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An Interactive Study Guide to Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film By Donald Bogle

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AN INTERACTIVE STUDY GUIDE
TOMS, COONS, MULATTOS, MAMMIES, AND BUCKS: AN INTERPRETIVE
HISTORY OF BLACKS IN AMERICAN FILM
BY DONALD BOGLE

Written by

Dominique M. Hardiman
B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2011

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Science Degree

Department of
Mass Communications & Media Arts
Southern Illinois University
April 2011

RESEARCH APPROVAL

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in the field of Professional Media & Media Management

Approved by:

Dr. John Hochheimer, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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This Research would not have been possible without the initial guidance of Dr. Novotny Lawrence. I was intrigued by the new ideas and historical facts presented through his courses. He gave me the inspiration to learn more, and not only educate myself on the concepts of film, but also of my own African American history. Secondly, I would like to give thanks to the individual who has helped bring my research to life. Also, he has guided my very simple idea into a rewarding project utilizing my interests and passions. Dr. John Hochheimer has been one of the most influential professors I have had throughout my program, and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to work with him through this final journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Originally there were five character types created for the African American actor. The Tom, Coon, Mulatto, Mammy, and Buck. These five characters have been explored in detail by Donald Bogle, writer of the book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (2001). Bogle began his discussion of the characters in the year 1903 with the release of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), a film that introduced the first of the five, the Tom. Over the next 10 years the four others were introduced, reproduced and impressed upon African American roles for years to come. Bogle also performs a timeline of films and actors in each who were representative of the original five and how to recognize the sometimes hidden similarities.

The information Bogle has presented is vital for readers to fully understand African American's role in film and the struggle to be characterized outside of the original five types. Although this material may be substantial, it can also be intimidating for those who have no previous knowledge, and to have another tool to guide readers would be very useful. The potential knowledge and understanding the information presented by Bogle can enhance perception of African American roles in film, and allow viewers to look through the entertainment to the underlying subtexts.

I was introduced to this book during a historical African American film course. While reading and being presented with many of the films throughout the book, it became evident that I was learning parts of African American history I had been unaware of, even as an African American woman. After reading, I realized that not only other African American students, but also any other nationalities of students taking similar courses using this book should know the importance of the true roles of African Americans in film.

The issue lies in the intimidation factor. Many students may take one glance at a book this size, and the kinds of information presented throughout, and not fully grasp the benefit of actually reading this material. As a student I have found it easier to complete given assignments or readings when I have had tools to aid my studying and understanding of these new subjects. For this purpose I have chosen to create a study guide or manual that will serve as a guide through Bogle's book, as well as encourage further research through assessments and defining of particular terms. Also, I will present my ideas and prototype study guide to the author himself, in the hopes that it can be a published addition to his book and packaged together. I believe the information here is vital, and if given the correct tools and guidance, more can be contributed to those reading and analyzing this book.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS & RESOURCES

The initial thoughts behind the creation of this study guide were quite different from the final product. Originally, the initial idea consisted of creating a compellation of all films discussed in detail by Donald Bogle. Next, I would compare each film to a recent film with a similar storyline or portrayal within of the African American actors. Lastly, I would conclude whether one of the five original characters could be seen in current roles. This however became difficult. It was an unrealistic belief that it would be possible to find current films with similarities of those 100 years prior, especially considering the advancements in film creation. Also, films today, which Bogle describes in detail, do a far better job of hiding the five original characters. Since this fact can make it even more difficult for an untrained or unknowledgeable student to recognize the character types, I felt it would be a better to inform them and allow them to make their own judgments.

The second phase of creation yielded this final project. I began by reading each chapter thoroughly and extracting each important fact, film, character, actor, implication, paradox, and idea that Bogle presented. These detailed outlines create a “go-to” for each chapter and the essential topics that may be overlooked or scanned over. I can attest to falling victim of an intimidatingly large book or

chapter or a book, and simply skimmed over all the while missing details or key facts. Also, each outline is categorized in a simple and easily accessible format that gives room along each side for note taking and class discussions. I chose to use an outline form in order for the main topics to stand outside of the smaller sub-topics, and focus attention to only those larger particular ideas or facts. Each of the larger sections explained by Bogle are also referenced by corresponding page numbers throughout the book for an easier find of the information.

In addition, to the outline there are two sections for additional research on the part of the student. First, there are terms that were included in each chapter that for those who may have no prior knowledge or understanding of the historical context, and/or simply do not have as expanded vocabularies may not comprehend. Therefore, seven out of the ten chapters have terms I have drawn out the reading for students to define as graded assignments and present their findings to their professors. Secondly, I have also included chapter assessments. Each chapter has a few questions presenting students with questions of their personal thoughts and feelings on certain subjects. Also, these questions require the student to research certain historical events discussed shortly through the reading. Having a clearer understanding of the historical contexts and events described will give students more opportunity to learn more about the facts in history that may have been taboo previously or discussed lightly. Lastly, these

questions include film research, actually viewing particular films and being able to extract important implications and factors.

To perform this research I have utilized mostly the work of Donald Bogle, but also I have utilized the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), for film dates and full casts. There were places throughout this book where film dates were not included, and where missing the Internet Movie Database lent much help. Also, when depicting character types I chose to use Google Images (www.google.com/imghp) to aid in finding photographs of each of the five original types for student reference.

A final work in progress will be the photograph section as an addition to the study guide. In this section there will be drawings, cartoons, film still shots, magazine covers, and film covers for each of the films and actors discussed by Bogle. By adding this section students will be able to reference the photograph while reading, gaining a better understanding of how these characters looked and what they represented during their time period.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this research have far outweighed the original perception. I did initially believe that a project such as this would be such a useful tool, especially one that has the potential to not only be beneficial for students but also for my own publication. After defending my research, I learned from students who have also taken the same historical African American film course, that it would have greatly benefited them if they would have been offered a study guide to aid them in the process of reading and understanding the material presented. If there are others here at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, who feel that such a tool would be useful, this contributing factor will be one that lends help and clarity to those who are unsure. I have also found that in-depth investigation can give a far better understanding that one will take into their daily lives, analyzing historical factors for their true importance.

The average viewer is an untrained viewer. It is my main purpose to better inform, or provide the vehicle to better inform anyone who is looking to gain all of the important details from reading this text. In this reading, lay many facts and ideas which when applied and used to train the average viewer, can allow the viewer to look past entertainment value. Only a well-informed viewer can truly judge a film for its true worth (or ill merit) causing box office blowouts or large

audience shares. Perhaps after all evidence is conveyed, a viewer will be able to spot any sign of old character types in African American roles, and enable themselves to make better judgments as to what constitutes quality films or roles.

Lastly, I have found that there are many students who if given the correct or complete information concerning some aspects of African American history, much can be overcome and realized about the trials and tribulations that have encompassed their involvement in not only film but many other topics. There is much to learn about the representation of African Americans in film as well as other minority groups. Initially the material may seem too heavy, but with the help of study aids and probing questions fostering even more research, true connections can be made between student and material. It has been amazing to hear other's thoughts that have taken the similar courses and the amount of help that could be lent to those in understanding the unknown. In creation of this study guide, I have tried not to take away from the readings, if a student does not read the text, still things can be missed. It will be important for students to understand how Bogle speaks on these topics and learn his point of view in total. These outlines can only guide students to specific portions of the book that are of the greatest importance, they will certainly not substitute for actually reading the material. Students who properly utilized this study guide will be presented with more opportunity to learn the facts and train themselves to recognize the five

character types with ease. I believe the addition of historical research was the final contributing factor, in a way forcing students to learn more about history and the events leading up to the African American presence in America.

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All Film Dates Retrieved from the Internet Movie Database

<http://www.imdb.com/>

All Images Retrieved from Google Images:

<http://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi>

(direct links are attached to image when clicked upon)

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Chapter Outlines

1. Chapter 1~*Black Beginnings: from Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Birth of a*

Nation

a. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903)

i. 12-minute motion picture

ii. Introduced the "Uncle Tom" character (pgs. 4-7)

1. American film's first black character

2. Paradox:

a. Uncle Tom was not black, he was a white actor

in blackface

b. Blackface was maintained through silent films

3. He was a staple in Hollywood at a time when the motion-picture industry itself was non-existent

4. Socially acceptable character (acceptable to white society)

5. "Good Negro" character

6. Chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, insulted

a. Keep the fait, n'er (never) turn against their white Massa's (masters)

- b. Remained hearty, submissive, stoic (passive),
generous, selfless, oh-so-very kind
- iii. Enduring to white audiences
- iv. Uncle Tom characters emerged as heroes
- b. Early Toms
 - i. Confederate Spy (c. 1910)
 - 1. Uncle Daniel (Tom Character) is a Negro spy for the South, dies before a Northern firing squad, but he is content, happy that he did it for Massa and Little Massa's sake.
 - ii. For Massa's Sake (1911)
 - 1. Former slave is so attached to his master he sells himself back into slavery to help the master through a period of financial difficulties.
 - iii. Uncle Tom's Cabin (remake) (1927)
 - 1. James B. Lowe
 - a. It was said that "he has made history"
 - i. "History was made because it gave "Uncle Tom" a new start

- b. His exemplary conduct caused Universal to look at Lowe as a living black god, most suited of all men for the part of Tom
- c. Those who are religious say that a heavenly power brought him to Universal.
- d. Although he was given "heavenly power" the Tom he portrayed still came off as a genial darky, furnished with new color, but no new sentiments.
- e. He did his "Tomming" with such an arresting effectiveness that he was sent to England on a promotional tour to ballyhoo (create an uproar) the picture.
- f. He became the first black actor to be publicized by his studio

2. The Coon (pgs. 7-8)

- a. Presented the Negro as an entertainment/amusement object and black buffoon
- b. Lacked the single-mindedness of the Tom
- c. The Pure coon

- i. "No-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English Language" (Bogle)

d. Films:

- i. *Wooing and Wedding of Coon* (1905)

- 1. First appearance of the pure coon
- 2. Depicted a honeymooning black couple as stumbling and stuttering idiots

- ii. *The Masher* (1907)

- 1. Self-styled white ladies' man that is rebuffed by all the women he pursues.
- 2. When he meets a mysterious veiled woman who responds to his passes, the hero thinks he has arrived at his blue moon heaven.
- 3. Finally finding success, he removes the veil only to discover that his mysterious lady is colored!
- 4. Without further ado, he takes off
 - a. He may have been looking for a blue heaven, but he certainly did not want a black one

e. Rastus-The Popular Coon

i. Film List:

1. *How Rastus Got His Turkey* (c. 1910)

a. # 1 Slapstick comedy

2. *Rastus in Zululand* (1919)

a. Film about a “darky” who dreams of going to Zululand in the heart of Africa

b. He wins the affection of a Chief’s daughter

c. Surely due to his aimless flirting with her

d. When asked by the Chief to marry her—in true no-account coon fashion—he chooses death over marriage.

3. *Rastus and Chicken* (1911)

4. *Pickaninnies and Watermelon* (1912)

5. *Chicken Thief* (1911)

ii. Rastus’ character became a stock character that was used in advertisements for Cream of Wheat

f. The Pickaninny (pg. 7)

i. Gave the Negro child actor his initial place in film history

ii. “Harmless, little screwball creation who’s eyes popped

- iii. Also, his hair would stand on end with the least excitement
- iv. Antics were pleasing and diverting—surely from the true racism behind the character and his actions.
- v. Hal Roach Our Gang/ The Little Rascals series (1922)
 - 1. Young black children referred to as snowballs, cherubs, coons, bad chillun, inky kids, smoky kids, black lambs, cute ebonies, chubby ebonies
 - 2. The approach to the relationships of the black children with the whites was almost as if there were no such thing as race at all.
 - 3. The films charm was attributed to the appearance that all the children, white and black, were buffoons, forever in scraps and scrapes, forever plagued by setbacks and sidetracks as they set out to have fun, and everyone had his turn at being outwitted.
- g. Uncle Remus
 - i. Harmless and congenial
 - ii. First cousin to Tom
 - iii. Distinguished himself by his quaint, naïve, and comic philosophizing

- iv. Only hinted at during the silent film period (1894-1929)
- v. Came to the larger scale in the 1930s and early 1940s
- vi. Films:
 - 1. *The Green Pastures* (1936)
 - 2. *Song of the South* (1946)
- h. The Tragic Mulatto: The Movie Maker's "Darling" (pg. 9)
 - i. Today some (and perhaps most) of the most prominent actresses have been mulatto women
- i. The Mammy (pg. 9)
 - i. Closely related to the comic coon
 - ii. Usually big, fat and cantankerous
 - iii. Made debut in 1914 in the blackface version of *Lysistrata*
 - iv. *Coon Town Suffragettes* (1914)
 - 1. A group of bossy mammy washer women who organize a militant movement to keep their good-for-nothing husbands at home
 - 2. This militancy yields fit roles for famous mammy Hattie McDaniel
 - v. Offshoots of the Mammy character
 - 1. Aunt Jemima

a. "Handkerchief Head"

2. These were Toms blessed with religion or Mammies who wedge themselves into dominant white culture
3. Sweet, jolly, good-tempered-bit more polite than Mammy and never as head
4. The term "Aunt Jemima" was coined and used as a promotional face of pancake flour
5. The face of Aunt Jemima went through many changes from an almost pitch-black figure to the now jolly lighter brown figure used today.

j. Birth of a Nation (1915) (pgs. 10-18)

- i. Created by D.W. Griffith
- ii. Introduced the Black Buck
- iii. Multidimensional film
- iv. First film to deal with a black theme and articulate the entire pantheon of black gods and goddesses
- v. All character types presented here
- vi. Film kicked off a wave of controversy
 1. Denounced as the most slanderous anti-Negro movie ever released

- vii. Rehearsed for 6 weeks, created in 9 weeks, edited in 3 months
 - 1. This longer production times had thus far been unheard of
- viii. 12 reels in length-previous films were only 2 or 3 reeled
- ix. 3 hours in length- previous films were no longer than 10-15 minutes
- x. Developed the close-up, cross-cutting, rapid-fire editing, the iris, the split-screen shot, realistic and impressionistic lighting
- xi. Woodrow Wilson said "It's like writing history with lightening"
- xii. Griffith seemed to be saying that things were in order only when whites were in control and when the American Negro was kept in his place
- xiii. Told the story of the Old South, the Civil War (1861-1865), the Reconstruction Period (1865-1877), and the emergence of the Klu Klux Klan
- xiv. Based on the novel by Thomas Dixon called The Clansman (1905)
- xv. Synopsis:

1. Good, Decent family-the Cameron's of Piedmont

South Carolina

- a. They treat their slaves well and they could be no happier
- b. Slaves contentedly pick cotton, and in their quarters they dance and perform for their master
- c. In The Big House Mammy joyously does her chores

2. All is in order-everyone knows their place

3. Civil War takes place and things begin to change

- a. In piedmont the Cameron's are terrorized by Negro raiders and the South (the Cameron's) endures ruin and destruction

4. Reconstruction

- a. Carpet baggers (Northerners who moved to the South during Reconstruction era) and uppity Niggers from the North move into Piedmont

- b. Congenial darkies are now renegades and are being used to “crush the White South under the Hell of the Black South)
 - c. Old slaves have quit working
 - d. Black Union soldiers walk down streets shoving whites off the sidewalk
 - e. Former slaves take over political polls and disenfranchise whites
 - f. Blacks celebrate through the streets
 - g. Laws created saying “all whites must salute Negro officers on the streets”
 - h. Signs read “The helpless White minority”
 - i. Announcement made: “Passage of a bill, providing for the intermarriage of blacks and whites”
5. Film climaxes when Gus, the black renegade, sets out to rape the Cameron daughter who runs and throws herself off a cliff
6. The Mulatto Silas Lynch attempts to force white Elsie Stoneman to marry him

- a. At this point in the film all hope is lost
7. Hope is regained with the appearance of a group of good, upright Southern white men
 - a. Members of the “invisible empire,” who, while wearing white hoods, battle the blacks in a direct confrontation
 - b. These individuals were called the KKK (Klux Klan)
8. The KKK is lead by Ben Cameron and they defeat the black rebels
 - a. They claimed they were the defenders of white womanhood, white honor, and white glory
 - b. They had restored the South everything that was lost, especially white supremacy
9. These events=the Birth of a Nation=the Birth of the KKK
10. The Aftermath
 - a. NAACP attacked Birth, picketed the film at the NYC premier and called it “racist propaganda”

- i. Chicago and Boston branches of the NAACP also joined the efforts against the film
- b. Other civil rights and religious organizations protested the film also
- c. Race riots broke out in cities
- d. Newspapers and speeches censored the film
- e. Black critic, Lawrence Reddick said it glorified the KKK and increased its already growing popularity
- f. In the South advertisements read: “Work Audiences into a Frenzy...It Will Make You Hate”
- g. American Historian, John Hope Franklin once said because of this film “lynching’s and other forms of violence increased”
- h. Ultimately Birth was banned in 5 states and 19 cities

11. The anger did not cease in 1915

- a. Years after, at each showing of the film, there was protest
- b. Griffith was called a racist, but maintained that it was not an attack on the American Negro and defended himself as only a filmmaker with no political or ideological view in mind

12. The film became one of the highest grossing films of all time

13. After this film, "never again could the Negro be depicted in the guise of an out-and-out villain"

- a. This portrayal was too touchy and too controversial

14. Griffith's film had succeeded because of its director's artistry and technical virtuosity, but no studio dared to risk it again

- a. Consequently, black males in Hollywood were cast almost always in comic roles
- b. Also, Hollywood hesitated in portraying sensual black men as a result of Griffith's display of

white uproar at the sight of intermixing and the
depiction of the Black Buck

15. Half a century later finally a sexual black male
character appeared on the screen

1. Chapter 2~ Into the 90s: the Jesters (pgs. 20-34)
 - a. The Jesters were the replacement figure for the villain characters
 - i. They were “high-stepping and high-falutin’, and as crazy as all get-out”
 - b. This era began in 1918 with a whimper-it ended in 1920 with both a crash and a bang.
 - c. Whimper:
 - i. *The Greatest Thing in Life* (1918)
 1. A film so far removed that it was hard to believe it was directed by one so much a part of the mainstream as D. W. Griffith
 2. Synopsis:
 - a. A White Southern officer finds himself sharing a shell hole with a Black private

- b. At first there is great hostility, but war makes strange bedfellows, and evidentially compatible ones.
- c. The White Southerner is hit by an enemy shell, and the Black soldier rescues him
- d. In saving the White soldier's life he also becomes critically wounded
- e. As the Black soldier lays dying he calls for his mother, requesting a last kiss
 - i. The other soldier grants this request and pretends to be this blacks man's mother, giving him a kiss on the lips

3. Paradox:

- a. After the war is over the country and the motion picture industry appeared washed of their racial sins and reverted to their old ways.
 - b. For Black actors, the old way soon indicated that when a call was issued to "Make way for the Jesters!"
- d. 1922-The Release of Our Gang Series & Hal Roach

- i. "Comedies of child life"
- ii. "Our Gang" became better known as "The Little Rascals"
- iii. Characters: Farina, Stymie, Buckwheat
- iv. Beginning came with "Sunshine Sammy"
 1. Also known as "Little Sambo" & "Smiling Sambo"
 2. Noted for his ability to widen his eyes to the size of ping pong balls
- v. Starred in comedies with Harold Lloyd
- vi. One of the highest paid juveniles in early silent films
- vii. Hal Roach decided to find a playmate and later a replacement for Sammy
 1. Roach put on a talent search for a "colored boy with hair long enough to play either a boy or a girl"
 - a. Found: 18 month old Allen Clayton Hoskins
 - b. But Hoskins needed a new name
 - c. One executive said he was so "chubby and agreeable" that he reminded the executive of "mush"-hot cereal
 - i. Given the name "Farina"

- d. As a character Hoskins was known to be a crier and cast as such
- e. In Our Gang he became a familiar face with pigtailed that stood one end when he was frightened
- f. He also had a sister, Mango, who appeared but did not survive as a permanent character

viii. Like Characters:

1. Stymie Beard

- a. Wore a derby, head shaved bald, and occasionally checked out in colorful zoot suits
- b. Nonchalant
- c. Detached shrewdness
- d. Could see through any scam
- e. Ex. In one episode a group of disguised midgets try to rob a bank, but Stymie is able to figure that somethin' ain't right with dem der chillum
- f. He always spoke as if his mouth was full of food

2. Buckwheat

- a. Had pigtails also and the same clothing as Farina
- b. Also resembled Farina, giving the same questionable sexuality (it was unknown if he was a boy or a girl)
- c. Round chocolate moon face
- d. Enormous eyes
- e. Quiet, odd-ball type
- f. Perfect little dum dum tag-a-long

3. Farina

- a. Husky voice
- b. Arrogantly pleasant way about him
- c. Common sense
- d. Heroic demeanor-came to the rescue of little white damsels in dress
- e. Ex. In one episode he tries to save a little white girl who has fallen into a puddle of mud-but then is accused by her mother of pushing her in

f. He was afraid of ghosts

ix. The Release of “Our Gang Series”:

1. Group of lower-middle-class American youngsters making their way through childhood in entertaining ups and downs, ins and outs, as black and white kids together tried to figure out life and play.

2. Black Children:

a. Dialect: filled with “dats & dere’s, I is, You is, We is”

b. Foods: fried chicken & watermelon

c. The adventures and lifestyles of the Black children conformed to accepted notions and attitudes of the day

d. Relationships of the Black children with the White children were almost as if there was no such thing as race

3. Charming because:

a. All children were buffoons, forever in scraps and scrapes, forever plagued by set backs and

side tracks as they set out to have fun, and everyone had his turn to be outwitted

x. Comparison & Contrast: D.W. Griffith & Hal Roach

1. D. W. Griffith:

- a. Featured scared Negroes
- b. Outrageous blackface makeup
- c. Pure coons with crude and racially self-demeaning charm

2. Hal Roach:

- a. Liberal treatment of jesters
- b. More so an exception than the rule of the day
- c. Readily could spot a colored maid or butler
- d. Also did not have many bystanders whose eyes popped
- e. The children did often run off scared out of their wits

xi. Although there were still few roles for Blacks in movie, whenever they were used in this period, it was usually in a demeaning manner

xii. What degraded black comic figures of the day even further and made them appear more grotesque and less individualized was that whites still played Negro roles.

1. Their acting was grossly overdone

xiii. Things begin to shift:

1. Changes began during the mid 20s-around the time of the release of Thomas Ince's *Free and Equal* (1915)

a. This film went unreleased while waiting for the uproar from *The Birth of a Nation* to dissipate until 1925

b. Theme: Social equality & intermarriage

c. Synopsis:

i. Northern liberal, Judge Lowell waged a bet with a Southern Colonel that blacks are equal to whites

ii. He takes in a young Negro-Alexander Marshall

iii. This young black man pursues Lowell's daughter

- iv. His efforts fail but out of frustration he rapes and strangles the maid
 - v. He is convicted and exposed-but had already married Lowell's daughter
 - vi. Also, it was found that the young Negro already had a Negro wife
 - vii. The judge takes his documentation in support of equality between blacks and whites and throws it into the fire
 - viii. It is revealed to him that his "perfect Negro" is in fact the "perfect rogue"
2. This film portrayed the black man as a villain
 - a. Alexander Marshal=Brutal Black Buck type
 3. Film was a failure of its time
 4. *Free and Equal* demonstrated that the old racial themes and thought patterns would no longer stand up
 - a. Also the use of white actors in blackface was denounced
- xiv. Jack Richardson

1. Famous blackface actor
2. "Richardson as a Negro is hopelessly out of date and fails to stir a single spark of conviction"-NY

Amsterdam News

xv. Question: when would the cinema reflect such realism?

1. At this time the film industry found itself face to face with this question and it had previously been evaded

e. Blackface

- i. A tradition that had hung on even after its "effectiveness" had worn thin
- ii. Originated in the days of slavery
- iii. Negroes were not permitted on stage
- iv. White minstrel troupes blackened their faces with a burnt cork mixture
 1. To mock and caricature the plantation slaves they imitated

v. Post Civil War:

1. Freed slaves formed their own minstrel companies
2. Still they had to darken their faces with burnt cork
3. Ex. Vaudeville

vi. Early 90s:

1. Bert Williams

- a. A negro comedian who always darkened his already dark skin

2. Sammy Davis Jr.

- a. Has recalled childhood memories of his father warning him not to touch his face or he would smear the burnt cork

vii. This was a tradition that was ridiculous and unnecessary

f. It was one of the many ways in which the entertainment world bowed to prejudice

g. The shift from white actors in blackface was a slow one but Hollywood began by casting Negro actors in small roles

h. Ex. Noble Johnson & Caroline Snowden

i. Ex. Films

- i. *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *Little Robinson Crusoe* (1924), *The Negotiator* (1924), *The First Year* (1926), *Topsy and Eva* (1927), *Soft Cushions* (1927), *Noah's Ark* (1929), *The Four Feathers* (1929), *In Old Kentucky* (1927)

- j. Sound:
 - i. It was a major contributing factor to the end of white actors in blackface

2. *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

- a. Film revealed the power and popularity of the talking motion picture
- b. Where the blackface tradition attained its crowing achievement and its final success
- c. Warner Brothers picture
- d. Included very routine generalizations-the conflict plot offered little to the audiences
- e. Al Jolson
 - i. Jewish entertainer was the star
 - ii. Sang a passionate rendition of “Mammy” and captured audiences with sound for the first time
- f. Film launched the talking motion picture era
 - i. Enormous success
- g. Movie industry had a great expansion and underwent a period of profound transition
- h. From 1927-1940:
 - i. The Negro parts greatly increased

- ii. Hollywood was now aware that movies needed sounds-
music, rhythm, pizzazz, singing, dancing, clowning
- iii. According to American myth, who were more rhythmic than
Negroes?
- iv. New advancements yield:
 - 1. *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and *Hallelujah* (1929)
 - a. *Hearts in Dixie*
 - i. Southern plantation where pickaninnies
romped and ran
 - ii. Toms worshiped their master, labored
during the day and played during the
night
 - iii. Blacks were mindlessly contented
 - iv. They lived in shacks, worked from
sunrise to sunset, and always seemed
to be on some “euphoric high” brought
on, one would assume, by cotton fields
and spirituals
 - v. Without being aware, the blacks in this
film came across as a group of black-

faced jesters rather than as valid
representations of black folk culture.

- vi. This was the first all-black musical
- vii. Pinpointed the problem that was to
haunt certain black actors for the next
half century: the blackface fixation

i. The Negro Actor

- i. Directed by whites...in scripts authored by whites
- ii. Photographed, dressed and made up by whites
- iii. Like the slaves they portrayed, they aimed (and still do aim)
to please their master
- iv. To please master figure he performs a presentation for mass
consumption of black life as seen through the eyes of white
artists
- v. Doing all of these tasks while being a black man in blackface
 - 1. From *Green Pastures* (1936) to *Porgy & Bess* (1959),
most of the actors suffered from the blackface fixation
 - a. Only the very gifted, very talented black actors
have overcome it
- vi. Prominent actors:

1. Clarence Muse, Mildred Washington & Stepin Fetchit

2. Muse:

- a. Good-hearted grandfather
- b. Too submissive and disciplined to get a rise out of the audience

3. Washington:

- a. Also a very submissive character
- b. Did not evoke excitement in the audience

4. Stepin Fetchit:

- a. Walking, talking, dancing, prancing piece of coon dynamite
- b. Strongest performer in *Hearts In Dixie*
- c. "Gummy"-outlandish plantation coon
- d. Starred in a series of coon-jester and coon-servant films.

j. *Hallelujah* (1929)

- i. Second of big spectacles
- ii. Directed by King Vidor
- iii. Interested in filming a story of "real Negro folk culture"

- iv. Had blacks battle it out amongst themselves rather than with any white antagonists
- v. He created an unreal universe and consequently divorced himself from real issues confronting blacks and whites in America
 - 1. His blacks were pawns-used for expression of his own lyrical view of realism and his own feeling for mood and atmosphere rather than for any comment of their own
- vi. Film still remains a landmark in sound films
- vii. Story of: Good colored boy going bad and the battle within him between callings of the spirit and temptations of the flesh
 - 1. Set on the "Little Johnson farm"
 - 2. Characters:
 - a. Zeke Johnson-Daniel L. Haynes
 - b. Chick-Nina Mae McKinney
 - c. Hot Shot-William Fountaine
 - d. Pappy-Harry Gray
 - e. Mammy-Fanny Bell DeKnight

- f. Spunk-Everett McGarrity
 - g. Missy Rose-Victoria Spivey
 - h. Johnson Children-Milton Dickerson, Robert Couch, Walter Tait
- viii. Film proved to be the finest record of black grief and passion to reach a movie screen
- ix. New York Times' Mordaunt Hall:
- 1. "Peculiarly typical religious hysteria of the darkies and their gullibility...their hankering after salvation, the dread of water in the baptism."
- x. Most characters success ended with this film
- 1. Hollywood had not yet found a place for these actors
- xi. Nina Mae McKinney "Chick"
- 1. Movies first black whore
 - 2. Almost every black leading lady owes a debt to McKinney
 - 3. Born in 1912
 - 4. Had a role also in the Blackbirds review
 - 5. When filming Hallelujah she was 17 years old

6. She represented the black woman as an exotic sex object
 - a. Half woman/half child-very important to her roles
7. Implications of her battle=the latter tragic mulatto theme
8. She was also called:
 - a. "Cinnamon-colored gal"
 - b. "High yeller"
9. Her white side=spirituality
10. Her black side=animalistic urges
11. McKinney was the first recognized black actress on the silver screen
 - a. Also the first in the tradition of light-skinned black leading ladies
 - b. "One of the greatest discoveries of the age"
12. MGM was so impressed they gave her a 5-year contract
13. Her stardom did not happen as expected

- a. Still there were no roles for the black leading ladies

14. Five years after *Hallelujah* she was forgotten in America

15. She traveled to Europe and toured as a cabaret performer named Black Garbo

- a. She found European audiences were more receptive to her talents

16. In 1935 she starred with Paul Robeson in Zoltan Korda's *Sanders of the River*

17. Later she returned to the US and starred in independent all-black films

18. Her last important role:

- a. Razor-totin', high-strung, high-yeller girl in *Pinky* (1949)

- b. Her hands on the hips, hard-as-nails brassy voice became the trademark for black leading ladies

xii. *St. Louis Blues* (1929)

1. Directed by Dudley Murphy

2. Warner Brothers Film
3. Starred Bessie Smith
 - a. Blues singer done wrong by her man, Jimmy the Pimp
 - b. She must fight another woman for her man
4. Ultimately Smith's character finds herself deserted and unhappy
5. This film, as well as Hearts in Dixie, Hallelujah, did not do well in the box office
 - a. Americans were still unprepared to accept black actors in important roles
6. The commercial failure of these films yielded an 8 year interval until The Green Pastures in 1936

1. Chapter 3~1930s

- a. Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks were no longer dressed as old-style jesters
 - i. Now they were portrayed as respectable domestics
- b. Hollywood found a new place for the Negro:
 - i. Kitchens, laundry rooms, and pantries

- ii. No other period in film history had more black faces carrying mops and pails or lifting pots and pans than these Depression years
 - iii. Whether a black face was seen for two minutes or three and a half hours, they were always tidying the house, cooking a meal, or watching over stables
- c. Servants were used for a number of reasons:
- i. Incredible antics
 - ii. Cooking a meal
 - iii. Amazing absurdities
- d. Blacks in film were used to reaffirm a socially chaotic age, a belief in life, and the American way of living
- i. Even during the worst of times, everything could be straightened out as long as people kept their chins up
- e. Servant Syndrome
- i. 30s
 - ii. A golden age for black actors
 - iii. Servants repeatedly exploited and mistreated
 - 1. These black actors were criticized by civil rights organizations for playing demeaning roles

- iv. These actors although looked down upon, still proved that the mythic types could be individualized and made, if not into characters of beauty, then at least into ones of joy.
 - v. Almost every black actor of this time approached his/her role with a Joie de Vivre (the joy of living), that movies were never to see again
- f. The Films:
- i. Without scripts to aid the actors, sympathy from the directors, or important roles
 - 1. Black actors in American film were compelled to rely on their own ingenuity to create memorable characters
 - 2. Among the personalities of the 30s, there was a certain microcosm in which each black performer had his specialty.
- g. Traditionally:
- i. White Americans have felt that one Negro looks just like another
 - ii. Blacks struggled to created their own identities
 - 1. Bill “Bojangles” Robinson used urbanitiy

2. Eddie “Rochester” Anderson used his mixer voice
3. Louis Beavers used her jollity
4. Hattie McDaniel used her haughtiness
5. The very best actors played their roles but also played
against them

- a. They build themselves into nondirectional-
auteurs

- b. Servants were now outshining their “masters”

- iii. Standard direction (White directors-Negro actors):
- iv. “Upon opening the door for ones white emloyer in any film,
the director would command, ‘Jump to ground...Remove
cap...Open again...Step back and bow...Come up
smiling...Now bow again...Now straighten up and grin!’”
- v. Just the sight of a black face on screen guaranteed laughs
from the audience

h. Films:

- i. *Animal Crackers* (1930) by the Marx Brothers
- ii. *Hallelujah* (1933)
- iii. *I'm a Bum* (1933)
- iv. *Mississippi* (1935)

- v. *Wonder Bar* (1934)
- vi. *Go into Your Dance* (1935)
- vii. *Twentieth Century* (1934)
- viii. *Lady by Choice* (1934)
- ix. *The Biscuit Eater* (1940)
- i. Classic William Claude Dukenfield (White comedian, actor & writer)
quote:
 - i. "Get along, you Senegambian!"
- j. Timeline into 1930s films:
 - i. The Negro->the field jester->the house servant->the domesticated servant (also a trusted "friend")->humanized servant->posthumanized eccentric
- k. High-Steppin' Sir Stepin-Stepin Fetchit (pgs. 38-47)
 - i. Full name: Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry
 - ii. Born in Key West, FL in 1902
 - iii. His comedic persona came about starring alongside comic Ed Lee
 - 1. The two had an act called "Step and Fetch It"
 - iv. Stepin began his career with a terrible track record
 - v. He was always late and disappeared often

- vi. During the early 30s he was one of the best known black actors
- vii. From 1929-1935:
 1. Appeared in 26 films
 2. First Negro to receive featured billing and special scenes for his character
 3. His private life was exploited like the typical White Hollywood star
 - a. He owned 6 houses, had 16 Chinese servants, \$2000 suits imported from India, threw lavish parties, had 12 cars (one was a champagne pink Cadillac with his name in neon lights along the side)
 - b. His lifestyle was known as “supernigger highjinks”
 4. Stepin entered Hollywood in the 20s
 - a. He became the “arch-coon”
 - b. Introduced audiences to the antics and tom foolery that every black comedian after him was drawn from

5. Characteristics:

- a. Tall & Skinny
- b. Bald Head
- c. Oversized Clothes
- d. Wide Grin
- e. White Teeth
- f. Widened Eyes
- g. Large Feet
- h. Slow Walking
- i. Broken Dialect
- j. Incorrect Pronunciation of words with multiple syllables
- k. No "sense"

viii. More Films:

1. *In Old Kentucky* (1927)
2. *The Ghost Talks* (1929)
3. *Show Boat* (1929)
4. *Fox Movietone Follies* (1929)
5. *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934)
6. *The World Moves On* (1934)

7. *David Harum* (1934)

8. *The World Moves On* (1934)

9. *Judge Priest* (1934)

10. *Steamboat 'Round the Bend* (1935)

11. *Salute* (1929)

l. Stepin became a target for Civil Rights advocates

m. His career began to dissipate

i. No doubt his own immaturity killed his career

ii. He filed for bankruptcy-incurred a debt of \$4 million but had \$144 million in his bank account

n. End of the 30s

i. He starred in underground independent all-Black features

1. Playing the same coon character

ii. His “cooning” became unacceptable

o. He was not heard from until the release of the 50s TV Documentary

“Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed?”

i. He denounced the film for “taking me, a Negro hero, and converting me into a villain...It was Step, who elevated the Negro hero to the dignity of a Hollywood star. I made the

Negro a first-class citizen all over the world...somebody it was all right to associate with. I opened all the theaters.”

- p. Stepin starred in two films after...both were a disappointment
- q. He died in 1985
- r. 2 Blond Leading Ladies: Mae West & Shirley Temple
 - i. The “Depression Heroines”
 - ii. For both, black actors became confidants and playmates
 - iii. Mae West
 - 1. Films:
 - a. *I'm No Angel* (1933)
 - b. *She Done Him Wrong* (1933)
 - c. *Belle of the Nineties* (1934)
 - 2. In her films, black maids/”domestics” clustered around her
 - a. They were overweight, middle-aged, jolly Aunt Jemima’s
 - b. Wore patchwork dresses, colorful handkerchiefs tied on their heads
 - c. Unusual names: Pearl, Beulah, Jasmine

3. The setting of her films included white carpeting, white furniture, white décor, and white Mae West

4. In the films *I'm No Angel*:

a. West would instruct while insult: "Beulah, peel me a grape!"

5. Film implications:

a. Black women could not possibly be rivals to West's femininity

b. Only black women were fit to wait on whores

c. Because blacks and whores were together at the bottom of the social scale

iv. Libbie Taylor

1. Was West's actual maid in real life and went on to work with her during her film career

2. Blacks in Mae West films represented:

a. 2nd step of the "servant evolution"

s. Shirley Temple

i. Inside Industry Joke: "Temple picture was incomplete without at least one darky"

ii. *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934)

- iii. Made Temple a star, a blues singer, and was billed as “Aunt Jemima”
- iv. Other Films:
 - 1. *Dimples* (1936)
 - 2. *Little Miss Marker* (1934)
 - 3. *The Littlest Rebel* (1935)
 - 4. *The Littlest Colonel* (1935)
 - 5. *Since You Went Away* (1944)
- v. Her films gave Depression audiences the impression that if everyone were kind to one another, the bad times would soon be over!
- t. Mr. Bojangles: the Cool-Eyed Tom (pgs. 47-52)
 - i. Bill “Bojangles” Robinson
 - ii. Became a big star through Shirley Temple films
 - 1. “Perfect interracial love match”
 - iii. In *The Littlest Rebel* he played Temple’s guardian
 - 1. First time in film history that a black servant was responsible for a white life
 - iv. Robinson came to film as a tap-dancer

1. It was said that he had never had a dance lesson in his life
2. Self taught
- v. He ran away from his home in Richmond, VA at the age of 8
- vi. He began making a living dancing for pennies in saloons and on the streets
- vii. Formally hit show business in 1928 in *Blackbirds Revue*
- viii. Also starred in:
 1. *Brown Buddies* (1928)
 2. *Hurray for Love* (1935)
 3. *In Old Kentucky* (1935)
 4. *The Big Broadcast of 1936* (1936)
 5. *One Mile from Heaven* (1937)
 6. *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1938)
 7. *Road Demon* (1938)
 8. *Up the River* (1938)
 9. *Just Around the Corner* (1938)
 10. *Stormy Weather* (1943)
- ix. He coined the word “copasetic”-everything is fine and dandy
- x. Originator of the staircase tap-dance trick

- xi. Fred Astaire called Robinson the “Greatest dancer of all time”
- xii. Performances were generally superficial and terribly unvaried
 - 1. It was as if he read from a blackboard when performing lines
 - 2. But it was his dancing that made up for his inability to act
- xiii. Robinson was unlike Stepin Fetchit:
 - 1. He was able to articulate sentences
 - 2. Was a consistently reliable actor
- xiv. Characters were a part of humanizing servants
 - 1. “Humanizing”-a softening or refinement of black characters
 - 2. These humanized characters ushered in black dignity
- xv. Bill Robinson died in 1949
- u. Clarence Muse: the Inhibited, Humanized Tom (pgs. 53-56)
 - i. Muse was virtually ignored in the 1930s
 - ii. He was a short, stody man with a large voice
 - iii. Born in Baltimore, MA in 1889

- iv. Graduate of Dickenson School of Law in Pennsylvania
- v. Worked in the South with black acting troupes
- vi. While in New York he appeared with the Lincoln Players,
then with the Lafayette Players
- vii. He was trained more seriously, not as a funny man
- viii. Tom Films:

<i>Hearts in Dixie</i> (1929)	<i>A Royal Romance</i> (1930)
<i>Huckleberry Finn</i> (1931)	<i>Rain or Shine</i> (1930)
<i>Dirigible</i> (1931)	<i>Broadway Bill</i> (1934)
<i>Last Parade</i> (1931)	<i>Secret Witness</i> (1931)
<i>Woman From Monte Carlo</i> (1932)	<i>Cabin in the Cotton</i> (1932)
<i>Winner Take All</i> (1933)	<i>Washington Merry-Go-Round</i> (1933)
<i>From Hell to Heaven</i> (1933)	<i>The Count of Monte' Cristo</i> (1934)
<i>Showboat</i> (1936)	<i>Follow Your Heart</i> (1936)
<i>Spirit of Youth</i> (1937)	<i>Way Down South</i> (1937)
<i>Zanzibar</i> (1940)	<i>Tales of Manhattan</i> (1943)

<i>Shadow of a Doubt</i> (1943)	<i>Watch on the Rhine</i> (1943)
<i>Two Smart People</i> (1946)	<i>Joe Palooka in the Knockout</i> (1947)
<i>An Act of Murder</i> (1948)	<i>Riding High</i> (1950)
<i>Porgy and Bess</i> (1959)	<i>Carwash</i> (1972)

- ix. Only starred in non-Tom film: *So Red the Rose* (1935)
- x. In 1940 he co-wrote the script for *Broken Strings*, an independent film starring himself as a concert violinist
- xi. Also in 1940 he starred in *Maryland*, where he played a coon minister
- xii. Muse died in 1979
- v. *Imitation of Life* (1959)
 - i. This was the first important film of the 30s
 - ii. Film prided itself on its portrait of the modern black woman—still a servant but now had dignity and character.
 - iii. Based on Fannie Hurst's novel
 - iv. Directed by John Stahl
 - v. Starred:

1. Louise Beavers, Fredi Washington, Claudette Colbert,
Rochelle Hudson, Ned Sparks and Warren William
- vi. 2 widows...2 daughters...1 White and 1 Black
 1. White daughter falls in love with her mother's love
interest
 2. Black daughter runs away from home to escape her
black identity
- vii. Film was called the "slickest and possibly the best made
tear-jerker of its time"
- viii. On the surface: story of motherly love and motherly woes
- ix. Under the surface: "conscious apotheosis of the Tom spirit
and an unconsciously bitter comment on race relations in
America"
- x. The relationship between Colbert and Beavers assumptions:
 1. The difference between White and Black, like the
difference between right and poor, could easily be
done away with if everybody worked together
- xi. Beavers: was a combination of a Tom and an Aunt Jemima
 1. Magnified and glorified
- xii. Film introduced the idea of Black Christian Stoicism

xiii. Character Peola:

1. Played by Fredi Washington
2. Originally was suppose to be a Tragic Mulatto character
 - a. But Washington played this character as an actor in search of a movie
 - b. She made Peola a password for non-passive resistance
 - c. Seemed to be crying out that she simply wanted the same things in life as others
3. She was the film's most complex character, and most heart felt
4. Was the "New Negro" demanding a real "New Deal"
5. The explanation for her rebellion:
 - a. She wanted to be White not that she wants White opportunities

w. Fredi Washington (pgs.60-61)

- i. For a time Washington was known as the "great Black hope"
- ii. Sophisticated and talented black actress with the range and the beauty to win leading roles

1. In the end though, she fell victim to the times and her own peculiar looks
- iii. Born in Savannah, GA in 1903
- iv. Began as an entertainer in bars and nightclubs
- v. In Harlem, her and her sister Isabelle were “legendary beauties”
- vi. Washington later toured with the “Shuffle Along Company” and later had roles in *Singin’ the Blues* (1939) and *Porgy* (1959)
- vii. There was always a problem casting Washington
 1. Because she was Black but looked White
 2. She had sharp features, long dark straight hair and bright green eyes
 3. The press described her as looking French or Italian
- viii. *Black Boy* (theater)
 1. Played opposite Paul Robeson
 2. Acting as a Black girl passing for White
 3. Her “type” was discovered here
- ix. *The Emperor Jones* (1933)
 1. Played a light-skinned Harlem “slut”

2. Although playing such a character she still proved to be too sophisticated and intelligent

x. *Imitation of Life* (1934)

1. It was this film where she emerged as the “tragic mulatto” type for the Depression era

xi. Other films:

1. *Drums of the Jungle* (1935)
2. *One Mile from Heaven* (1937)
3. *Mamba’s Daughters* (1939)

xii. Washington’s characters were never happy

xiii. Audiences during this time were still not prepared for a successful Mulatto type

1. They still preferred the Mammy and Jemima’s

xiv. Fredi Washington died in 1994

x. Louise Beavers: the Black Guardian Angel (pgs.62-66)

- i. Beavers survived the industry because of her humanized domesticity
- ii. For a time she was the most important black actress in film
- iii. She always played the Mammy or Aunt Jemima

1. Was groomed by herself and the studios for these roles
- iv. A big-boned, robust woman, skin as smooth as chocolate velvet, large bright eyes and wondrously naïve
- v. First appeared on the scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903) as a cook
- vi. Initially she was a heavier woman
 1. But was forcefully placed on diets, and had to eat beyond her normal food intake
 2. She weighed close to 200 lbs., but it was a battle for her to stay overweight
 3. During filming the pressure would cause her to loose weight and the producers would add padding to her body to make up for lost pounds
- vii. Beavers' accent was also a problem
 1. She was born in Cincinnati
 2. Had no trace of a Southern dialect
 3. Schooled herself in the Southern drawl
- viii. She was always happy, kind and involved herself in her coworkers lives

1. But she barely gave room for her own personal life
- ix. In the 1930s she made 10 films, but over all starred in over 160 shows and films
- x. During *Imitation of Life* she encountered many battles
 1. The young girl who played Peola as a child did not want a Black mother
 2. She also requested that the word “nigger” be removed from the script
 - a. She won this battle with the help of the NAACP, but was punished by having to say and be called a Negro repeatedly
- xi. Louise Beavers died in 1962
- y. *The Green Pastures* (1936)
 - i. 2nd most important film of the 1930s
 - ii. First all-Black spectacle since 1929
 1. This was due to the financial disappointment of earlier films
 2. Studios had begun to stray from them
 - iii. The growing “ghetto theaters” and successful all-Black independent films causes:

1. A new market
 2. A growing Negro audience, eager for any film that remotely resembled their own experiences
- iv. The long theatre run of *The Green Pastures* was attributed to becoming property with meaning to many audiences
- v. Warner Brothers took a chance on this film
1. It became one of the most successful Negro movies of all time
 2. It was a “likeable picture”
- vi. Film rested on a cruel assumption:
1. That nothing could be more ludicrous than transporting the lowly language and folkways of the early-twentieth century Negro back to the high stately world before the flood
 2. Exploiting the incongruity of angels with dirty faces
 3. Implied Negro ignorance and inferiority
- vii. The “Negro Miracle Play”
1. Nothing could be more absurd
- viii. The acting though, transcended the shortcomings of the script

- ix. After the move, many of the actors returned to their jobs as porters, cooks, and maids
 - 1. Their holiday in Hollywood had come to an end
- z. Rex Ingram: the first of the freed Black Men
 - i. Of all the actors in *The Green Pastures* he won the most recognition
 - ii. He was the “quintessence of Hollywood handsome”
 - iii. Films:
 - 1. *The Green Pastures* (1936), *Stevedore*, *Porgy* (1959), *Once in a Lifetime* (1932), *Trader Horn* (1931), *Sign of the Cross* (1932), *King Kong* (1933), *The Emperor Jones* (1933), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1939), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), *Talk of the Town* (1942), *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), *Fired Wife* (1943), *A Thousand and One Nights* (1948), *Moonrise* (1948), *Anna Lucasta* (1958), *God’s Little Acre* (1958), *Elmer Gantry* (1960), *Your Cheating Heart* (1964), *Hurry Sundown* (1967)
 - iv. Ingram was very intelligent

1. Was the first black man to earn the Phi Beta Kappa

Key at Northwestern University

v. He began his career in silent films and also stage appearances

vi. Also, he was one black actor who escaped the “type-casting”

1. Played a servant, but was not required to be a Tom or Coon

vii. Played essentially free men, slightly heroic and removed from typical American life

viii. He was frequently compared to Paul Robeson

1. Both dignified and self-contained Black men

2. He had one thing Robeson lacked: a gentleness, an interest and sympathy in all mankind

3. Robeson was more interested in himself

ix. After 1948 Ingram’s career dissipated

x. He was tried and plead guilty to transporting a 15 year old white Kansas girl to New York for “immoral purposes”

aa. Stepin’s Step-Chillun (pgs. 71-77)

- i. Included: Willie Best, Mantan Moreland, and Louis Armstrong
- ii. Willie Best
 1. Also known as “Sleep ‘n’ Eat”
 - a. A coon is content with enough to eat and a place to sleep
 2. Specialized in dense, dim-witted characters
 3. He walked around half awake-half sleep
 4. Characters were even more demeaning than Stepin Fetchit’s
 5. Played “automons”
 6. In the 30s he starred in 25 films
 7. In the 40s he starred in 35 films
 8. In the 50s he starred in 2 television series
 9. Willie Best died in 1962
- iii. Mantan Moreland
 1. At the age of 12 he ran away from home and began his career as a dancer

2. He later toured with comedy act Tim Moore, who played the character “Kingfish” on the Amos ‘n’ Andy show
3. He also was a frequent black café and nightclub performer
4. Moreland always played the “right-hand-man” but would take off for the hills the moment his White friend needed his help
 - a. Played the “cowardly lion”-“terr’fied of de ghosts”
5. No actor could widen his eyes like Mantan
6. He had become an anachronism by the 1940s
7. Mantan Moreland died in 1973

iv. Louis Armstrong

1. His career spanned over four decades and two syndromes
2. He played the reliable servant->and perfect entertainer
3. Was also known as “Satchel-Mouth/Satchet Mo”
4. He learned to have a layer of gregarious charm

- a. He could appeal to everyone
- 5. As a Negro Servant...he was exemplary of the post-humanized period
 - a. During this period, no character gave a second thought to proving anything to anyone
 - b. The humanized black domestic was often forced to have superhuman humaneness, a super human tolerance merely to point up his fitness for racial justice and to win audience sympathy
- 6. Louis Armstrong died in 1977
- bb. Rochester: the Gentleman's Gentleman (pgs.77-82)
 - i. Eddie "Rochester" Anderson
 - 1. 2 stories about how he began his career...
 - a. He sold newspapers as a child in Oakland, CA and competing with the other boys to outshout for the sale he acquired the inimitable gravelly quality of his voice
 - b. Comedian Jack Benny was on a search for a porter character like one he met while on a

train and when Anderson appeared Benny decided he was perfect for the role and coined him "Rochester"

2. Both may be fabrications but his greatest attribute was his voice
 3. Greatest success while teamed with Jack Benny
- ii. In his film *Man About Town* Rochester followed Stepin Fetchit's lead...Fetchit had taken the servant indoors, Robinson had domesticated him, and now Rochester gave him full run of the house.
 - iii. Benny-Rochester films out shown many of the others
 1. There was a father-son relationship
 - a. The great-white-father-poor-black-slave-son category
 2. For such a relationship to exist
 - a. One man must have control over the other
 - b. This was never the case in Benny-Rochester films
 - i. Rochester was far too independent to be completely subservient to anyone.

- ii. Referred to Benny as “Boss” or “Boss, Sir”-not the typical “Sir” of most slave/master relationships
- iv. Rochester fused the tom and coon types=gregarious eccentric presence
- v. Would always warn Benny of dire consequences and audiences laughed not because of his color or racial jokes between the two, but because Rochester was a very bright fellow who was bound to be proved to be right in the end.
- vi. Rochester’s name was wedded to Benny’s throughout his career
 - 1. It was always said that Benny owned the rights to the name “Rochester” and could have fired Anderson and given the role to another actor at any time.
- vii. Anderson as Rochester was a distinct personality
- viii. Many of the critics believed that Rochester stole the show
- ix. His proven ability to carry a film alone came with *Cabin in the Sky* (1943)
 - 1. Critics commended him for his performance
 - 2. Directed by Vincente Minnelli

3. Anderson did something his predecessors had not...

a. He had Touched his audience

x. Died in 1977

cc. Hi-Hat Hattie (pgs. 82-86)

i. Rochester's female counterpart: Hattie McDaniel

1. Massive, high-strung mammy

2. Critics criticized her for her mammy roles

a. She responded, "Why should I complain about making seven thousand dollars a week playing a maid? If I didn't, I'd be making seven dollars a week actually being one!"

i. This statement was representative of the true options blacks had in film during this time

3. Played the fussy, boisterous, big-bosomed maid

4. Audiences responded to her excessive showmanship, effrontery, and her audacity

5. Spoke her mind freely

6. The mammy became the literal mother figure, the put-on was carried to the forefront of the action, and the

style of the servant overpowered the content of the script.

- ii. Came to Hollywood in the late 20s
- iii. Born in Wichita, KS in 1898-13th child of a Baptist minister
- iv. In the beginning she was deemed...
 - 1. "Colored Sophie Tucker" & "female Bert Williams"
- v. McDaniel's "super-deluxe, grand-slam, all-or-nothing performance in *Alice Adams* (1935)
- vi. Never was McDaniel seen kowtowing
- vii. In her films, she proved to be a part of a household much more than just a maid...
 - 1. She was able to speak "back" to the homeowners and share her opinion
 - 2. She even received phone calls in her films
 - 3. She was doing what every black maid in America must have wanted to do at one time or another.
 - 4. Also played roles of the protective mother, caring very much for the well being of the children of the house
- viii. Her bossiness often can be read as a cover-up for deep hostility

- ix. In all of her roles she refused to accept any typical domesticity, to yield to the meek brand of Christianity that characterized Louise Beavers.

dd. Gone with the Wind: Black Realities and the End of a Tradition

- i. Produced in 1939
- ii. Film by David O. Selznick
- iii. 3rd and final important feature of the 30s spotlighting blacks
- iv. Based on Margaret Mitchell's novel-film took more than two years to film and cost almost four million dollars
- v. The black-white relationships were probably closer to real ones of ante-bellum America (define?) than any ever presented in the movies.
- vi. The previously Civil War films:
 - 1. Presented Negroes as slaves, but humiliated and debased them far beyond the callings of the script.
- vii. *Gone with the Wind* was criticized because the slaves were not shown taking up rifles against their former masters.
 - 1. But, the most beautiful aspect of the film was the ultimate accomplishment of the black actors to be transformed into complex human beings.

2. Hattie McDaniel

- a. Portrayed the O'Hara family Mammy
 - i. Always boasting she diapered 3 generations of women
 - ii. She is proud of the affection between master and servant
 - iii. She keeps the Tara (family plantation) going during the war
 - iv. Motivated solely by concern for the master family, but also not afraid to display anger towards them-does not bite her tongue!
- viii. Scarlett and Mammy retain a mother-daughter relationship
- ix. Mammy becomes all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing commentator and observer
- x. She remarks, she annotates, she makes asides, she always opinionates
- xi. It is Mammy who knows-and keeps secret-Scarlett's every plot

1. It is she who criticizes or advises, counsels or warns,
protects or defends, but always understands.

ee. Butterfly McQueen

- i. One of 2 actresses (herself and Hattie McDaniel) who
differed from all others greatly
- ii. Played Prissy in *Gone with the Wind*
 1. Performance was marked by fragility, hysteria, and
absurdity
 2. Servant girl for the O'Hara family
- iii. Some thought of her as a "stock darky figure"-but there was
much more to her performance
- iv. She seemed to provide an outlet for the repressed fears of
the audience
- v. "Tiny and delicate...Butterfly McQueen seemed to ask for
protection and was a unique combination of the comic and
the pathetic.
- vi. Her talents were often misused or misunderstood by
directors and writers
- vii. When she took on coon roles
 1. They seemed forced

2. She replied “I had imagined that since I was an intelligent woman, I could play any kind of role”
 - a. This was untrue
 3. She was a surreal creature rather than a stock comic servant
- viii. Her career took a disastrous turn in the 40s
1. Little to no work
- ix. In the 50s servants had vanished and she found herself struggling as a sales clerk at Macy’s, a waitress, a factory worker, a dishwasher, and as a companion to a Long Island white woman.
- x. 60s
1. Blacks were used in TV commercials and many hoped to see McQueen and other old servant fixtures
 - a. But network advertisers feared boycotts, protests, and militancy
 - b. *To cast McQueen as anything but a servant was out of the question
- xi. Butterfly McQueen’s story has a happy ending

1. In the late 60s she was rediscovered in the off-Broadway play *Curley McDimple*
2. *Gone with the Wind* was reissued
3. She was a name again

ff. Oscar Polk

i. Played Pork in *Gone with the Wind*

1. Most important scene

- a. Scarlett presents him with a watch once owned by her father
- b. Pork wants the watch desperately, but cannot accept it first
 - i. Because he has had his brain, his soul, and his individuality sapped from him during his years of servitude
 - ii. Sense of inferiority
 - iii. Written on him: his stumped, bent over posture and hesitant speech
 - iv. A man fighting to keep himself together
 - v. Port was a valid comment on the slave system

gg. Everett Brown

- i. Played Big Sam in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
- ii. Rescues Scarlett from attackers in Shantytown

hh. Eddie Anderson

- i. Uncle Peter in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
 1. Most rigidly typed black character
 - a. One unredeemable black stereotype in the entire picture
 - b. Clownish backwoods dolt who works for Aunt Pittypat
 2. Only thing that saved Anderson was being buried under layers of make-up that audiences failed to realize that one of their favorite characters was being used for the crudest comic relief.
- ii. Because the servant tradition had been carried to its highest point, the black characters of *Gone with the Wind* brought the tradition to a fitting close.
- iii. During the next era, much of the audacity, individuality, and tenacity of McQueen and McDaniel's character types was stripped.

2. Paul Robeson: the Black Colossus (pgs.94-100)

- a. Son of a former slave
- b. Had a rare intellect and athletic ability that enabled him to reach out for all the best white America could offer
- c. Born in Princeton, NJ
- d. By high school he was an academic *cause célèbre*
- e. Honor student and won a scholarship o Rutgers University
 - i. At this time it was virtually unheard-of for black students to receive scholarships
- f. He was a super athlete- four-letter man
- g. Named All-American for football in 1918
 - i. Was called “the greatest defensive end who had ever trod the gridiron”
- h. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa
- i. Graduated with honors
- j. Then went on to Columbia University’s Law School
- k. He then began starring in plays
 - i. *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924) and *Othello* (1928)

- I. It is one of the less pleasant aspects of the American way that when a black artist is successful and silent, he remains a national favorite
 - i. But when a black artist becomes important enough to want better roles (those with more dignity and less racism towards them) or when the artist makes some comment against the social-political climate of the country, he becomes a doomed man.

- m. Robeson speaks out
 - i. He became associated with the Communist Party
 - ii. He spoke out against American discrimination and segregation
 - iii. Made trips to the Soviet Union
 - 1. He was then singled out and finally SILENCED
 - 2. Reportedly the State Department refused to let him leave the Country
 - 3. And at another time did not want to let him back in
 - iv. Became the first of the controversial black political prisoners, the first of our four great black artists to have his art denied him because of his political beliefs.

- n. Since denied a platform to perform questions were asked...
 - i. Was he really the greatest baritone of all time?
 - ii. Was he actually America's greatest actor?
 - iii. Was he really so incredibly handsome?
 - iv. Was he actually too much of an assertive black male in this plays and films for white America to permit him to continue?
 - v. Was his smile the key to understanding his enigmatic personality?
- o. If there were answers to these questions, they were found in his films
 - i. Audiences in the 30s went to see his pictures to learn more about the myth and the man, the mask and the mystique.
- p. Most of his most important features were filmed abroad
- q. He was the only star in the 30s to work in foreign pictures
 - i. He thought overseas was where he could be free from stereotyping
 - ii. His foreign films did not meet his approval
 - iii. He always hoped his roles would elevate his people
 - iv. Films were even rewritten without his approval and at one premier he even stormed out of the movie in protest

- r. His next films he was cast as an “undercover” servant
 - i. Comparable to Sydney Poitier 25 years later
- s. He was always at the service of some white friend
 - i. This was the first time this technique had been used
 - ii. Seen as the same old white Massa figure
- t. Most of his films were dishonest
 - i. Here there was no attempt to trick the audience into believing they were viewing something modern and significant
 - ii. Robeson films were meant to reflect the liberal and even radical attitudes of the day
- u. What was impressive about Robeson films was Robeson himself!
 - i. His eyes gleamed, smile brilliant and infectious
 - ii. Often revealed the complete joy of the actor as he sang and sometimes masking an ambivalent, ironic side of his personality
- v. Robeson’s greatest contribution (and what most disturbed American moviegoers):
 - i. His proud, defiant portrait of the black man

w. His films even brought to the light the fact that miscegenation was illegal in the south

1. Chapter 4~The Interlude: Black Market Cinema

a. The reply to how Negroes were depicted in American films was that blacks should develop their own crop of filmmakers

i. To some extent this reply is still the same today

b. Truth

i. Blacks have been making their own films for many years

c. An underground movement

i. Group of independent black filmmakers flourished in the late 20s and the 30s

1. Tried to present portraits of black Americans, but were still trapped by the same stereotyped conceptions as their white competitors.

2. Plagued by: financial, technical, and distributing problems

ii. Still many black writers gained their experience during this time

d. The Appearance of Race Films

- i. If it had not been for such films many blacks would have never worked in film
 - ii. These films were also a source of income for many great actors
 - iii. In this period...the independent black producers experimented with black themes
 - iv. Films were created exclusively with black audiences in mind
 - v. And on occasion revealed black fantasies
- e. Prominent Actors in Race Films
- i. Early Years:
 - 1. Paul Robeson and Charles Gilpin
 - ii. 30s & 40s:
 - 1. Lena Horne, Eddie Anderson, Spencer Williams, Nina Mae McKinney, Mantan Moreland, Louise Beavers, Herbert Jeffery, comics Moms Mabley and Pigmeat Markham, and even Stepin Fetchit
 - iii. Emmett J. Scott
 - 1. Secretary of Booker T. Washington
 - 2. Used the help of the black bourgeoisie for capital to create film *Lincoln's Dream*

- a. Screenwriter Elaine Sterne expanded the short project into a feature
 - b. Script submitted to Universal but was rejected
 - c. Finally film was shot in Chicago and Florida
 - d. They experienced many setbacks: bad weather, poorly designed and constructed sets, inexperienced cast and crew, and inadequate lighting facilities
 - e. Production then ran into financial issues
 - f. To help, Scott enlisted the help white backers (but they altered the films theme and sentiments)
 - g. After 3 long years the film was produced
 - i. It was a disaster artistically and financially
 - h. Although the film was not a success, it served as an impetus for others
- f. The Lincoln Motion Picture Company (LMPC)
 - i. Group of black pioneers
 - ii. Incorporated in 1916

- iii. Based in Nebraska
- iv. Brainchild of black actor Noble P. Johnson and brother George P. Johnson
- v. Films:
 - 1. *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1916) was their first film and it exceeded expectations and previous Negro achievements
 - 2. *Trooper of Troop K* (1917), a second film, was about the massacre of the Negro troops of the famous Tenth Calvary and the historic rescue of Captain Lewis S. Morey by Trooper K
 - 3. Both films were distributed to ghetto theaters
- vi. With the appearance of these new race films, a number of all-black theaters began opening
- vii. A growing black audience were becoming anxious for more black merchandise
- viii. LMPC made films until the late 20s, turning out approximately 10 films; all were no longer than 3 reels.
- g. The Reol Motion Picture Corporation
 - i. Headed by Robert Levy

- ii. Emerged after WWI
- iii. Produced the film *The Call of His People* (1921)
 - 1. Film was made in Irvington-on-the-Hudson, NY
 - 2. An adaptation of the novel *The Man Who Would Be White* by black writer Aubrey Browser
 - 3. Negro light enough to pass for white
 - a. More often these “passing” films seemed to be wish-fulfillment for their producers
- iv. Reol was one of the first companies to make film versions of black classics
- v. Launched the 1st colored movie star: Edna Morton
 - 1. She was billed as the “colored Mary Pickford”
 - 2. Described as a “teasing brown” torrid dancer with the grace and abandon of her race
- h. Arising Black Film Companies:
 - i. Ebony Film Corporation-Chicago
 - ii. Foster Photoplay-Chicago
 - iii. Gate City Film Corporation-Kansas City
 - iv. Constellation Films-New York
 - v. Renaissance Company-New York

- vi. Dunbar Pictures-New York
- vii. Roseland Pictures and Recording Laboratories-New York
- viii. Paragon Pictures-Jamaica, Long Island
- ix. When white entrepreneurs realized the success in producing films for black audiences, they began producing all-black films for ghetto audiences.
- x. Famous Artists Company created in 1927
 - 1. Octavus Roy Cohen created a series of all-Negro shorts that made fun of Negro lawyers and doctors by depicting them as the familiar coons
 - 2. Cohen used white actors in blackface
 - 3. Cohen's Viewpoint:
 - a. Depict Negro professionals as just as idiotic as the servant figures of the Hollywood films
- xi. Colored Players of Philadelphia
 - 1. Produced two films:
 - a. *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (1929) with Charles Gilpin
 - b. *Scar of Shame* (1929)

- i. This film was a statement on the color cast system and the divisions that exist among black Americans
 - ii. Film was also thought to be the “finest product of the entire independent film movement”
- i. Problems Arise
 - i. Flu Epidemic in 1923 caused many ghetto theaters to close and this amplified the already present distribution problem
 - ii. When “talkies” came in, many companies lacked the capital to keep up production and acquire the sound equipment required to create films with sound.
 - iii. The release of *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and *Hallelujah* (1929) spelled disaster for the independent companies.
 - iv. Finally, the Depression finished off all but the sturdiest companies
 - 1. During the Depression, independent black films for black audiences were made almost entirely by white moviemakers-yielding-the underground movement and a second phase of film culture

j. Second Phase of Race Films

i. New films focused on major Hollywood genres: mystery, melodrama, boy-meets-girl love story, musical, and the western.

ii. In the late 30s Jed Buell filmed *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937)

1. First Negro Western

2. He also filmed *Lucky Ghost* (1941) which featured a coon hero and also he created several films with Mantan Moreland

iii. During this phase there were films that treated blacks sensitively

1. Ex. *The Emperor Jones* (1933)

2. Other films:

a. *The Black King* (1932), *The Spirit of Youth*

(1937), *Broken Strings* (1940), *Go Down Death*

(1944), *The Blood of Jesus* (1941)

k. Prominent white-backed film corporations

i. Astor Pictures

1. Produced *Tall, Tan and Terrific* in 1946 and *Big Timers* in 1946

2. Also produced black musicals

a. *Beware* in 1946

b. *Ebony Parade* in 1947)

ii. Herald Pictures Incorporated

1. Produced *Harlem is Heaven* in (1932) and *Miracle in Harlem* in 1947),

iii. Million Dollar Pictures

1. Produced the western *Bronze Buckaroo* in 1938, *Dark Manhattan* in 1937, *One Dark Night* in (1939), *Reform School* in (1939), *Bargain with Bullets* in (1937), *Life Goes On* in (1938), and *The Duke is Tops* in (1938)

I. From phase 1 to phase 2 the black independents supplied ghetto theaters with an array of entertaining back products

i. Even when blacks were allowed in white theaters they still preferred to frequent black theaters so they would be able to “give full rein to their feelings and impulses”-because they were with their “own” people.

m. Oscar Micheaux (pgs. 109-116)

i. Born in Illinois in 1884

- ii.* He was one filmmaker who survived the flu epidemic, the competition from the Hollywood studios, and even the financial pinch of the Depression
- iii.* Started the Oscar Micheaux Corporation in 1918 with short features and then went into creating full-length films
 - 1. During a 30 year period: Micheaux created 30-40 films
- iv.* He was promoted as the “Greatest Negro photoplay of all time”
- v.* Mystery and myths have long surrounded the corporation and Micheaux himself
- vi.* It was always unknown how he knew so much about film
- vii.* Micheaux began his professional career as a novelist
 - 1. In a 10 year period he produced approximately 10 melodramatic novels and created his own company to publish them
 - 2. Micheaux Philosophy:
 - a.* Learn from the masses; then teach them
 - b.* Once a novel was completed...he would take aggressive promo tours to launch it

c. He would meet with leaders of the black communities-doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and schoolteachers-as well as with black laborers, domestics, and farmers, he lectured in schools, churches, even in homes, promoting himself and his work.

3. He also even sold books to white farmers

viii. He was approached by the Johnson Brothers (Lincoln Motion Picture Company) for the rights to his novel *The Homesteader*

1. He accepted under the condition that he was allowed to direct the film

2. His bid was rejected but he enlisted the help of a group of Oklahoma farmers for capital

ix. Micheaux used the same aggressiveness to promote his films as he did with his novels.

1. He was even able to persuade Southern theater owners to show his films

2. He would approach them and tell them about the new black audience and the cash that could be received

3. They began to show his films at special matinee performances for black audiences
 4. Some were shown as midnight showings for white audiences eager to see black film
 5. He found most of his actors in black acting companies such as Lafayette Players in NY
 - a. It was said that if he spotted a figure, noted a gesture or was struck by the way the light fell across a face, he would immediately sign them up!
- x. A Micheaux finding:
1. Lorenzo Tucker-found sitting in the lobby of the Dunbar Hotel and worked in 14 films with Micheaux
- xi. Micheaux casted his actors based on “type”
1. This “type” was modeled after Hollywood personalities who were then publicized as black versions!
 2. The leads in Micheaux films were mostly light-skinned Negro actors
 3. He was later criticized by militant black audiences for selecting “light-brights” (light skinned blacks)

- xii.* With his aggressiveness of promotion, using not only his own efforts but also sending out the actors themselves to promote, he became known as “the most successful black moviemaker of the period”
- xiii.* Although he had many successes, he experienced financial issues repeatedly
- xiv.* His silent films were far more fluid and less formulaic than his talkies, similar to Hollywood B movies with obvious technical problems.

 - 1. Lighting and editing were poor and the acting would be terrible
 - 2. But still these were much better films than others during that time.
- xv.* Race theme:

 - 1. Often a topic in his films
 - 2. He would use Hollywood scripts but use a racial slant

 - a.* Ex. Gangster films, war films, melodramas and sex dramas
 - 3. Topics also included:

 - a.* Educating blacks and the feelings towards it

b. Black unity

c. "Passing"

xvi. Contemporary black audiences also view Micheaux's greatest contribution as his greatest shortcoming...

1. His films reflected the interests and outlooks of the black bourgeoisie

2. Films never centered on the ghetto

3. They did not deal with racial misery and decay

4. Films concentrated on upright middle-class protagonists

5. One might say that he created a world that was part fantasy, part reflective of a segment of the black bourgeoisie

xvii. Micheaux adhered to W.E.B. Dubois's "talented tenth" theory

His heroic leads are the educated go-getters who believe they must do something to "further the race, not hinder it"

xviii. To understand his films, one must understand that he was moving as far as possible away from Hollywood's jesters!

xix. Micheaux's company and any others hanging on finally ended after WWII

xx. He died in 1951 in Charlotte, NC, in relative obscurity

xxi. Micheaux's "lost" film: *Within Our Gates* (1920) (pg. 116)

1. *Within Our Gates* had been lost for years
2. Originally rejected by the Chicago Board of Censors because of its controversy:
 - a. It included an explosive lynching scene
3. When the film finally was played, it opened up to a packed audience
 - a. But national distribution was limited
 - b. Southern theaters refused to book it
4. Later it disappeared
5. 1990 it reappeared at the Spanish Film Archives in Madrid
6. Then shown again publicly, notably in the NY Lincoln Center
 - a. This time around audiences had the rare opportunity to see a pioneering African American director examining-with passion and commitment- the "race theme"
7. The film also used an interracial cast

a. Micheaux looked at tensions between blacks
and whites in the South

8. Turned his focus on such other “explosive” issues

a. Rape

b. Miscegenation

c. Urban crime

xxii. The issue that killed off the efforts of even the sturdiest of
the independents in the late 40s were:

1. The Negro Problem Pictures that took up racial
themes

2. The independents could not compete with these
Hollywood-made features

3. Soon their products were no longer distinct

xxiii. But the work of these independents deserves close
attention, kept in faith for as long as they could and for a
long time before it was fashionable.

1. Chapter 5~The 1940s: the Entertainers, the New Negroes, and the
Problem People (pgs. 117-120)

a. During this time these three had become the film people of the 40s

b. The villain was gone, and the jester had its last days

- c. The servants
 - i. The great financial slump had ended
 - ii. They exchanged their mops and pails for zoot suits and sequined gowns
- d. This era presented a lively group of Negro entertainers
 - i. Singers, dancers, musicians, acrobats, and clowns abounded
 - ii. The amount of cash flow coming in from these new characters was incredible
 - iii. It seemed as if this era was only these characters for a time
- e. But before the end the entertainers were to be virtually shoved aside as a puzzling set of people appeared and revealed that in America there was such thing as a “race problem”
- f. This era was split into two by:
 - i. War abroad
 - ii. Emergence of one at home
- g. This decade proved to be the most bizarre and certainly broke the most ground of all for blacks in American films.
- h. The Entertainers
 - i. Negro Entertainment Syndrome

1. Flowered in the early 40s
 2. Reached its apex with two all-black musicals
 - a. *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) *Stormy Weather* (1943)
 3. Used throughout the war years as the standard procedure for handling black personalities
- ii. In almost every American movie in which a black had appeared
 1. Filmmakers had been trying to maintain the myth that Negroes were naturally rhythmic and natural-born entertainers
 2. Even though characters were incredibly racist, still they were still great entertainers
 3. The entertainment aspect could be shown as implied or explicit
 - i. Producers introduced specific musical interludes in which the entertainer could perform unhampered by a story line
 - i. Frequently a nightclub scene was introduced into the movie so that the performer would have a “natural setting”

- ii. It came a time when the entertainers became so successful in this format that there was hardly a *Big Broadcast* or a *Broadway Melody* or a *Hit Parade* (define all of these?) in which there was not at least one number by a black personality
- j. Even as late as the 50s, remnants of the entertainer syndrome were present in films such as Fritz Lang's *The Blue Gardenia* (1953), and Jean Negulesco's *A Certain Smile* (1958)
- k. The new energy of the entertainers was used in the 40s to ease the tensions of a war-depressed nation
 - i. It was during the war years the great gift of the movies
 - ii. Allowed people to escape to other worlds where blues, bad times, and heartaches.
 - iii. In part they were used to boost the nation's morale and to promote patriotism
- l. The black entertainers stated through their song and dance that America was indeed a good and decent country full of joy and unity, a place well worth fighting for.
- m. Like servants:

- i. The entertainers set out to delight and please without changing anyone's life
- n. Unlike servants:
 - i. Whose familiarity with the stars of the 30s films had irritated some, the entertainers syndrome was clearly a "safe device"
- o. Because musical numbers were not integrated into the script, the scenes featuring the blacks could be cut from the films without spoiling them should local (or Southern) theater owners feel their audiences would object to seeing a Negro
 - i. The whole procedure now seems archaic; it was another way motion picture catered to audience prejudices
- p. Two personalities prospered and perished
 - i. Among the era's big favorites, big rebels, and most prominent and handsome black creations
 - 1. One seated at a piano
 - 2. One conspicuously draped around a column
 - ii. Hazel Scott & Lena Horne
 - 1. Each entertainer-a remarkable pianist and a sultry song stylist-brought to film her own concept of black pride and steadfastly adhered to it

- q. Hazel Scott: Miss Proper Middle-Class Lady (pgs. 122-125)
- i. She became very popular in the early 40s
 - ii. Proud and demanding performer
 1. Never tried to conceal either her color or her anger
 - iii. Was one of the first black artists to refuse to appear before segregated audiences
 1. But this militancy might have hindered her career and bought her rise to a halt
 - iv. Born in 1920 in Port of Spain, Trinidad
 - v. Began in movies in 1943
 - vi. She was the daughter of two creative parents
 1. Father R. Thomas Scott-a well-known Negro scholar
 2. Mother Alma Long Scott-a musician and a Trinidad Aristocrat
 - vii. When the family moved to Harlem in 1924 Hazel had already become a child prodigy
 1. She learned to read at 3
 2. She had perfect pitch at 3 and a half
 3. She played the piano at four

4. She had mastered the classics-and was improvising-
at five
 5. She then studied privately with a professor from the
Julliard School of Music.
- viii. At the age of 20 she made her professional debut at a
Greenwich Village club called Café Society Downtown.
1. Became an overnight sensation and especially in NY
- ix. She was an insert in the film *Something to Shout About*
(1943) performing at a piano
1. Columbia executives saw her sequence and were so
impressed they wrote in a part for Scott and asked
her to come to Hollywood
- x. She was very sure of her talents
1. She made demands
 2. She refused to play roles in which black women were
cast as whores or maids
 3. She always appeared in films as herself, seated at a
piano
- xi. The Scott specialty

1. Unique and daring blending of the classics and swing music
2. Perverse irony of Hazel Scott's work
 - a. Later younger black audiences found her too bourgeois and rather affected
 - b. Looked as if she was trying to prove something, for the sake of her race
3. There were times though that Scott fell into the kind of category she fought to escape—"pop-style revivals"

4. American audiences congratulated themselves for appreciating this “cultured” black woman who knew the classics so well.
 - a. But in retrospect those audiences were just like the blue-haired ladies in the 50s who watched Harry Belafonte in his tight pants and open shirts and left the theater raving about the “anthropological research” that enriched his folk tunes.
 - b. This “culture” they spoke of was actually a cover explanation for what her character represented.
5. Hazel appeared as new variation of the age-old “exotic black woman”
 - a. She was criticized for exposing her breasts and armpits
 - b. Her style might have been seen as a come-on
 - c. Even in her smile there was a lewd suggestiveness that remains intriguing

- d. She was far sexier than most may have admitted
 - e. However, she fought to maintain her dignity in films
6. Scott's career came to an end when Columbia Pictures studio head Harry Cohn and Scott disagreed over a costume that she believed stereotyped blacks
- a. Cohn told her she would never work again in Hollywood
 - b. She finished her last signed film and only made one film then after French film *The Night Affair* (1961)
- r. Lena Horne: Black Beauty in Residence (pgs. 125-128)
- i. Horne was Hazel Scott's biggest rival
 - 1. It would be better to say that the nearest thing Lena Horne had to a rival was Hazel Scott
 - ii. She was the 40s biggest attraction
 - iii. Born in 1917 in Brooklyn
 - 1. It was said that the nurses carried her through the hospital raving about her "copper color"

2. This was not the first time in her career that success was given to her because of here extraordinary copper skin tone
3. She was called the *café au lait* Hedy Lamarr
- iv. NAACP Secretary Walter White took interest in her career
 1. Convinced she could alter the trend of Negroes in American movies
 2. After starring in a few films...White sent in letters asking who the new *Latin American* discovery was
 3. MGM was even accused by a few Negroes of trying to pass her off as white
- v. Just as Hazel Scott did, Horne came to the stage as herself
 1. Elegantly and sensuously dressed
- vi. Her bit:
 1. Said to be something of a sensual exotic-dressed suggestively in a tight, colorful costume-while performing in a sexy, heated club with other black cast members
- vii. After her next two roles the “sex-object syndrome” was carried a step further by casting her as exotic sirens

1. But Horne always proved herself too much the lady o
be believable as the slut
- viii. Lena Horn starred in many films
1. For some reason she never seemed happy, or
enjoying herself
 2. She sometimes came across as aloof and remote
 - a. But it was this very aloofness and artistic
detachment that added to her allure and
mystery
- ix. Towards the end of the 40s she had trouble with her studio
- x. Found in her autobiography:
1. Reported that her relations with MGM were never
very friendly once she became involved with the white
musician Lennie Hayton, whom she later married
Horne then became more selective of the roles she
would play
 2. MGM even began making it hard for her to get
nightclub assignments

3. MGM began giving roles to other lighter skinned women, like Ava Gardner and Dorothy Dandridge although Horne would have been perfect for the roles
- x. During the early 50s she was listed in the Red Channels, and consequently was blacklisted from television and some radio appearances
- xii. Even her friendship with Paul Robeson and interest in the Council for African Affairs caused many conservatives in the entertainment industry resent her
- xiii. It seemed for a time that her career may have been over
- xiv. She was able to make her way back into mainstream:
 1. *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956), and the Broadway play *Jamaica* (1957)
- xv. In the 60s she came back strong with concert and stage performances, then another film role
 1. She played Richard Wildmark's mistress in *Death of a Gunfighter* (1969)
 2. She was a unique mixture of middle-class haughtiness and down-home, nitty-gritty daredevilment

xvi. Today, Lena Horne is still thought of as *the* black leading lady of the war era

1. She also starred in the eras two big all-black spectacles:

a. *Cabin in the Sky*

b. *Stormy Weather*

i. Both released in 1943

ii. Both taking the entertainer syndrome to its apex

s. *Cabin in the Sky* (1943)

i. Based on a successful Broadway show

1. Starred Ethel Waters, Dooley Wilson and the Katherine Dunham dance troupe

ii. Sat on the MGM shelves until Arthur Freed was given the go

1. The first all-Negro musical in almost 14 years was launched

iii. Characters:

1. Ethel Waters, the good wife-Petunia

2. Eddie Anderson, -Joseph "Little Joe" Jackson

3. Lena Horne, the temptress-Georgia Brown

4. Rex Ingram-Lucifer, Jr.
 5. Oscar Polk-Deacon and Fleetfoot
 6. Butterfly McQueen-Lily
 7. Ruby Dandridge
 - a. The mother of Dorothy Dandridge-chatty churchgoer
 8. John "Bubbles" Sublett-performed a stick-and-staircase dance sequence
 9. Duke Ellington-played a rendition of "Shine"
 10. Kenneth Spencer-Heaven's general
 - a. Was touted as the new Paul Robeson
 11. Wille Best
 12. Mantan Moreland
 13. Louis Armstrong
- iv. *Cabin in the Sky* was directed by Vincente Minnelli
 - v. A sepia-tone surface was employed effectively
 1. The film had the studio-made period glow MGM prided itself on
 - vi. This film told the story of Little Joe Jackson

1. A harmless *little colored man* who enjoys shooting craps and raising a bit of cain
 2. Married to Petunia who constantly worries about him
- vii. Neither Joe nor Petunia know the struggle
1. This “struggle” was between the general of heaven and Lucifer, Jr. of hell for the rights to Jackson’s soul
- viii. Lucifer, Jr. tries to throw everything he has at Joe
1. Sweepstakes tickets, and the temptress Georgia Brown
- ix. But in the end Petunia’s prayers save Joe and the two are able to walk to their cabin in the sky
- x. Time Magazine:
1. “Like many star-filled pictures, this one never really shows off its crowded heavens. The Negroes are apparently regarded less as artists (despite their very high potential of artistry) than as picturesque, Sambo-style characters”
 - a. As good as the performances are, they still seem locked in and artistically restrained by very old concepts

- xi. This film resembled earlier black films
 - 1. Negroes removed from the daily routine of real American life and placed in a remote idealized world.
 - 2. Familiar Good Colored Boy theme who leaves the Good Christian Woman to take up with the Bad Black Girl
- xii. The basic poverty level was glossed over
 - 1. And the inability of Little Joe to read and write
- xiii. The film still received raves from others though
- xiv. *Stormy Weather* (1943)
 - 1. Those Negro actors that did not appear in *Cabin in the Sky* were given a second chance for glory in this all-black production
 - 2. Directed by Andrew Stone
 - 3. Released by 20th Century-Fox
 - a. “Thinly veiled dramatization of the life of Bill Robinson, who starred alongside Lena Horne in this film
 - 4. *Stormy Weather* was a review of Negro Entertainment from 1918 to 1943

- a. Seen through the eyes of Robinson
 - b. Told in a series of entertainment sketches with
Horne singing
 - c. Cab clowning, and Bojangles tapping
 - d. In between musical performances was
backstage drama between Robinson and
Horne
 - e. They fall in love, break up, and fall in love
again in an extravagant grand finale
5. Plot was shamelessly illogical, but fortunately there
were good songs and some wonderfully diverting
performances
 6. Fats Waller and Ada Brown sang spicy renditions
- xv. Bits and Pieces of Black Action
1. The Entertainer Syndrome died after the 40s
 2. Within this Syndrome came:
 - a. The Nicholas Brothers
 - b. Katherine Dunham company
 - i. Dunham was an attractive
anthropologist and lecturer with a Ph.D.

- ii. She lived an isolated life in Jamaica
 - iii. While living there she studied their rituals and primitive dance rhythms
- 3. She later incorporated what she had learned into her choreography for dances to swing music. During this time actors such as Eartha Kitt and Marlon Brando made their names on their own. Hall Johnson Choir, considered by many the greatest choral company in the country. Duke Ellington shined in *Reville with Beverly* (1943)
 - a. Dorothy Dandridge starred in Count Basie's band
 - i. Dandridge also starred alongside Louis Armstrong in *Pillow to Post* (1945)
 - b. 1945 Warner Brothers released an all-black jazz documentary
 - i. *Jammin' the Blues* (1944)
 - 1. Moody, well-textured short featured Marie Bryant, Lester

Long, and other prominent jazz
artists

- c. Ben Carter
 - i. Played crusty old John-Henry in the
Judy Garland musical *The Harvey Girls*
(1946)
- d. Otto Preminger's *Centennial Summer* (1946)
 - i. Starred Broadway star Avon Long
(photo) in an 1876 saloon number
- e. Pearl Bailey
 - i. Sang "Tired" in *Variety Girl* (1947)
 - ii. Later appeared in *Isn't It Romantic*
(1948)
- f. *New Orleans* (1947)
 - i. Featured Louis Armstrong and Billy
Holiday
- g. *Symphony in Black: A Rhapsody of Negro Life*
(1935)
 - i. Duke Ellington was the star
 - ii. Symphonic Jazz featured

h. *Ebony Parade* (1947)

- i. Independent
 - ii. All-black
 - iii. 3 reel musical
 - iv. Starred Count Basie, Cab Calloway,
June Richmond, the Mills Brothers, and
Dorothy Dandridge
 - v. Ended up a disappointment in film
4. The characters were having a “grand old time” but
their quality of work and their films had seriously
declined
 5. Their overexposure and exploitation became obvious
at the end of WWII
 6. Industry was saturated with films starring Negro
dancers and singers, far too many, far too random, to
permit specific discussion
 7. It is difficult to give an exact date when the
Entertainment Syndrome ended
 - a. But it was a picture which spelled the ultimate
end to the syndrome

i. Walt Disney's *Song of the South* in 1946xvi. *Song of the South* (1946)

1. Stylistically it was a great novelty
2. "Live-action spectacle with clever animated sequences interspersed throughout"
3. Took place on an Atlanta plantation
 - a. Contented servants worked joyously in magnificently photographed Technicolor (description) work fields
4. Film is based on the Joel Chandler Harris tales
5. Characters:
 - a. Hattie McDaniel was the family mammy
 - b. James Baskette portrayed "dear old" Uncle Remus
 - i. A character glowing with sunshine and joy
 - ii. He sings as animated bluebirds and butterflies whiz past (insert photo from film during this scene)

7. Although the tale distorted the black plantation experience, they still were able to “reveal the moral insights of Uncle Remus”
 - a. His gift had been to transliterate the social framework of his own community into animal adventures=take the old stereotypical Negro characters and transform them into animated cartoon animals
 - b. Br’er Rabbit and Br’er Fox-were a clever animation but did not comment on the old Negro character it was taken from
8. The film yielded some profit
 - a. But it was also criticized heavily
9. Signaled the demise of the “Negro as fanciful entertainer or comic servant”
- t. The New Negroes: AN INTERIM (pgs. 136-142)
 - i. It was because Washington had formulated a plan to increase the employment of Negro citizens and if they are given jobs through the entertainment and film industry it could demonstrate the achievement of Washington’s plan.

- ii. President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order 8802, which made it illegal to discriminate based on race and religion for war industries
- iii. The pressure yielded the first Army Air Corps squad for Negro cadets
- iv. The government then began to pressure all industries to become open to Negro employment
- v. As Negroes began to enter the film industry new character types also were created
 - 1. The “sympathetic Negro” character had appeared before the 40s but only few
 - 2. First character in the talkie era:
 - a. Dr. Marchand in John Ford’s *Arrowsmith* (1931)
 - i. Played by Clarence Brooks
 - ii. He boasted about himself being a graduate of Howard University’s Medical School
 - iii. This was the movie’s first professional black character

3. The second character was in Mervyn LeRoy's attack on penal institutions in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932)
 - a. Starred Paul Muni
 4. Third, LeRoy employed Clinton Rosemund to play Tump Redwine in *They Won't Forget* (1937)
 - a. This character was used to symbolize the oppressed, exploited peoples of the world
- vi. In addition to these films, the films Paul Robeson starred in during the 30s were typically centered on the "noble" black characters
1. This character was not seen in many other films
 2. Another was Leigh Whipper
 - a. He was cast in a trio of sympathetic New Negro roles
 3. Also Earnest Anderson was featured with Bette Davis, George Brent, Olivia de Havilland, and Hattie McDaniel in John Huston's *In This Our Life* (1942)

- a. Anderson's performance and the films' racial theme proved the only commendable thing about this film
- b. He made only two other films after this
 - i. *Deep Is the Well* (1951) and *3 for Bedroom C* (1952)
 1. This film presented the "intelligent Negro"
- vii. Other films presented the New Negro in the Military
 1. Ex. *Bataan*, *Crash Dive*, *Sahara* (all 1943)
- viii. In 1941 the first black General was appointed
 1. Benjamin O. Davis
- ix. Of all of these new military, New Negro Hero films there was one that went farther in their implications...
 1. *Lifeboat* (1944)
 - a. Alfred Hitchcock film
 - b. Group of Americans holed up in a battered lifeboat after their boat had been destroyed by the Germans

c. All of the characters/passengers symbolize specific elements in a full democratic society

i. Canada Lee:

1. A black steward-represents America's second-class citizen
2. He was once referred to as "Charcoal"
3. But after he is found to be a hero, people greet him differently and with respect
4. After this role Lee played other sympathetic New Negro roles

2. Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1947)

3. *Lost Boundaries* (1949)

4. *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1952)

5. *Casablanca* (1942)

a. Michael Curtiz film

b. Starred a "shy little colored man who sat at a piano and sang "As Time Goes By"

- c. Film's song became a national anthem for
lovers and loners
- d. The character named "Sam"
 - i. Became a code for the "friendly,
congenial type of Negro" everyone loved
 - ii. Dooley Wilson played Sam in this film
 - iii. He was a little more than an updated
combination of a faithful servant and
entertainer
 - iv. This character had a very easygoing
relationship with his white Humphrey
Bogart, and without the normal racial
barriers
 - v. It was close to what was termed as the
movies' "*huckfin' fixation*"
- x. "*Huckfin' Fixation*"
 - 1. A good white man opposes the corruption and
pretenses of the dominant white culture
 - a. In his rejection (like Huck Finn) he takes up
with an outcast

- i. The outcast (like Nigger Jim)
 - 1. Trusty black who never competes with the white man and who serves as a reliable ego padder (one who encourages his white counterpart undoubtedly)
 - 2. Darkness and mystery have always been attached to the American Negro
 - 3. And by associating himself with this individual, the white hero grows in stature
 - 4. Blacks seemed to possess the soul the white man searches for
 - a. This perhaps may represent the white liberal American's dream of lost innocence and freedom
- u. The Problem People (pg. 143)
 - i.* The postwar audience
 - 1. Not a very lax audience
 - ii.* American lives were now complicated
 - iii.* Old time war call for solidarity was heightened

1. "Equitable treatment for all" NOW included blacks
- iv. Audience now demanded "recognizable problems and issues"
1. Especially racial matters
- v. Old all-black spectacles were now remote
1. They were too diverting, too entertaining, too reflective of a corruptly innocent time when Hollywood had no conscious
 2. Moviegoers now wanted nothing but the facts and realism
 3. Willing to accept controversy
- vi. American movies undergo the first stage of radical change
1. 1947, Hollywood still had to satisfy the masochistic cravings of the post-war audience
 2. New releases
 - a. *Crossfire* (1947)
 - b. *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947)
 - c. Both focused on racial discrimination
 - d. Condemned anti-Semitism in America
- vii. Films was now deciding to go a step further

- viii. 1949, audiences began to receive a long list of films that investigated the race problem in America
- ix. Negro actors in film suffered, struggled, bled, yet endured
 - 1. They always won their battles
- v. Home of the Brave and the Postwar Good Sensitive Negro
 - i. Film produced in 1949
 - ii. Launched the cycle of problem pictures
 - iii. Produced by Stanley Kramer,
 - iv. Directed by Mark Robson
 - v. Written by Carl Foreman
 - vi. Went against Hollywood's typical theories
 - vii. Made on a low budget
 - viii. Actors:
 - 1. Frank Lovejoy, Steve Brodie, Lloyd Bridges, Jeff Corey, James Edwards
 - 2. None of these were big stars
 - ix. Film was based on a successful Broadway play
 - x. Had an anti-Semitic theme
 - xi. Focused on a young Jewish soldier, who was played by a Negro man

1. This would serve as the first “Negro tolerance” picture
- xii.* Tried to yield high profits and publicity
1. So the actors were sworn to secrecy about the film details
- xiii.* Film was a total shock to the film industry and the country
1. “The emotional breakdown of a young Negro private”
 2. He reveals to his captain the racial incidents that he has experienced while working on a mission to a Japanese-ran island
 3. Excluded and harassed
 4. He cracked under pressure
 5. It was not only these incidents
 - a.* He believed the American way of racism has forced blacks outside the world and the entire human race
- xiv.* Quote from film:
- xv.* “Some drunk across the hall from my aunt’s yelling: ‘Throw out the dirty NIGGERS!’ that was us. But I just turned over and went back to sleep. I was used to it by then. Sure I was ten. That’s old for a Pickaninny...I learned that if you’re

colored, you stink. You're not like other people. You're-
 you're alone. You're something strange, different...well, you
 make us different, you rats."

xvi. The film ended in one trying to make peace

1. A white soldier asks the black soldier if he wanted to
 be a partner in a bar ownership

2. This encourages the black soldiers' new philosophy:

a. "I am different...everybody's different. But so
 what! Because underneath we're all guys."

xvii. Today this ending would be seen as pacifying the truth in
 what was being told

1. The gesture by the white soldier was a "noble" one
 but was believable only in the movies.

xviii. This was the beginning of what Hollywood has never
 stopped producing:

1. The happy ending

xix. Compared to previous black characters, the black soldier is
 one that has exceeded himself in liberation from the
 stereotype

xx. Carl Foreman went on to become a top scenarist

xxi. Black actor James Edwards went on to star in other films and it looked as if he would become *the* black leading man in American movies of the 50s

1. This however did not happen. His career was cut short unexpectedly
2. Born in Muncie, IN
3. Studied speech and drama at Indiana University and Northwestern University
4. Served as a first lieutenant during WWII
5. Began in Broadway
6. Gained momentum with the series called *Deep Are the Roots*, which was a drama about a Southern household during the war years
7. Moved to Hollywood and his first film was *Manhandled* (1944)
8. Edward's postwar Negro was the screen's first black hero governed by a code of fundamental decency, courage, and compassion

a. Has opportunities to take over his white counterpart, but chooses not to, and awaits acceptance

9. This “code” is one that later would be the foundation of the Sidney Poitier star personality of the 50s

10. Edwards’ career did not last for one reason

a. America was simply not ready for a “sexy black man”

b. He was characterized in a sexless way and never was given a love interest, still his sex appeal shown through

c. “The very first of the Good Sensitive Postwar Negroes scared his public, and for that reason he was denied movie stardom.”

w. Lost Boundaries’ Tragic Mulattoes

i. Film by Louis de Rochemont

ii. Made in 1949

iii. Second of the problem pictures

iv. Directed by Alfred L. Werker

- v. Based on a *Reader's Digest* true account of a New England Negro family that lived as whites for twenty years.
- vi. Filmed in Portsmouth, NH
- vii. Budget of 600,000
- viii. Deep-rooted prejudice of the American small town
- ix. Scott Carter, handsome light-skinned Negro doctor
 - 1. Cannot find work at Negro hospitals (because he looks too white)
 - 2. Cannot work at white hospitals (because he admits to being a Negro)
- x. Carter moves his family (has a light-skinned wife also) to New England community
 - 1. This family begins to establish friendships and respect of their neighbors but do not tell them they are Negroes
 - a. They have two children after their move
 - 2. The Carter family go unrecognized until the father enlists in the military and found to be a Negro
 - a. Navy tells him he cannot enlist because of "Failure to meet physical qualifications"

- i.* The family must confess
 - ii.* Child asks parents why they did not tell him he was a Negro
 - 1. Child leaves home in search of his roots on the streets of Harlem
 - iii.* Other child also becomes confused
- 3. The townspeople begin to turn on the family
- 4. The speech:
 - a.* Pronounced from a white town minister on tolerance causes the townspeople to change their attitude towards the family
- 5. This family appeared to be a new “relevant” fixture on the screen
 - a.* In fact it was actually a story of “old-time tragic mulattoes”
- 6. Underlying idea:
 - a.* How awful it is that these good white people should have their lives ruined simply because of Negro blood.

b. White audiences could sympathize with these
tragic mulattoes

xi. The film's final compromise:

1. Film did point out the hypocrisy of the townspeople
but did not give them any repercussions for their
treatment
2. The blame was placed on the family for deceiving the
town

x. Pinky's Tragic Mulatto and Its Strong Black Woman (pgs. 150-154)

i. *Pinky* (1949)

1. Twentieth Century-Fox production
2. Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck
3. Directed by Elia Kazan
4. Actors:
 - a.* Jeanne Crain, Ethel Waters, Ethel Barrymore,
William Lundigan, Frederick O'Neal, and Nina
Mae McKinney
5. An unreal world: clearly defined black and white
photography, carefully composed scenes, and
theatrical sets

6. Focused on the “Deep South”

7. Film firsts:

- a. First film to deal with an interracial romance
- b. First film to deal with the archetypal strong-black-woman character

8. Plot:

- a. Fair-skinned Negro nurse, Pinky has been “passing” in the North
- b. She revisits the South
- c. Upon her visit she becomes depressed by this life, the daily threats and insults
- d. She is attacked by a knife-carrying black woman
- e. Also she was arrested after initially when police come to her defense during the knife fight, but found to be black and taken into custody
- f. She is followed and chased by thugs
- g. She then plans to return to her life in the North where she has a white fiancé and has been living life as a white woman

h. Her grandmother obligates her to care for an old aristocratic white woman, Miss Em

i. This woman epitomizes the South's racist code

ii. While living with Miss Em Pinky matures

9. Quote:

a. "Nobody deserves respect as long as she pretends she's something she isn't"-Miss Em

b. Pinky then decides if she returns to her life as a White woman, she will only be running away from the truth

c. After Miss Em dies, she wills the home to Pinky

d. She fought a serious property battle but won her home

10. Last duty:

a. She ends her romance after coming out to her fiancé

b. Pinky realizes that she can be an asset in the South

- c. She turns Miss Em's home into a black nursing clinic, and is now content having pride in her race
 - i. But this is at the surrender of her personal life
 - ii. This tragedy is true of all "tragic mulattoes"
 - iii. She ends a wiser woman, but unfulfilled

11. The big compromise:

- a. Film cast a white woman to play the mulatto Pinky
- b. When Ethel Waters as Granny was pictured doing chores it was expected
- c. As Pinky performed similar chores to pay for her property battle, the audience was shocked and sympathized with the "lovely white girl compelled to work like a 'nigger.'"
 - i. The insults and treats she endured seemed all the more extreme because

they were against a white woman in
reality

- ii.* But her “interracial” romance was seen lighter than expected simply because there was nothing “interracial” about the realistic couple

12. Ethel Waters

a. Played a different kind of Mammy

- i.* She was multi-dimensional, neither all Christian resignation (Louise Beavers), nor all rage and fury (Hattie McDaniel)
- ii.* Showed humanity

1. After caring for Miss Em she is left only clothes and shoes, but she is grateful
2. And after finding that her daughter has been passing for white she could have shown fury, but she did not

b. Quote:

2. Beauchamp enlists the help of a young white boy
whom he saved from drowning previously
 3. This boy does not want to help “He owes something
to a Nigger”
 4. After Beauchamp refuses money as repayment the
boy feels guilty
 5. It is with the help of the boy and an old “spinster”
schoolteacher that things are accomplished and he is
found innocent of the crime
 6. During the trial, not once does Beauchamp crack,
never does he try to prove that he was good to any
white man
 - a. Because that is only what a man who believes
he is inferior would do
 7. It is revealed that Beauchamp has known the identity
of the killer the entire time
 8. Kept the secret because he did not think anyone
would have believed him
- vii. “Tough-minded and complex, *Intruder in the Dust* unearthed,
among a number of things, a somber piece of Americana: a

black man on trial has little chance for justice in our country, said the film, more than twenty years before such statements were fashionable.”

z. Juano Hernandez (pgs. 156-158)

- i.* Born in 1901
- ii.* Son of a Puerto Rican seaman
- iii.* He was a circus performer, vaudeville trouper, and radio actor
- iv.* Self-educated and self-assured
- v.* Spent childhood in Brazil, singing, and performing acrobatics on the streets to raise money for food
- vi.* Worked in a Cuban circus as a tumbler
- vii.* America:
 1. Vaudeville
 2. Sang in:
 - a.* *Show Boat* (1936)
 - b.* *Blackbirds* (1920)
 3. Biggest success was in radio

4. He was one of the only Negro actors consistently used for different types of roles

viii. Performed as:

1. Everything from Mandrake the Magician to Benito Mussolini, Haile Selassie
2. Also played, Chiang Kai-shek on the "Cavalcade of America" show

ix. This film was his first-proved to be its greatest asset and virtue

x. In Hollywood, he found steady employment

1. Hernandez in films was always confident, archly independent strong black man
2. Also usually the separatist, usually the withdrawn, proud individualist
3. Seemed to have lost out simply because of his "black assurance"

xi. Hernandez and the cycle of problem pictures appropriately ended the schizophrenic 1940s

1. Chapter 6~The 1950s: Black Stars

a. This era should be remembered as:

- i. Apathetic, sleepy-eyed, vulgar and hypocritical, grandiose, spectacular, and tasteless
- b. Historic events
- i. McCarthy was elected to the Senate
 - ii. Troops were sent into Korea
 - iii. A Nobel Peace Prize for Ralph Bunche in Sweden
 - iv. The National Guard was sent into Cicero and Chicago
 - v. The Supreme Court Decision of 1954
 - vi. Marian Anderson was showcased at the Met
 - vii. Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi
 - viii. 14-year old boy lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman
 - ix. Bus boycotts and bombings in Montgomery, AL
 - x. Rise of Martin Luther King
 - xi. Sit-ins in Oklahoma
 - xii. Federal Troops sent into Arkansas
- c. Film Industry
- i. Some actors were lost in the 50s due to blacklisting

1. Directors were beginning to stray away from the cookie-cutter films and individualizing themselves and their films from others
 2. Television sets were now in homes across the nation
 3. Giant wide screens
 - a. Cinerama, CinemaScope, Vista Vision, 3-D were implemented to help box office sales
- ii. Blacks were still advancing in film
1. Two new additions:
 - a. The Negro Lead Character
 - b. The Negro Theme
 2. Three emerging personalities:
 - a. Sydney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, and Ethel Waters
 - i. With their appearance the audience ship changed from watching black film for entertainment to watching for the black experience they displayed and what they represented.

- ii. Their films made a dent in Hollywood's
box office
- iii. At this time, the white audiences were unable to personally
relate to previous black actors like Stepin Fetchit
 1. They never thought about the negativity they
displayed in their films, nor how they felt about
performing in them.
 2. The audience was oblivious to the person behind the
character and their feelings
- d. Ethel Waters: Earth Mother for an Alienated Age (pgs. 161-166)
 - i. First of the three to win mass audience approval
 - ii. Grew up in Chester, PA
 - iii. She used to have to steal food, run errands for whores, be a
lookout for pimps and underworld figures for income
 - iv. Was married at 13
 1. Separated at 14
 - v. At 15 became a chambermaid and laundress at a
Philadelphia hotel for \$4.75/week
 - vi. She was first billed as "Sweet Mama Stringbean"

vii. Her early films brought new style and substance to the time-worn Mammy

viii. Autobiography

1. *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* (1951)

- a. Details of her life, the fights, the lovers, the marriages, the career troubles
- b. Made audiences realize that she was in fact just like the character she played so well

ix. Important film

1. *The Member of the Wedding* (1952)

- a. It marked the first time a black actress was used to carry a major-studio white production
- b. Was a comeback opportunity for Waters after her career had taken a decline
- c. This film was a very serious picture
- d. Had very little plot
- e. Focused on the interactions of three outcasts:
- f. Frankie Adams played by Julie Harris who was a 12 year old motherless girl entering her teens and wanting to belong

- g. John-Henry played by Brandon de Wilde who was Frankie's 6 year old cousin and playmate
- h. Bernice played by Ethel Waters who was a weathered and beaten cook
- i. Bernice proves to be the guiding spirit in the children's lives
 - i. She is the cook, housekeeper, protectress, reprimander, adviser, and confidante
- j. This film had the potential to scare off some unknowing viewers and others were baffled
- k. Waters was given rave reviews, even by those who did not like the film
 - i. She emerged now as more than just a representative of the long-suffering, strong black woman
- x. For black audiences:
 - 1. Ethel Waters was the personification of the black spirit they believed had prevailed during the hard times of

slavery, and they felt she brought dignity and wisdom
to the race

xi. For white audiences:

1. Ethel Waters spoke to an inner spirit of a paranoid
and emotionally paralyzed generation that longed for
some sign of heroism

xii. Waters later begin to suffer financial trouble, income-tax
evasion, and other debts

1. Her issues amounted so high that she was forced to
make an appearance on a TV quiz show called
“Break the \$250,000 Bank.”

- a. She stood in front of audiences to try and win
money to pay her taxes

xiii. Over the years it seemed that Waters began to fade but her
image-the myth she lived out-loomed larger than life over the
decade

xiv. She made appearances in other programs during the 60s
and 70s

xv. Ethel Waters died at age 80

e. Dorothy Dandridge: Apotheosis of the Mulatto (pgs. 166-175)

- i. Second of the black stars
- ii. She was a great beauty
 1. Dark and vibrant eyes
 2. Long and silky eyes
 3. Sharply defined features
 4. Rich golden skin tone that always fascinated movie audiences, black and white
- iii. She had a very distinctive personality
 1. Schizophrenic, maddening, euphoric, and self-destructive
- iv. Most important to her appeal was her fragility and her desperate determination to survive
 1. She used her own incongruities and self-contradictions to capture and extend the mass imagination
- v. Her life and career had huge press coverage
- vi. Irony of her career:
 1. The image she marketed appeared to be contemporary and daring, at heart it was based on an old and classic type, the tragic mulatto

- a. She may have been forced to live out a screen image that destroyed her
- vii. In her important films she portrayed doomed, unfulfilled women
 1. Nervous and vulnerable, they always battled with the duality of their personalities (and surely their mixed race)
 - viii. Dorothy Dandridge came to film after starring in many stage performances
 - ix. Daughter of a Cleveland minister
 - x. Mother was a comedienne-actress named Ruby
 - xi. Performed as a child with sister Vivian in a vaudeville act called "The Wonder Kids"
 - xii. Her and her sister performed as the Dandridge Sisters, touring the country with the Jimmy Lunceford Band
 - xiii. At 16 while singing at the Cotton Club she met Harold Nicholas of the dancing Nicholas Brothers
 1. She married him and had a daughter
 - a. Later the two divorced
 - xiv. During the 40s she worked in nightclubs and a few films

xv. Early 50s

1. She played in a few films as a “good girl”

a. *Tarzan’s Peril* (1951)

- i. One scene she has been captured and tied with limbs spread about
- ii. She moved her body, trying to break free
- iii. But this movement was the first time had the black woman been so erotically and obviously used as a sex object
- iv. Even the way Tarzan looked at Dandridge was in a very sexual way

xvi. *Carmen Jones* (1954)

1. This was the movie that established her career

- a. Showcased the Dandridge mulatto performance

2. The films director Otto Preminger initially believed she was too sophisticated to play a whore, but he underestimated her talents

3. Dandridge took it upon herself to learn the be given all the opportunity
 - a. She learned the southern dialect
 - b. Mastered wildly uninhibited body movements
 - c. Exploited her own nervous tension
4. With this new caricature she tossed her hair, darkened her eyes with makeup, dresses herself in “role appropriate” clothing and strutted into Preminger’s office prepared to get her role
 - a. The role was hers
5. This film was the 50s most publicized and successful all-black production
6. Based on an opera by Bizet
7. Dandridge transformed the original character who was a Spanish cigarette girl into a sexy black factory worker in the South
8. Carmen’s interest is Joe (Good Colored Boy) played by Harry Belafonte
 - a. She lures him into deserting the army, they continue to a Chicago hotel to lay low

- b. She deserts Joe for a prize fighter
 - i. Joe finds her and strangles her

9. Plot: Stock Situations

- a. Hair pulling by black women, bar fights, exaggerated dialects, animalistic passion and fury from the lead characters
- b. Old-style *kitsch*

10. *Carmen Jones* made Dandridge a star

- a. She was given an Oscar Nomination as best actress of the year
- b. Although she lost the award to Gene Kelly, no black performer had been nominated for a leading actor award

11. Dandridge soon became a victim of the press

- a. There were stories on her daughter being disabled
- b. Her son being “hidden” from the public
- c. Her white father
- d. Her white lovers

- i. She was said to be involved with everyone in Hollywood
 1. Tyrone Power
 2. Otto Preminger
 3. Peter Lawford
 4. Michael Rennie
 5. Abby Mann
 6. Arthur Lowe
12. She soon discovered that when she wanted to escape from it all there was no place to go
13. The film offers dissipated
 - a. And those she did receive cast her only as exotic, self-destructive women
- xvii. *Island in the Sun* (1957)
 1. Dandridge starred here as the first black woman to be cast in an interracial relationship
 - a. And because she was the first to bring integrated relationships to the mass audience she remains a socially significant figure
 2. Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck

- xviii. Dandridge's next films encompassed the same pity for the poor racially "tainted" beauty on screen
- xix. She fled the US to Europe in the hopes to perform diversified untyped characters, but still she encountered "disillusionment and repeated compromises"
 1. Her European films were still the same dynamic between her and white counterparts
 2. She appeared in some as a sex object and others being torn between two loves which is one where she was at her most vulnerable state
 3. She had issues with scenes where she was suppose to kiss her white counterpart
- xx. She began to bring her own disappointments and frustrations to her characters
 1. Audiences responded to the sadness on screen, the perhaps believed that she was unfulfilled because of that drop of Negro blood
 2. This Negro blood was wrecking her chances of fulfillment
 3. Her tragic flaw was her color

- xxi. Her last important film was *Porgy and Bess* (1959)
 - 1. Played Bess alongside Sidney Poitier as Porgy
 - 2. She stole the screen from all other actors
 - 3. Played a woman at odds with society
 - a. Bad Black Girl trying to right the tragic heroine who ends up leaving the good Porgy to wander up No'th to Harlem with Sportin' Life played by Sammy Davis Jr.
- xxii. The rest of Dandridge's career was a sad story, she only appeared in two other films
- xxiii. Directors would only think of her as the exotic, doomed mulatto
- xxiv. By the late 50s and early 60s this type was dated
 - 1. It was talked about that she would star in *Cleopatra* but the plans fell through
- xxv. Her personal life had many conflicts
 - 1. Just as the characters she played had
 - 2. She was openly seen with white actors and rumors begin to flow of her only being attracted to white men

3. During one film playing opposite a very dark actor, she underwent a minor trauma because she did not want his black hands to touch her
 4. In the late 50s her marriage to white restaurateur Jack Denison seemed to be suspicious that Dandridge had fallen victim to acting out her screen life in reality
 5. In 1962 she divorced Denison and found herself bankrupt
- xxvi. No movie jobs, few club offers, occasional TV appearances
1. It was rumored that she began drinking, using pills, and being involved in self-destructive love affairs
- xxvii. 1965, at the age of 42 Dandridge died of an overdose of anti-depressants
1. She in fact lived as the perfect tragic mulatto...
 2. Trapped because of her color
- f. Sydney Poitier: Hero for an Integrationist Age (pgs. 175-183)
- i. Third black star
 - ii. Career proved more substantial, professionally and personally than his predecessors.
 - iii. Born in Nassau Bahamas in 1927, youngest of 8 children

- iv. Lived in Miami and then on to NYC in the 40s
- v. Prior to his movie career he worked as a dockhand, dishwasher, chicken plucker, and bus boy
- vi. One day he found an add for the American Negro Theater in the NY Times
 - 1. He auditioned but it did not go as planned
 - 2. He decided to become better
 - 3. He performed small roles and some road tours
 - 4. When his craft was seasoned he came to films and “just about took over”
- vii. 3 reasons why he succeeded and won the audience
 - 1. Model integrationist hero (define integrationist)
 - a. In his films he was educated and intelligent
 - b. He spoke proper English
 - c. Dressed conservatively
 - d. Had table manners
 - e. For white mass audience he was a black man that met their standards

- i. Characters were tame: they did not act impulsively, and were not threats to the system
 - ii. Characters were non-funky, almost sexless and sterile
 - iii. The perfect dream for white liberals anxious to have a colored man in for lunch or dinner
- f. He was also acceptable to black audiences
- g. Paragon of black middle-class values and virtues
- i. During this time Negroes were still migrating North and were gradually increasing their political power
 - ii. The black middle class and the limited power they had, supported Poitier
 - iii. Black America was trying to meet white standards and ape white manners-he became a hero for their cause

- iv. Not crude or loud, and did not carry
ghetto cultural baggage
 - v. No dialect, no shuffling, no African
cultural past
 - vi. Almost totally devoid of rhythm
 - vii. Complete opposite of the black buffoon
2. His characters were still the old type that America had
always cherished
- a. They were mild-mannered toms, throwbacks to
the humanized Christian servants of the 30s
 - b. When insulted or badgered, his characters
stood by and took it
 - i. “He knew the white world meant him no
real harm”
 - c. The only difference between Poitier’s
characters:
 - i. That he was governed by a code of
decency, duty and moral intelligence
 - d. He did not use his goodness only as a means
of saving a position

- i. Past Negroes in the movies, notable Bill Robinson, were usually concerned about pleasing the master in order not to be booted out of the Big House
 - ii. But Poitier did not care about the Big House
 - iii. He acted as he did because of his overriding intelligence
 - iv. Demanded that his characters be humane
3. Poitier became a star because of his talent
- a. He dignified the figures he played
 - b. He played roles with sensitivity and strength
- viii. When viewed today:
- 1. The old incongruities and disparities once ignored by the audience of 1957 are blatantly apparent
- ix. Poitier's character falls into the tradition of the dying slave content that he has well served the Massa

1. His loyalty to the white audience destroys him just as much as the old slave's steadfastness kept him in shackles
- x. During the 60s his sexual neutralization became embarrassingly apparent
1. It can be said that all of Poitier's films of the 50s were important and significant
 - a. Because they were all made to please the white audience at a time when the main topic of conversation was school desegregation
 - b. Audiences still respond to Poitier's sophistication and charm, his range and distinctly heroic quality
- xi. In the 60s Hollywood belittled and dehumanized Poitier's human spirit by making it vulgarly superhuman
1. He became "SuperSidney" the Superstar
 2. He was depicted as too faithful a servant
 3. For black and white Audiences in the 50s he was a great reason for going to the movies

xii. His movie characters singlehandedly made audiences believe things would work out, that they were worth working out.

1. It was still just a beautiful dream, but quite often that's what great movies and careers are all about

g. The Eisenhower age

i. The products and personalities may now seem as ludicrous or irrelevant

ii. Goes on record as a self-consciously and self-righteously sincere period in which racial issues were confronted and dealt with in relatively honest terms,

1. At least with as much integrity as the film industry was capable of giving

iii. Films ended happily

1. If any black anger popped up, its impact was lessened by the picture's conclusion, when all difficulties and problems were resolved.

iv. Some films such failed to record black anger and anguish realistically:

1. *Edge of the City* (1957), *Island in the Sun* (1957), and
The Defiant Ones (1958)

v. Integration was approached naively

vi. Other films returned to idealized, fake black worlds:

1. *Carmen Jones* (1954), *St. Louis Blues* (1958), *Anna
Lucasta* (1958) and *Porgy and Bess* (1959)

h. 1959

i. Racism would be revealed as a national sickness

ii. The doctrine of integration would be uncovered as too
simple an answer to so complex a situation

iii. The American black man would assert himself culturally to
articulate the rage he had suppressed through the years

iv. That great social and political change-and its impact on
Hollywood films:

1. Rendered obsolete much of the work of the black
stars and personalities of the 50s

2. Usher in a new type of black film, and black star

1. Chapter 7~The 1960s: Problem People into Militants

a. Turbulent, guarded and paranoid

b. The streets and screens exploded with anger and insolence

- c. Black people were no longer sad-eyed and trying to prove their worth in order to fit into white worlds
 - i. They were no longer submissive, patient Negroes pleading for acceptance
- d. The headstrong militant appeared
 - i. Black hearts still broken
 - ii. Black lives still ruined
 - iii. Militants
 - 1. Brought to the light black rage, black anger, and black power
 - 2. Began overturning the old way of thinking and
 - 3. Raised the issue of deep-rooted bitterness that had be ignored for so long
- e. Most important decade because:
 - i. Era of great change
 - ii. Beginning of a transition period of which we have yet to see the end
 - 1. This period began with sit-ins, boycotts, and marches
 - 2. Ended with riots, demonstrations, and a series of horrifying assassinations

iii. Negroes were asking for their rights

1. By 1969 blacks were demanding them

f. Films:

i. Were representative of this black visual representation

ii. Mix of old and new

1. "Period of so-called significant films rather than great personalities"

iii. Sidney Poitier was at the top of the black box-office

1. His films seemed out of place during this separatist age

iv. These new militant films presented a world previously ignored on the American screen

1. Ghettos, whores, hustlers, addicts, pimps, and pushers

v. A world of racist sickness, of oppression, of black despair and rage

1. Studied poverty, interracial marriages, the state of being black and finding fulfillment in the narrow confines determined by a hostile white world

- vi. First steps in the creation of these new black films was the emergence of black scriptwriters, providing films with totally new dialogue and realistic characters than ever seen in black characters
- vii. Evolution was almost complete with the appearance of America's first major black movie director.
- viii. New black film advanced in two directions:
 - 1. Serious, lyrical and poetic films
 - 2. Farcical (silly), high-spirited, and flashy
- g. Steps Forward (pgs. 196-200)
 - i. *Take a Giant Step* (1960)
 - 1. Amalgam (mixture) of old and new, launched a new decade
 - a. Johnny Nash
 - i. Rock 'n' roll singer
 - ii. Stars as a black boy approaching manhood, full of unanswered questions and stifled by the white environment in which he must function
 - b. Ruby Dee

- i. Makes an offbeat appearance
 - ii. Housekeeper who helps Johnny out with some of his questions about sex
 - c. Beah Richards
 - i. Johnny's middle-class mother
 - d. Frederick O'Neal
 - i. Portrayed Nash's father
 - ii. Later he became the first black president of Actor's Equity (insert short description)
- 2. Chief virtue
 - a. It was based on the successful Broadway play by black playwright Louis Peterson
 - i. Black screenwriters were rare in Hollywood
 - ii. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961)
 - 1. Walter Lee Younger is a young man struggling with his station in life. He is currently sharing a very small apartment with his wife, son, sister, and mother.
 - a. Walter seems to be an imprisoned man

2. The family receives an unexpected financial windfall
3. Characters:
 - a. Sidney Poitier-Walter Lee Younger
 - b. Claudia McNeil-Lena Younger
 - c. Ruby Dee-Ruth Younger
 - d. Diana Sands-Beneatha Younger
 - e. Ivan Dixon-Asagai
 - f. John Fiedler-Mark Linder
 - g. Louis Gossett Jr.-George Murchison
 - h. Steven Perry-Travis Younger
 - i. Joel Fluellen-Bobo
 - j. Louis Terrel-Herman
 - k. Roy Glen-Willie Harris
4. This family's dream is to escape the ghetto and find their "American Dream"
5. Their dreams seem to come true when Ruth (Walter's Mother) receives a \$10,000 insurance policy left by her husband.
6. As hopes rise of moving out of the ghetto another is pulling the family apart

- a. Each member of the household are clashing in violent desperation

7. “*A Raisin in the Sun*’s message may seem dated today, but even though the film celebrated integration and ultimately paid homage to the America of free enterprise and materialism, it mirrored a timeless sense of oppression and despair, and it contained performances that, if at times overblown, were often rich and effective.”

h. Black Art Films (pgs. 200-204)

- i. Attempted to present “untyped” black characters
- ii. Quartet of inexpensively made films arise

1. *Shadows* (1961)

- a. Picked up the old tragic mulatto theme
- b. A black girl who looks white falls in love with a white man
- c. She does not tell him that she is black
 - i. Atypically, not because of shame, but because she believes it is not important

- d. After her love deserts her, she realizes one fact:
 - i. In America race is always an important
- iii. By 1963, movie goers were aware of Freedom Riders in the South
 - 1. And the work of Martin Luther King
- iv. Civil rights activity was becoming more respectable
 - 1. And the great white liberal movement was in full swing
- v. *The Cool World* (1963)
 - 1. Focused on previously unexplored Harlem
 - 2. Showed the plight of a 15 year old ghetto victim named Duke
 - a. Played by Hampton Clanton
 - b. Duke is in search of a gun
 - i. The gun was representative of power in the ghetto
 - ii. It will allow him to overpower the rival gang
 - 3. Harlem is portrayed as "Divine Hell"

- a. Gang activity
 - b. Trading comic books for marijuana
 - c. Sharing whores
 - d. Drinking alcohol
 - e. Purse snatching
 - f. Storming angrily through the city
 - g. Hopelessness
4. The film also provides a look into the “good side”
 - a. Fifth Avenue, 125th St, and Lenox Avenue
- vi. *One Potato, Two Potato* (1964)
1. The screen’s first study on interracial marriage
 2. Centered on a custody battle between a divorced white couple
 - a. After being deserted by her husband the woman falls in love with a black man
 - b. The two, although warned, marry and take her child from the previous marriage
 3. The marriage between the interracial couple and the daughter was accepted by his family as one of their own

4. After her previous husband finds out she is now married to a black man, he takes her to court for his daughter
5. He wins the custody battle
 - a. Leaving the daughter feeling confused and unsure

vii. *Nothing But a Man* (1964)

1. “Shot in distinct black and white, quiet in tone, notable for its subtlety...”
2. The main character Duff, played by Ivan Dixon
 - a. Dixon plays a character who’s quarrel is not with only his white oppressors but also with those blacks who permit oppression
 - b. He showed a new style of black sexuality
 - i. Through the way he walked, eyed and held women
 - ii. He showed a character who was a sensitive, tortured man but also one who was sensual (first in film)

viii. All presented “art-house style”

1. Depictions of America's racial problems
 2. Black protagonists demanding a chance to fulfill themselves on their own terms without having to live up to white standards
- i.* Here shone the evolving great militant spirit
- j.* A Step Backward: Ossie Davis and *Gone Are the Days*
- i.* *Gone are the Days* (1964)
 1. Film adaptation of the Ossie Davis play *Purlie Victorious*
 - ii.* *Purlie Victorious*
 1. Went back to the old stereotype figures
 2. Centered on a fast-talking, slickster minister, Purlie, whose ambition is to convert a battered barn (the property of a staunch Southern aristocrat) into an integrated church
 3. He enlists help
 - a.* The local mammy
 - b.* The local tom
 - c.* The local Pickaninny
 - d.* The local white liberal

- i. In the end, with those who lend their help, he builds the church
- 4. Had Ossie Davis not been associated with this film it would not be worth mentioning
 - a. By 1964 he had already acquired white liberals and members of the black bourgeoisie.
- iii. Promoted himself into the leading-man category
- iv. Films:
 - 1. *No Way Out* (1950)
 - 2. *The Cardinal* (1963)
 - 3. *Shock Treatment* (1964)
 - 4. *Slaves* (1969)
 - 5. *The Hill* (1965)
 - 6. *The Scalphunters* (1968)
- v. Although he had made himself a success there was no place for him during that time
- vi. Usually cast as a stoic, relatively dignified “tom-like” character
 - 1. He was also an educated Negro in one film
 - 2. A Latin scholar in another film

- vii. Model integrationist hero: intelligent, reasonable, reliable, and well-mannered
- k. Along the road, in Harlem, and on the subway
 - i. The little pictures:
 - 1. *Black Like Me* (1964), *The Pawnbroker* (1965),
Dutchman (1965)
 - a. *Black Like Me*
 - i. Based on John Howard Griffin's best selling book
 - ii. Reversed Hollywood's great theme of passing the color line
 - iii. A white writer undergoes the process of transforming into a black man by taking a pill that causes the skin to darken and sitting under intense sun lamps
 - 1. While living as a black man, he learns of the hatred and racism that occurs in a black man's everyday life

2. He is shoved on buses, chased by white hoodlums, abused by employers, refused employment, questioned about his sex life, and repeatedly subjected to humiliation

iv. Critics still view this film as another example of the white man slumming at a black man's expense

v. Others have seen this film as a continuation of the tragic mulatto theme

2. *The Pawnbroker* (1965)

a. A Sidney Lumet film

b. Did not have a black theme but was set in Harlem

c. Featured a Jewish hero

d. The blacks were inhabitants (sometimes victims and/or predators) of a world that daily assaults and dehumanizes them

- e. Thelma Oliver plays a black whore, ready to sell everything, including herself to save her lover

3. The Dutchman (1967)

- a. Adapted from LeRoy Jones' one-act play
- b. Directed by Anthony Harvey in England
- c. Grim little parable, beginning with a subway ride and ending with a nightmarish dance of death
- d. This film articulated the options left open to a black man in white America:
 - i. Survive by joining the black bourgeoisie (those apers of white manners who are doomed to lives without their manhood)

I. Way Down in de New Ole South with Tom-Tom, Miss Bronze

Barbie Doll, and Ms. Militant Mammy (pgs. 208-213)

- i. Hurry Sundown (1967)
- ii. Otto Preminger film
- iii. First major, big-budget, star-studded motion picture to center on the militant spirit of the mid-1960s and the black revolt

- iv. Based on K. B. Gilden's best-selling novel about the post-WWII New South
- v. Shot in Baton Rouge, LA
 - 1. During filming the crew were threatened by the KKK
- vi. This film was a summation of almost every Southern white and black cliché the movies had ever relied on
 - 1. The Southern Bell, the Massa, the white idiot child, the faithful mammy, the white Liberal, the New Educated Black Woman, the New Good Sensitive Negro, the Corrupt Old White Bigot, the Po' White Trash
- vii. This film's ending announced that the postwar integrationist spirit would not be destroyed so easily.
 - 1. It was also presented that these Bronze Barbie Dolls would never feel the hatred as did darker skinned blacks
 - a. She knows oppression only on a superficial level
 - i. She clearly symbolizes the post-integrated black woman

- ii. Her color will never make her feel shame, and she is to be respected for that
 - iii. She has entered a free society at the expense of her own individuality
 - b. She has adopted so many white values that she lost her own soul
 - i. This type of black woman could have been fascinating if properly handled
- 2. This film presented archetypal scenes and characters that audiences associated with the South, with bigots, with Liberals, and with touchy racial situations
- 3. Called "big glorious comic strip with pop scene after pop scene, and thus it succeeded on a primal level as a popularization of current events
- 4. Pointed a new direction for the handling of the Negro problem

m. *The Liberation of L. B. Jones* (1970)

- i. Starred another black whore type played by Lola Falana, rather than a black decadent middle-class lady figure

1. This type of character is one that the movies, even black fiction and poetry, have yet to deal with

n. *A Man Called Adam* and Sammy Davis, Jr.'s, Bid for Movie

Stardom

i. *A Man Called Adam* (1966)

1. Psychodrama
2. Stars: Sammy Davis Jr., Cicely Tyson, Peter Lawford, and Ossie Davis
3. The only saving grace of this drama was that it unintentionally revealed the confused anger then felt in American inner cities
4. It was said that a few minutes into the film, moviegoers were probably ready to go home
5. But the idea of a jazz film appealed to black audiences
 - a. And so did the idea of a new black heel of an antihero

o. Sammy Davis Jr. (pgs. 213-215)

- i. Through the late 50s and early 60s his career was very basic
- ii. He was always only a featured actor

- iii. He had been an entertainer all his life, beginning as a child with his father in the Will Mastin Trio
- iv. The black press was critical of him
 1. Audiences were conditioned to think of him as a show-business legend
 - a. But still, his film performances were not outstanding
 2. At times he came across as a “shrimp trying to act like a big fish”
 - a. He seemed to be trying to hard
 3. While starring alongside the rat-pack (Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Peter Lawford-he was too much the tagalong figure
 4. Their treatment of Davis was hypocritical
 5. He became the “showcase Negro” for the white stars
 6. Often he wore clothing, walked and talked as did black actors years ago
- v. In other films he seemed too eager to please his white costars, and consequently failed to satisfy black audiences.

- vi. With the film *A Man Called Adam*, Davis tried to redeem himself
 - a. But he was dramatically unprepared for the role
 - b. He failed terribly in the scenes in which he whined down or broke down
- vii. For later generations, Davis would be interesting to watch—just to see such a famous talent, although the ones he starred in did not display his brilliant talent as they did in theatre and nightclub performances
- p. Super Sidney of the 1960s (pgs. 215-219)
 - i. Sidney Poitier's biggest hit of the decade: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*
 - ii. Other Films:
 1. *Paris Blues* (1961), *All the Young Men* (1960), *Pressure Point* (1962), *The Long Ships* (1964), *Lilies of the Field* (1963), *The Slender Thread* (1965), *A Patch of Blue* (1965), *Duel at Diablo* (1966), *To Sir, With Love* (1967), *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *For Love of Ivy* (1968)

2. He was awarded an Academy Award for his performances in *Lilies of the Field* (1963)
- iii. After the Oscar Poitier was made even “nicer” by Hollywood scenarists, and it appeared as if he were to going along wit the “program”
- iv. Most of his films during the 60s were solid entertainment vehicles
 1. But they failed to satisfy audiences completely because the social significance and political implications of the 50s Poitier features were lacking, and a surprisingly mannered ideal black man, so far above the masses who loved him, was emerging
 2. And *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* paid homage to this new “superblackman”
 - a. This new type jolted Poitier off of the pedestal he had previously been placed
- v. *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967)
 1. Stars:

- a. Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, Katharine Houghton, Beah Richards, Roy Glen Jr., and Sidney Poitier
2. Story that tackled the touchy subject of interracial marriage
 - a. A white girl comes home toting her new man
 - b. He happens to be a tall, handsome black man, whom she also wants to marry
 - c. Her parents must deal with this possibility, although it takes time and conflict
3. The film concentrated on these “nice, decent people”
 - a. And diverted attention from any real issues
 - i. In fact there were no issues
4. Poitier was charming, good-looking, mannerly, and brilliant
 - a. “Who could refuse him for a son-in-law?”
5. Beah Richards earned an Oscar nomination
 6. This film proved the last of the explicitly integrationist message pictures

7. What remains the most interesting aspect of the 60s was the rapidity with which attitudes, outlooks, and opinions changed
 - a. Dealing with racial situations
 - i. Moviemakers had been accustomed to moving in cautious steps
 - ii. But they seemed to lose track of the speed with which the mind of the mass audience was moving
 - vi. By 1966 the Martin Luther King philosophy of nonviolence was just about dead
 1. The film industry was still using MLK's attitudes
 - vii. Malcolm X had been assassinated
 - viii. Stokely Carmichael had arrived
 1. Black activist
 2. First leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
 3. Later became the honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party

- ix. H. Rap Brown had said violence was as natural in America as apple pie
- x. Riots
 - 1. Watts (a neighborhood in California), Detroit, Harlem, South Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Washington D.C.
- xi. President's National Advisory Commission had reported that America was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal."
 - 1. But the film industry still continued with its brother-love everything's-going-to-be-dandy escapist movies, assuming that audiences would still believe in them.
- xii. The new audience:
 - 1. TV had exposed them to scenes of blood and brutality in their own living rooms
 - 2. Also there was a new interest and awareness of the black experience
 - a. It was becoming "chic" and "hip" to understand the black man's style, even to speak in his jazzed-up dialect

- xiii. By the end of the 60s the film industry finally jumped on the bandwagon and two new phenomena appeared:
 - 1. One was the final evolution of a new kind of black film
 - 2. The other was the extraordinary rise of an actor named Jim Brown
- q. Jim Brown: Black Buck Hero for a Separatist Age (pgs. 220-223)
 - i. Came to film after a successful college and pro football career
 - 1. He seemed to be a joke when he decided to become an actor
 - a. But he in fact had the last laugh
 - ii. During the time he entered film, mass black audiences needed him
- r. Even though he was nothing more than the black buck of old, he answered—because of his unique charisma and astounding physical presence—the need for a viable black-power sex figure
- s. He suggested violence and power, a dash and daring never before exhibited by a black male
- t. His physical
 - i. Stood 6 feet two inches

- ii. Weighed over 200 lbs.
- iii. Had a 45 inch chest
- iv. Previously been acclaimed as the most powerful and elusive running back in the history of professional football.
- u. He was also making negative press
 - i. Arrested for allegedly throwing a girl from a balcony and a full-grown man over a car
- v. He was big. He was black. He was outspoken. He was baaadddd
 - i. He played the big, black, baaadddd nigger parts it seemed he was born to play
 - ii. And the fact that he lacked the necessary talent did not matter
- w. Young black men looked up to Brown
- x. Young black children in the ghetto liked him because he was a black man who could shove back to whitey the violence that whitey had originally dealt out
- y. Women responded to him because his intense sexuality was closely related to his thick legs exposed

- i. The blackness of his skin and his sheer physicality took audiences back to the myth of the black man as a pure creature of astounding sexual prowess
- ii. Another reason for his success with females (more importantly white females) was his apparent lack of sensitivity
- iii. His characters lacked the tenderness and humanity, which in the past had always redeemed the most violent of movie heroes in the eyes of female fans.
- iv. The main thing women could respond to was his beautiful physical being
 1. Surprisingly tough, he did not have many black women as fans
- z. His characterizations even won him a certain homosexual following
 - i. He plays in one film as the sexual interest of a fellow prisoner and as time passes the prisoner's sexual interest grows
- aa. One interesting fact:
 - i. His character's strength was always used to work with the dominant white culture rather than against it

ii. Whites applauded him and gave him their stamp of approval

bb. Jim Brown's brute force, if not properly guided, would be blind and indiscriminate and too much of a threat to white males in the audience; thus he could never be cast as a politically militant black man

i. He starred in almost nothing but B movies (define B movies)

1. These films still carried political weight simply because there was a black man up there on the screen, raising Cain, strutting like a glorious prima donna, and sure to let everyone know that he could not care less whether he was liked or not.
2. He seemed to be avenging all those earlier black males who had to bow and kowtow

cc. A hero for the separatist age:

- i. Proved he was the right actor at the right time in the right place
- ii. His one-dimensional comic book adventures were precursors of the independent, arrogantly aggressive buck heroes that dominated black movies in the early 70s
- iii. He remained an important star during the 70s also

dd. The New-Style Black Film (pgs. 223-230)

- i. The 60s most curious phenomenon
- ii. Made its appearance with films such as:
 1. *Uptight* (1968), *Slaves* (1969), *The Learning Tree* (1969), *The Lost Man* (1969), and *Putney Swope* (1969)
- iii. Each conformed to a broader type of film
 1. The let's-hate-ugly-corrupt-America motion picture
 2. Indictments of the system
 3. Each focused on the aspect of the new black militancy
 - a. Often applauding separatism
- iv. These films had blacks working behind the cameras as well as in front
- v. *Uptight* (1969)
 1. Jules Dassin film
 2. First film to spotlight black revolutionaries and the separatist movement
 3. This film is set in the Hough ghetto of Cleveland, shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King

4. Takes up the theme of nonviolence
 - a. Nonviolence died with King in Memphis
 - b. This was declared by the dashiki-clad revolutionary protagonists as they arm themselves with guns and slogans
 - c. One member of a militant group is tuned into the police, the militants track and assassinate the informant
5. Considered a major disappointment
6. The audience was waiting for a film that would dramatize the chaos on the streets
7. It only revealed the director's inability to see a black story from a black point of view
8. The characters here lacked commitment and passion
 - a. They emerged as little more than one-dimensional, pent-up black brutes
9. If it had made a statement at all, it was that blacks were effectual only at wiping out one of their own
10. It resembled Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in which the renegade brute slaves failed to erect their great

black state and succeeded only in flogging a member
of their own race

a. Most disturbing fact:

i. The actors

ii. Individual militant performances could
have saved the stereotypical character
types

1. Chapter 8~The 1970s: Bucks and a Black Movie Boom

- a. “Slick, trendy, and contradictory era that opened with politics and social issues very much on the minds of most Americans”
- b. Student campus takeovers continued
- c. And protests against the Vietnam War
- d. Seemed that the 70s would be propelled along by political activism
- e. But this would quickly change
- f. Following Watergate and Richard Nixon’s resignation from the presidency, the nation’s citizens grew increasingly cynical and disillusioned about their government
- g. (This perhaps may have been the beginning to the loss of patriotism in the country, during which films fueled their disappointment)

- h. The citizens then became obsessed with themselves, labeled a self-indulgent “me” decade
- i. Film:
 - i. Reflected these shifting attitudes
 - ii. No other period in black movie history had been so energetic or important
 - iii. More black actors and actresses worked in films than ever before
 - iv. Black writers: Richard Wesley, Bill Gunn, and Lone Elder III wrote for important productions
 - v. Black directors: Gordon Parks, Sr., and Gordon Parks, Jr. also Sidney Poitier, Michael Shultz, Stan Lathan, Hugh Robertson, Ossie Davis
 - vi. For the first time in film history, the studios produced black-oriented films pitched directly at pleasing blacks
 - vii. Audiences saw black movie characters speaking in a new idiom and rhythm
- j. Movies now sought to give some semblance of a black community with a set attitudes, aspirations, and grievances all its own

- k. Although there were many new faces, still the old stereotypes resurfaced, simply dressed in new clothing to look modern, hip, proactive, and politically “relevant”
- l. The early years:
 - i. “The Age of the Buck” Period when a band of aggressive, pistol-packing, sexually-charged urban cowboys set off on a heady rampage, out to break the system and to right past wrongs
 - ii. The beautiful doomed light-skinned black woman (tragic mulatto), and some fast talking coons
- m. The later years:
 - i. Movies that were more escapist
 - ii. The return of a large-scale all-black musical
- n. The Prelude
 - i. Initial Films and James Earl Jones:
 1. *The Liberation of L.B. Jones* (1970)
 2. James Earl Jones
 - a. *The Great White Hope* (1970)
 - b. *The Man* (1972)
 - c. *Swashbuckler* (1976)

d. *A Piece of the Action* (1977)

e. *Conan the Barbarian* (1982)

f. *Matewan* (1987)

g. *Gardens of Stone* (1987)

3. *The Landlord* (1970)

a. Stars:

- i. Beau Bridges, Louis Gossett, Jr., Diana Sands, Mel Stewart, Robert Klein, Marki Bey, Marlene Clark, Lee Grant, and Pearl Bailey

4. *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970)

a. Ossie Davis film

b. Stars:

- i. Godfrey Cambridge, Raymond St. James, Calvin Lockhart, Judy Pace, Emily Yancy, Frederick O'Neal, Helen Martin, Cleavon Little, Theodore Wilson, Redd Foxx

o. Melvin Van Peebles: The Black Movie Director as Folk Hero (pgs. 234-238)

- i. *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*
- ii. Introduced the new-style defiant buck hero and entertained the new audience
- iii. Van Peebles discovered his audience, his style and subject
- iv. Film centered on a "cool-as-a-cucumber black stud:
Sweetback
- v. While he is young he witnesses two policemen beat another black young man. He decides to help this man and beats the policemen with their own cuffs
- vi. He flees the law and along the way has many sexual escapades and chase sequences
- vii. Film message:
 1. "A BAADASSSSSS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES"
 2. Seeing a black man triumph over a corrupt white establishment appealed to not only the mass black audience but also to some young white audiences as well

- viii. Audiences were now ready for this sexual back movie hero
- ix. It was a huge success
- x. Gave way for other imitations
- xi. It set off controversy because of its violence and raw sexuality
- xii. White critics tended to hate the film
- xiii. This film offered a daydream of triumph
- xiv. Was view by some as fuel to white hysteria and paranoia
- xv. Played on the philosophy to reject the black bourgeoisie, which had often aided and abetted White America through attempts as cultural assimilation, the new militant separatist black classes sometimes came to identify blackness with the trappings of the ghetto:
 - 1. The tenements (dwellings), as well as the talk, the mannerisms, and the sophistication of the streets-all of which appeared to mark a life lived close to one's black roots.
 - 2. Ghetto residents seemed to have a greater ethnic identity

- a. Poverty and ghetto life were frequently idealized and glamorized
 - i. And this was usually done by the educated, politically committed children of the black bourgeoisie
- b. With this glamorizing of the ghetto:
 - i. Came the elevation of the pimp/outlaw/rebel as folk hero
- xvi. This film was the first to glorify a pimp
 - 1. But it failed to explain the social conditions that made the pimp such an important figure
- xvii. The movie debased (dishonored) the black woman
 - 1. Depicted her as little more than a whore
- xviii. This film was a social document on the nature and certain attitudes of the new era
 - 1. Also revealed through music and movement a communal spirit—call it tribal if you will—existent
- xix. Melvin Van Peebles
 - 1. Van Peebles was born in Chicago in 1932
 - 2. Graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University

3. Lived in San Francisco, then France where he wrote 5 novels and tried filmmaking
 4. First film: *Story of a Three-Day Pass* (1967)
 - a. Interracial love affair
 5. Second film: *Watermelon Man* (1970)
 - a. Classic tragic mulatto movie of the early separatist 1970s
 - b. After these films he emerged as something of a folk hero for the black community
 - i. Partly because the way he produced outside of the Hollywood norm
- xx. *Shaft: He's a Badd Mother—Shut Your Mouth* (pgs. 238-239)
1. Appeared in 1971
 2. Was thought to make very little money
 - a. Made over 12 million within a year in North America alone
 3. Directed by Gordon Parks, Sr.
 4. Richard Roundtree was the star

- a. Parks saw him as a tough, renegade black detective
 - b. “Hotter than Bond. Cooler than Bullitt”
 - c. John Shaft was assertive and un-intimidated by whites
 - d. He walked through the streets dressed in leather
 - e. Black audiences looked at him like a brother the had all seen many times before but *never* on screen
5. Based on a novel by Ernest Tidyman
 6. Isaac Hayes created the soundtrack
 7. The “Theme from *Shaft*” won the Academy Award as Best Song
 - a. This would be the first time a black man had ever won the Oscar in this category
 8. Two Sequels
 - a. *Shaft’s Big Score* (1972, directed again by Parks), and *Shaft in Africa* (1973)
- xxi. *Super Fly: Mixed Messages* (pgs. 239-241)

1. Made in 1972
2. Independently produced by Sig Shore
3. Directed by Gordon Parks, Jr.
4. Within 2 months it made 11 million
5. African American communities:
 - a. Outraged by the glorification of the film's hero, who was a Harlem cocaine dealer named "Priest" played by Ron O'Neal
6. "Priest"
 - a. Dressed like an urban prima ballerina
 - b. Wore long coats and large wide-brimmed hats
 - c. A romanticized version of the Harlem pimp
 - d. The film looked authentic
 - e. Harlem settings
 - f. The streets and alleyways
 - g. The bars
 - h. And the tenants
7. They all paint an overriding bleak vision of "urban decay"

- a. Which was a new terrain for commercial
cinema

8. Mixed messages

- a. One point in the film features Priest talking
about leaving the drug game
 - i. His friend points out that it will be crazy
to leave the American dream: fabulous
apartment, the stereo, the car, the fine
clothing, and the women
 - ii. Film tells audiences that the American
dream of success has become polluted
and perverted into a nightmare of cold,
hard materialism
- b. But Priest plans to take his American dream
with him: his money

9. Sex scenes

- a. They were much more graphic than before and
lasted far longer than any scene in white
movies of the time

- b. And it seemed to play on the idea that black men had high-powered sexuality
- c. Instead of purposely trying not to have a tom character, instead they replaced him with the wildly sexual man
 - a. The score
 - b. Produced by Curtis Mayfield

b. Buckmania (pgs. 241-242)

i. Films:

1. *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972)
2. *The Soul of Nigger Charley* (1973)
3. *Black Caesar* (1973)
4. *Black Samson* (1974)
5. *Black Jesus* (1971)
6. *Sweet Jesus, Preacher Man* (1973)
7. *Slaughter and Slaughter's Big Rip Off*
(1973)
8. *Blacula* (1972)
9. *Scream, Blacula, Scream* (1973)
10. *The Bus is Coming* (1971)
11. *To of the Heap* (1972)
12. *The Final Comedown* (1972)
13. *Hit Man* (1972)
14. *Detroit 9000* (1973)
15. *The Black Godfather* (1974)
16. *The Mack* (1973)

- ii. Films were heady male action fantasies, with tenacious buck protagonists performing deeds of derring-do, while self-righteously giving lip service to the idea of political commitment
- iii. They also made us believe heroes were out to clean up the ghetto of its ills
- iv. Disturbing fact
 - 1. While these films were promoted as black films they were not
 - a. Most were written, directed, and produced by whites
 - 2. Many of them were created with very low budgets, were badly directed, and were technically poor
- v. Blaxploitation films arise:
 - 1. Movies that played on the needs of black audiences for heroic figures without answering those needs in realistic terms
- vi. Community uproar

1. They were tired of their children being
“exposed to a steady diet of so-called black
movies that glorify black males a pimps,
dope pushers, gangsters and super males”

vii. “It’s only entertainment”

1. There was a need for this entertainment
factor that these new films introduced
2. The lives presented were almost as false as
the previous all-black Hollywood movies

c. The Jock as Movie Star (pgs. 243-245)

i. Films:

1. *Soul Soldier* (1972)
2. *The Klansman* (1974)
3. *The Towering Inferno* (1974)
4. *Capricorn One* (1978)
5. *The Greatest* (1977)
6. *Hit Man* (1974)
7. *Maurie* (1974)
8. *Cornbread* (1975)
9. *Earl & Me* (1975)

10. *Brothers* (1977)

11. *Sharky's Machine* (1981)

12. *Never Say Never Again* (1983)

13. *Enter the Dragon* (1973)

14. *Black Belt Jones* (1974)

15. *Golden Needles* (1974)

16. *Hot Potato* (1976)

17. *Mandingo* (1975)

18. *Drum* (1976)

- ii. The black athlete has always been a safe commodity because, without ever having made a picture, he or she is already a box-office name
 - 1. And an audience may pay simply to see him/her make a fool of themselves
- iii. In American culture, the black athlete, powerful and seemingly of superhuman strength, has always been a double-sided social/political figure
- iv. Celebrated and feared because of his remarkable skills
- v. Basic use:

1. If the “name” athlete, with strength and force enough to oppose the culture successfully, chooses instead to support it, his endorsement serves as a cue to all us mortal weaklings with thoughts of rebellion to *cool it*.
 2. Packaged to proclaim the pleasures of a great capitalistic society
 3. Used to reinforce our notions that heroics are measured in physical actions
 4. Seldom is he ever a thinker, questioning his role in society
- vi. The athletes vanished from film after 1975
- d. *Lady Sings the Blues: Black Stars, Black Romance*
- i. It was a time for relationships on film instead of action
 - ii. Created in 1972
 - iii. Based on Billie Holiday’s autobiography
 - iv. Star:
 1. Diana Ross

- v. Motown/Paramount film
- vi. Film had a melodramatic tone
- vii. “Glossed” over Holiday’s life:
 - 1. Left out the various husbands, lovers and substituting a dream prince charming in the form of Billy Dee Williams as Louis McKay
- viii. The film although quite false was an entertaining film
- ix. It was the first full-fledged black romantic melodrama
- x. It was a new sensation to watch a black man actually court a black woman
- xi. Rarely before were black characters depicted as romantic
- xii. This film presented audiences with the most romantic scenes thus far in the history of blacks in film
- xiii. Diana Ross
 - 1. Won an Oscar nomination for Best Actress

e. Sounder

- i. Created in 1972
- ii. Directed by Martin Ritt
- iii. Centered on a family of sharecroppers in the South during the Depression
- iv. Characters:
 1. Cicely Tyson as Rebecca Morgan
 2. Paul Winfield as Nathan Lee Morgan
 3. Kevin Hooks as David Lee Morgan
 4. Carmen Mathews
 5. Taj Mahal as Ike
 6. James Best as Sheriff Young
 7. Erick Hooks as Earl Morgan
 8. Yvonne Jarrell as Josie Mae Morgan
 9. Sylvia Kuumba Williams as Harriet
 10. Teddy Airhart as Mr. Perkins
 11. Richard Durham as Perkins' Foreman
- v. This film gave a new depiction of black family
 1. There was not the same matriarchal set up of previous films set in the South

- a. And the family was not in
tendentious conflict with itself
 - 2. Never before had audiences seen a black
father and son talk in such personal and
intimate terms
- f. Suberbadd, Supermama (pgs.251-252)
 - i. The arrival of the black superwoman
 - ii. Rising Stars:
 - 1. Tamara Dobson and Pam Grier
 - iii. Important Films:
 - 1. *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), *Friday Foster* (1975)
 - iv. These characters answered a multitude of needs
 - v. Hybrids
 - 1. Part buck/part mammy/part mulatto
 - vi. High-flung male fantasy
 - 1. Beautiful, alluring, glamorous voluptuaries
(figures), as ready and anxious for sex and
mayhem as any man

- vii. They lived in fantasy worlds—of violence, blood, guns, and gore, which pleased male audiences
 - viii. Generally black women found it difficult to relate to these characters
 - ix. Like old-style mammies they not only ran the household but also the universe
 - x. They were typically out to clean up the ghetto of drug pushers, protecting the black community from corruption
 - xi. Dobson and Grier represented Woman as Protector, Nurturer, Communal Mother Surrogate
 - xii. Also had the look and manner of old-style mulattoes
 - xiii. Often perceived as being exotic sex objects
 - xiv. They took liberties with men, at times using them as playful, comic toys
- g. Sisters in Distress (pgs. 252-256)
- i. Films:
 - 1. *Georgia, Georgia* (1972)
 - 2. *Melinda* (1972)

3. *The Omega Man* (1971)
 4. *Hickey and Boggs* (1972)
 5. *The Class of Miss McMichael* (1978)
 6. *Wrong Is Right* (1982)
 7. *Claudine* (1974)
 8. *Mahogany* (1975)
 9. *Sparkle* (1976)
- h. Richard Pryor: *The Crazy Nigger* as Conquering Hero (pgs. 259-264)
- i. During the late 70s he was the most important black actor working in American film
 - ii. Born in 1940 in Peoria, IL
 - iii. Grew up in a brothel (whore house) owned by his grandmother
 1. His mother worked there as a prostitute
 - iv. He dropped out of high school, joined the army, and then began performing standup comedy at tiny clubs and bars
 - v. His idol was Bill Cosby
 1. But this soon changed

vi. During the 70s he became:

1. The ever-evolving, foul-mouthed, iconoclastic wild man, the Crazy Nigger, who spoke in the language and idiom of the streets
2. He spoke in comic terms for the underclass of the disaffiliated and disenfranchised people in the ghettos of America

vii. Films:

- i. *The Busy Body* (1967), *Wild in the Streets* (1968), *The Green Berets* (1968), *The Phynx* (1970), *You've Got to Walk It Like You Talk It or You'll Lose That Beat* (1971), *Dynamite Chicken* (1972), *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974), *Let's Do It Again* (1975), *The Bing Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings* (1976), *Silver Streak* (1976), *Wattstax* (1973), *Hit!* (1973), *The Mack* (1973), *Some Call It Loving* (1973), *Car Wash* (1976), *Adios Amigo* (1975), *Greased Lightening* (1977), *Which Way Is Up?* (1977), *Blue Collar* (1978), *The Wiz* (1978), *California Suite* (1978), *The Muppet Movie* (1979)

j. *The Wiz* (1978)

- i. The black movie that closed the era
- ii. Cost \$35 million to create—the most expensive movie then ever made
- iii. Produced in 1978
- iv. Based on a successful Broadway musical
- v. Directed by Sidney Lumet
 1. He had been previously known for his tense urban dramas but this was not true for an ethnic fantasy that should have been dripping with rich ethnic juices
 2. The scriptwriter: Joel Schumacher
 3. Was all wrong for this film seeing as he knew nothing about black speech rhythms or colloquialisms or a black point of view

vi. Characters:

1. Diana Ross as Dorothy
2. Michael Jackson as the Scarecrow
3. Nipsey Russell as the Tin Man
4. Ted Ross as the Lion
5. Mabel King as Evillene
6. Teresa Merritt as Aunt Em
7. Thelma Carpenter as Miss One
8. Lena Horne as Glinda the Good Witch
9. Richard Pryor as The Wiz
10. Stanley Greene as Uncle Henry

vii. Most of the actors were underplaying their own personalities that typically shown through roles

1. They were downplayed and not as funny or entertaining as previous roles

viii. This was not well-received by the critics

ix. Was a box-office disappointment

1. The black audience wanted a variety of decent, entertaining films just as any white audience did

k. The end of the 70s

i. Sad irony:

1. The decade had opened by revealing to the industry that there *was* a black audience
2. But closed with the industry believing that the black film and black audience were both dead

ii. The crossover film

1. New idea which would star blacks with whites and consequently appeal (primarily) to whites

1. Chapter 9~The 1980s: Black Superstars and the Era of Tan

- a. For blacks it was a time to move fully into the system
 - i. Never before had it been so apparent that blacks could no longer be outcast than with the candidacy of Jessie Jackson for president of the United States
- b. The black superstar reigned supreme in the entertainment industry
- c. Atop of the music charts: Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston
- d. Top shows included The Cosby Show being the country's number one prime-time television program

- e. During this rise of blacks in entertainment
 - i. Some believed that the races were at peace with one another
 - ii. That inner city blight and decay as well as social tension and racial inequities had ceased to exist
 - iii. That America's past history of racism had vanished
 - iv. When incidents of racial violence did happen, many were jolted by the news
- f. The movies:
 - i. Same attitude, as if things were all fine and dandy
 - ii. New films arise starring teams of black and white buddies
 - 1. This assured the mass audience that blacks and whites could laugh together without fretting about social issues
 - iii. Black performers:
 - 1. Most found themselves playing supporting roles that sometimes looked like retreads from the 30s or 50s
 - 2. There was though success of some independent black filmmakers and the stardom of comedy stars

3. "Age of the hybrid stereotype: a time when major stars played characters who were sometimes part coon/part buck, sometimes part coon/part mammy."
4. "Black men frequently found de-sexed, rarely permitted romantic roles."
5. "Women had few major parts"
6. Era of Tan: a time when films did all they could to make audiences forget the blackness of a black star
 - a. Often when a black actor appeared in a general release, he or she had no cultural identity
 - b. All ethnic edges sanded down: actors looked black but were expressed in a white way=tan blend that was still kept in the background

g. Holding Up the Fort

- i. Although black characters were now being placed throughout large white releases, these characters were without tension or bite
- ii. The great suspicious goal of the 80s:

1. To rid American films of the late 60s/early 70s
rebellious figures
 2. The movies wanted to believe that these characters
no longer existed
- iii. Menace black character films:
1. *American Gigolo* (1980)
 - a. Bill Duke as a Pimp
 2. *Fort Apache: The Bronx* (1981)
 - a. Pam Grier as a terrorizing street walker
 - i. A metaphor for the violence on city
streets
- iv. Black Comic films:
1. *Seems Like Old Times* (1980)
 - a. T.C. Carter playing an eye-popping chauffeur
 2. *The Shining* (1980)
 - a. Scatman Crothers playing a cook serving as a
noble, spiritual, childlike symbol
- v. Blacks used to display social realism:
1. *Brubaker* (1980)
 - a. “Gritty natural look into prison drama”

- b. Starred Yaphet Kotto, Richard Ward and
Morgan Freeman

2. Yaphet Kotto:

- a. *Alien* (1979)

- i. Here Kotto began the stereotype of the
black character being killed off in horror
or suspense films

- b. *The Limit* (1972), *Man and Boy* (1972), *Live
and Let Die* (1972), *Blue Collar*, *Report to the
Commissioner* (1975), *The Shootist* (1976),
Midnight Run (1988)

- c. In his films he never had to pretend to be
“baad,” he was who he was

- d. Proved himself to be a great actor but still was
only given supporting roles

- h. *The Blues Brothers* (1980)

- i. No film so blatantly reduced and exploited its black stars to
“mere background filler”

- ii. Stars:

- 1. John Belushi

2. Dan Aykroyd
 3. Cab Calloway
 4. Ray Charles
 5. James Brown
 6. Aretha Franklin
- iii. Climax of film is Aretha Franklin's version of the song "Think"
1. "Sending our senses soaring with one of the most blazingly energetic and heart felt sequences in American movie musical history."
 2. Movie never reached this peak again
 3. After Franklin's song the film went downhill
 4. And Franklin is never seen again
- iv. Film used its black stars-the true blues brothers and sisters of musical history and not some pallid, comic imitators-as walk-ons, there to provide flashy moments and some much needed rhythm.
- i. Dramatic Possibilities
- i. Important dramatic performances:
 1. *Ragtime* (1981)

a. Stars Howard Rollins, Jr., as Coalhouse

Walker, a ragtime pianist who leads a band of black revolutionaries in a takeover of the Morgan Library

i. His character was far fetched and no one could believe him to be a man living in this time period-early 20th century America

ii. Rollins created an untyped hero: thoughtful, intelligent, too full of self-respect and a sense of moral outrage to let himself be treated as less than a man

iii. He won an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor

ii. Louis Gossett, Jr.

1. Stage trained New York actor

2. Films:

a. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961)

b. *The Landlord* (1970)

c. *The Skin Game* (1971)

d. *Travels with My Aunt* (1972)

e. *White Dawn* (1974)

f. *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982)

i. His role was not originally written for a
black actor

ii. He persuaded the filmmaker that he was
right for the role

iii. Walked away with the picture

iv. He upset past movie traditions: here
was a black sergeant taunting the white
hero (even calls him boy) and the other
recruits as he puts them through the
rigors of military life

3. Played his character as a black man who works in a
white

j. Here comes the "buddy picture" (pgs. 271-276)

i. Despite the nation's racial problems, for decade white
audiences have responded to popular, seemingly well-
adjusted and inseparable professional interracial buddies

1. Ex. Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong, Will Rogers and Stepin Fetchit, Jack Benny and Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.
2. All of these teams have been wishfulfillment fantasies for a nation that has repeatedly hoped to simplify its facial tensions
 - ii. The movie relationships have usually been frauds
 - iii. They have usually held to one dictum:
 1. That interracial buddies can be such only when the white buddy is in charge
 - iv. The Rocky films:
 1. Even one-time adversaries found themselves interracially bonded
 2. Carl Weathers as Apollo Creed and Sylvester Stallone as Rocky
 - a. Were once opponents
 - b. Became compatriots, respectful of one another and almost on equal footing

- c. Apollo's presence heightened Rocky's heroism and power
 - d. "The fact that the Italian Stallion could defeat a man as skilled and bright as Creed made Rocky emerge as a true, even shrewd, undisputed champ"
3. Creed's character was closely patterned on Muhammad Ali
- a. For many years White America had resented Ali's brashness and bold confidents
 - b. And some boxing fans believed that the ring had been taken over, for too long, by a series of black boxers
 - c. Whites asked: Would there never again be a first-rate white fighter? ("Great White Hope figure")
 - d. The Rocky movies succeeded as great unconscious national fantasies that rewrote boxing history

- e. Rocky emerges as a successful white hope who defeats an Ali-surrogate, but he also is befriended by the former black champ

4. *Rocky III* (1982)

- a. Stars a different type of adversary for Rocky
- b. Character Clubber Lang played by Mr. T, is a garish buck figure, vicious, coarse, vulgar and attacks Rocky's manhood and comments on his wife
- c. Creed's character has become the "acceptable Negro" and aids Rocky in the fight against Clubber Lang
- d. Audiences applaud Rocky's defeat
- e. Creed is representative of a *street nigger who must go!*

5. *Rocky IV* (1985)

- a. Apollo and Rocky become "besties"
- b. The death of Apollo is avenged in Rocky's last fight against a Soviet champ-but Rocky is fighting for not only truth, justice and the

American way but also for the sake of his dear
 departed Apollo

- v. More “buddy” films:
- vi. *Nighthawks* (1982)
- vii. *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)
- viii. *Return of the Jedi* (1983)
- ix. *The History of the World, Part 1* (1981)
- x. *Wolfen* (1891)
- xi. *Deal of the Century* (1983)
- xii. *White Nights* (1985)
- xiii. *Running Scared* (1986)
- xiv. *Off Limits* (1988)
- xv. *Lethal Weapon* (1987)
 - 1. Stars: Danny Glover and Mel Gibson
 - 2. Provided interesting twists on the buddy theme
 - 3. Two men are partners on the police force
 - 4. Gibson: hot tempered, reckless, alienated, suicidal
 - 5. Glover: symbol of stability, middle-aged, middle-class
 “Cosbyesque” family man

- a. Offers friendship to Gibson and invites him into his home
 - b. Glover's daughter develops a crush on Gibson
6. Climax:
- a. Villain goes into Glover's home for revenge:
 - the traditional American family are in jeopardy
 - i. Irony: this traditional family is black
 - ii. Family is acceptable to white audiences after it has been scrubbed "clean" of too strong an ethnic identity
 - iii. The perfect composite "tan"
7. Film says that there are no significant cultural gaps or distinctions for the two men to bridge
8. Never is one led to wonder what the black man's social life is like
9. Never is one led to think the black man finds his home a refuge from the white world in which he works
10. True to the huck-fin fixation: the good black man bring to his white loner friend an element of calm control and a budding maturity

11. Interracial male bonding and black men are a cross
between toms and mammies: all-giving, all-knowing,
all-sacrificing nurtures

k. Richard Pryor, Superstar: The Ups and Downs (pgs. 276-281)

i. Emerged in the 80s as a superstar and legendary pop hero

ii. His private life was widely reported

1. Made headlines in 1980 following an accident in his

California home involving a “mysterious” explosion

a. Pryor suffered third-degree burns over the
entire upper half of his body

b. His chance of survival was said to be 1/3

c. Word began circulating that the accident was
caused because he was free-basing cocaine

d. Although the negativity spread, so did the
sympathy from fans

e. This accident made him both more human and
more mythic

iii. After the accident Pryor’s movie career peaked

1. Films:

- a. *In God We Trust* (1980), *Wholly Moses* (1980),
Stir Crazy (1980), *Bustin' Loose* (1981),
Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip (1982),
Richard Pryor Here and Now (1983), *Some
Kind of Hero* (1982), *The Toy* (1983),
Superman III (1983), *Brewster's Millions*
(1985), *Critical Condition* (1987), *Moving*
(1988), *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling*
(1986)
2. In 1982 Pryor was trying to stretch himself as an artist, to go beyond the audience's anticipations, to examine material, straight from his private torment, that has rarely been used as a source of comedy
3. In *Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip* he tells the audience of personal experiences: a trip to Africa, his relationship with his wife, the accident that almost wiped out his life. Often more touching than funny, it is one of the most intensely personal moments in the history of films.

- iv. Pryor, although had remarkable talent, still he was featured as an old-style coon in some films
- v. In 1983, Columbia Pictures signed him, to what was then on of the most lucrative deals in Hollywood history: an agreement to star in three films at the salary of \$5 million each.
 - 1. He had achieved the kind of success no black star in Hollywood history had ever envisioned.
- vi. In Pryor, the audience no doubt saw a part of itself, its faults and failings, its insecurities and doubts, and what it hoped were its brave efforts to keep afloat regardless.

2. Trading Places: Eddie Murphy (pgs. 281-287)

- a. Eddie Murphy's career took rise in the middle to late 80s
- b. Born in Brooklyn in 1962 and raised in Long Island in a middle-class family
- c. As a teenager, he formed a band with friends and between the musical numbers he would perform jokes to the audience.
- d. He later became a standup comedian in Long Island nightclubs for \$25-\$50/week

- e. After graduating from high school he was able to talk the owners of the Manhattan's Comic Strip club to allow him to perform
 - i. This landed him bookings along the East Coast
 - ii. Then spent 4 seasons on "Saturday Night Live"
- f. Unlike Richard Pryor:
 - i. Murphy won fame with black audiences, then reached others later
 - ii. His comedy lacked the bite and anger of Pryor's
 - iii. Murphy Quote: "I'm not angry. I didn't learn this stuff hanging out with junkies on 158th Street. I never have been much of a fighter. If somebody white called me 'nigger' on the street, I just laughed."
- g. On one level Murphy represented the loose, jivey, close to vulgar black man, who does not threaten the white audience's feelings of superiority.
 - i. He did not challenge racial attitudes
- h. Films: *48 Hrs* (1982), *Trading Places* (1983), *Best Defense* (1984), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Beverly Hills Cop II* (1987), *The Golden Child* (1986),

- i. In his films when racial slurs or stereotypes confronted him, he simply played off of those stereotypes, proving the untruth in them with comedy.
 - i. Even the films themselves turned the idea of racism into a joke
- j. He also attributed more films to the “buddy era”
- k. During the beginning of his career, many of his characters seemed “sexually neutralized.”
- l. During the early 80s white Americans were complaining that blacks found racism in places where it did not exist.
 - i. While the black audience felt that race is a part of many issues
- m. In 1987 Murphy signed an exclusive 5 picture contract with Paramount Pictures for \$25 million
 - i. At this point there was no other star in America, besides Sylvester Stallone, as powerful a box-office draw.
- n. Films Career Continues:
 - i. *Eddie Murphy Raw* (1987), *Coming to America* (1988)
- o. After *Raw* Murphy was beginning to be seen as having distrust for women and perhaps a mean spirit

- i. But his role in *Coming to America* gave him a new persona and warm-heartedness
- p. “To his credit—whether his films were goo, bad, or indifferent—he remained a cocky and frequently engaging talent, a young man whose self-assurance, energy, and unflagging determination to do things *his way* made him a distinctive hero, especially for the younger black audience of his era.
- q. *A Soldier's Story*
 - i. Released in 1984
 - ii. One of the few films to offer a cast of promising black actors who were strong, vivid characters.
 - iii. Based on Charles Fuller’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama
 - 1. Fuller was nominated for an Academy Award for the film
 - iv. Film centered on the murder of a black army sergeant on a Louisiana military base in 1944
 - v. Never before had feature films entered into the psyche (mind) of a certain kind of black character
 - 1. One who is foul-spirited, torn and embittered by his own self-hatred

vi. Stars:

1. Adolf Caesar

a. Nominated for an Academy Award for this film

also

b. Sadly, he died of a heart attack within two

years of the film

2. Howard Rollins Jr.

3. Larry Riley

4. Art Evans

5. David Alan Grier

6. Denzel Washington

r. Say It with Music

i. Black Musicals:

1. *Beat Street* (1984)

2. *Rappin'* (1985)

3. *Krush Groove* (1985)

4. *Berry Gordy's The Last Dragon* (1985)

5. *The Cotton Club* (1984)

s. Different Directions

i. The "unusual or offbeat films"

1. *Leonard, Part 6* (1987)
 - a. Starring Bill Cosby is a spy set out to exterminate an animal rights activist who has mind control of all the animals of the world.
2. *Crossroads* (1986)
 - a. Study of a blues musician played by Joe Seneca, who is pursued and befriended by a young admirer played by Ralph Macchio
3. *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984)
4. 1986 remake of *Native Son*
5. *Action Jackson* (1988)
6. *Soul Man* (1986)
 - a. The story of a white student who goes in blackface in order to qualify for a minority scholarship
 - b. Film definitely drew criticism and some protests from the black community
7. *Diva* (1982)
8. *'Round Midnight* (1986)
9. *Sugar Cane Alley* (1984)

10. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1980)

- a. Examination of an aborigine who takes violent action against the white colonial system that has exploited his people

11. *Out of Africa* (1985)

12. *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988)

t. Women: As Exotics and Non-racials

- i. During the 80s black women rarely had a chance for important roles

- ii. Some were able to find flashy roles

1. The “exotics”:

- a. Tina Turner in *Thunderdome* (1985)
- b. Grace Jones in *Conan the Destroyer* (1984), *A View to a Kill* (1985), *Vamp* (1986), *Siesta* (1987)
- c. Lisa Bonet (tragic mulatto) in *Angel Heart* (1987)
- d. Rae Dawn Chong (nonblack heroine) in *Beat Street* (1984), *The Color Purple* (1985), *Soul*

Man (1986), *Quest for Fire* (1981), *Commando*
(1985), *American Flyers* (1985),

e. Jennifer Beals (nonblack heroine) in

Flashdance (1983), *The Bride* (1985)

u. A Controversy about *Color* (pgs. 292-297)

i. *The Color Purple* (1985)

1. This era's most talked-about black-oriented film

2. A Steven Spielberg film

3. Based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by black
writer Alice Walker

4. Characters:

a. Celie

i. An uneducated, backwoods black
southern Woman

ii. The film's heroine

iii. Life emerges as a shattering tale of
horrors and abuses

1. She is raped and twice

impregnated by her step-father

2. Her step-father also sells their children to a barren couple
 3. She is abused by her husband "Mr."
 4. Mr. also separates Celie from her sister Nettie
 - iv. She is brought back to life by her husband's mistress Shug Avery
 - v. Through her tattered life Celie does find peace and triumph
5. This film originally had mixed reviews
- a. Reviewer's quotes:
 - i. "A noble, compelling, powerfully acted, magnificently photographed, richly textured film of heart-rending impact."- Critic Rex Reed
 - ii. "It makes you laugh, it makes you cry and it makes you feel a little bit of a fool for having been taken in by its

calculated, often phony effects.” *New York Times* Vincent Canby

- iii. “Overproduced, overly manipulative...saved by outstanding performances.” - *Variety*

b. Within the black community the reactions were mixed

- i. NAACP protested against the film’s depiction of the black male characters
- ii. *The New York Daily News*, black writer Earl Caldwell said that the black men “saw red” over the film
- iii. *The Washington Post’s* black columnist Dorothy Gilliam wrote about the “purity and depth of love” expressed in the movie
- iv. This film had become the most talked about film

ii. Some Good Points

1. The critics did have some truth to their points

2. The male roles did in fact present caricatured pawns,
 - a. Danny Glover's character Mr. seemed to be a familiar black brute, violent and oversexed.
 - b. "Never does one see the broader context in which any of the characters must live: the larger, dominant white culture that envelops—and certainly enslaves—they all.
 - c. Nor are the pressures that were brought for a black man to bear brought to light or even suggested.
 - d. The men mainly unleash their violence on the women, never on one another and certainly never on whites
- iii. The conclusion of the novel allows Celie to forgive Mr. and realize that he is the only one who can understand some of her feelings
 1. Which is definitely a fairy tale ending, after all of the abuse she has endured from him
- iv. What was missing from the film: the voice of Celie

1. In the novel readers were able to see life from the point of view of this poor, rejected black women
2. But the film is from the point of view of Steven Spielberg
 - a. “His sensibility informs almost every frame, turning an intimate tale into a large-scale, overblown Disneyesque Victorian melodrama, full of ‘big’ moments and simplified characters (who can neatly be defined in terms of good and bad).”
 - b. Spielberg also compromised the story by straying away from the novel’s insinuation of a lesbian relationship between Celie and Shug
- v. Although the film had many downfalls, still it touched all those who watched emotionally
- vi. Other Stars: Desreta Jackson (young Celie), Akosua Busia, Margret Avery (Shug), Oprah Winfrey (Sofia-very closely related to a Mammy character), Whoopi Goldberg (older Celie)

1. Whoopi was nominated for an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress

vii. In total the film won 11 Academy Award nominations, but partly because of the controversy surrounding the film and the industry's ambivalence toward Spielberg, the film won no Oscars.

v. Whipping Whoopi (pgs. 297-298)

i. For a few years she was the only black woman of the late 80s to star in Hollywood films

ii. Although she was receiving roles, she was repeatedly trashed through each role

iii. Born Caryn Johnson, in New York City (c. 1950)

iv. Came to film after an apprenticeship in theater

1. Received her acclaim as the one-woman Broadway show *Whoopi Goldberg*

v. Films:

1. *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1987), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Burglar* (1987), *The Color Purple* (1985), *The Telephone* (1988), *Clara's Heart* (1988)

- vi. In films there was cultural/racial mystery, there were no signs that she was a black woman
 - 1. She also hangs with only whites and never has a love match
- vii. “The very idea of Whoopi Goldberg as a romantic film personality was unacceptable to certain audiences.”
 - 1. In two of her films, she is so unattractive and absurdly dressed in oversized clothes or sneakers that she seemed defeminized.
 - 2. The filmmakers seemed to view her as an asexual creature from another universe
- viii. The casting of Whoopi without other black characters kept her removed from the black community
- ix. The casting of Whoopi in male-oriented action films kept women from identifying with her
- x. By 1988, Hollywood had alienated Whoopi and cast her in a film playing a maid
 - 1. She works for a family in Maryland

2. Again she appears desexed and presented the black woman once again as a mighty nurturer—an updated mammy—without enough of a life of her own.

w. Independents (pgs. 298-301)

- i. Black stars had begun to fear the Hollywood picture
 1. Fearful that it would be quintessential of an earlier race film
 2. Others were questionable if black film directors would rise again
- ii. *She's Gotta Have It* (1986)
 1. Low-budget, independent film
 2. Shot in 12 days in Brooklyn with a cast of unknowns, on a budget of \$175,000
 3. Young, black director Spike Lee
 4. Told the story of a young black graphic artist named Nola Darling played by Tracy Camila Johns
 - a. She must decide which one of her male suitors fits her best

- i. The men: Jamie (Tommy Redmond Hicks), Greer (John Canada Terrell), Mars Blackmon (Spike Lee)
 - b. She enjoys her relationship with all three men, but they insist she must choose
 - c. Spike Lee presents contemporary urban black characters, who, are no different from white ones caught up in a game of sexual politics
 - i. But their frame of reference and internal rhythms are distinctly of black cultural tradition
 - ii. He was criticized for his treatment of the lesbian character
 - iii. Also Lee was seen to have placed the main character in the backdrop of the male character's story
 - iv. But still he refused to make a "formula" picture
5. This film was a black film with sensibility, which had not been done previously

6. The film's success gave a new outlook on black film-
and hope

iii. *School Daze* (1988)

1. Spike Lee's second film
2. Satiric comedy focusing on life at a Southern black
college
3. "The Wannabees"
 - a. Light-bright blacks fleeing their cultural roots,
hoping like mad to get as close to a white ideal
as possible
4. "The Jiggaboos"
 - a. The browner or darker students, shoved to the
sidelines of social life at the black school
5. Female characters lacked dimension and were caught
up in men
6. The film itself did not compromise to please the white
audience

iv. *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987)

1. Robert Townsend film
 - a. Used his own credit cards to finance film

- b. Having acted previously, Townsend knew the Hollywood system inside and out
 - c. As an actor in this film, Townsend was its greatest asset
 - 2. Satiric film about the dilemmas confronting black actors and actresses in a Hollywood that offers them only stereotyped roles
 - v. Spike Lee and Robert Townsend
 - 1. Brought a new movement of independent black filmmakers who had been around for some time to a larger audience
 - a. St. Clair Bourne, Warrington Hudlin, Ayoka Chenzira, Robert Gardner, Haile Gerima, Charles Burnett, Billy Woodberry, Julie Dash, Kathleen Collins, Ben Caldwell, Larry Clark, Alile Sharon Larkin, William Greaves
- x. Hollywood and the Race Theme
 - i. Late 80s
 - ii. Hollywood's race theme was in full swing
 - 1. But it avoided a full examination of the subject

- a. Films: *Cry Freedom* (1987), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *Bird* (1988), *A Dry White Season* (1989), *Glory* (1989), *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)

2. *Cry Freedom*

- a. Promoted as a provocative, courageous attempt to uncover the brutalities and injustices of apartheid
 - i. Truth: it was a “mess”

y. Burning History: The White Man’s Burden

- i. *Mississippi Burning* (1988)
 1. Alan Parker film
 2. Set out to dramatize the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement of the early 60s
 3. Loosely based on a true story of the disappearance and murder of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1964
 - a. One Black Southerner, James Chaney
 - b. Two White Northerners, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman

4. Two FBI agents are trying to unlock the secret and find the killers
5. Mississippi is a war zone of terror and violence
6. Local law-enforcement officers and members of the Klu Klux Klan are running the town “their” way
 - a. They do away with any black trying to resist their power
 - b. Black churches are bombed
 - c. Black homes are torched
 - d. Black residents are tortured, intimidated, beaten, or lynched
7. Critic Roger Ebert:
 - a. “This one gets inside the passion of race relations in America...*Mississippi Burning* is the best American film of 1988”
8. The film’s images distracted the audience from the fact that it had no real interest in dissecting the race relations in the town
 - a. It did not care about exploring the lives of the black residents

9. Black moviegoers question: “How could Hollywood make a film about the Civil Rights Movement without having any major black characters?”
 - a. “The film’s few black characters were mainly depicted as rather sad-eyed, submissive dolts, who just seem *tired, tired, tired* of what’s going on but are too fearful of the whites to make a decisive move.”
10. From watching this film one would never know that after it all, black Southerners did finally join the fight for Civil rights (marches, sit-ins, boycotts)
11. Film *Falsehood* features a black FBI agent, but during this time there were none
12. Film’s heroes: the two white FBI agents, who must fight to protect the Negro community, ensuring that America lives up to the promise of equal rights for all
 - a. “It’s a *White Man’s Burden* movie, if ever there were one.”
13. Alan Parker’s white focus: to give the mass white audience people it can identify with

- a. Reveals Hollywood's cynicism about black subjects
- ii. Although the film focuses on racism, it is believed best to explore that racism through white eyes.
- z. The Bird Doesn't Fly
 - i. *Bird* (1988)
 - 1. Clint Eastwood film
 - 2. Dramatization of the life of black jazz musician—saxophonist—Charlie Parker
 - 3. Screened first at the Cannes Film Festival
 - a. Lead character Forest Whitaker as Parker won the festival's Best Actor Award
 - 4. Film was a significant disappointment
 - a. It began at the opening scene as a depressing film
 - b. Shows one side: a talented musician who seems at peace and in control only with his music

- c. Then another side of a wreck who dopes himself up, drinks, carouses, broods, and destroys his personal relationships
5. Film had all the ingredients of a melodrama but lacked spark
6. Viewer gets no idea of the inner workings of the real Parker nor of the cultural setting that influenced his style
7. Many of the triumphs and disappointments of Parker's life are not explored.
 - a. Also, his true passion for music is misrepresented
 - b. The buzz behind his performances and their locations were not glamorized properly
 - c. The film even gives the impression that "black women are nonpeople"
 - d. The camaraderie that existed between Parker and other popular influential jazz musicians was not shown

8. The best thing about the film was being able to hear Parker's music
9. "Because it ignores the forces of family and society that shaped him as an artist and a man, the film's hero seems culturally adrift. And by not exploring the societal/professional tensions that made Parker want to withdraw into a drug-induced world, *Bird* makes Parker look like just another bummed-out colored guy who cannot handle it"
10. Parker is identified as a self-pitying and pathetic character

aa. Focusing on Apartheid (pgs. 306-309)

i. *A Dry White Season* (1983)

1. Euzhan Palcy film

- a. Black female filmmaker
- b. Grew up in Martinique-island in the eastern Caribbean Sea
- c. One of six children of a pineapple factory manager

- d. She left for France in 1978 and received a degree in French Literature at the Sorbonne and a film degree at the Vaugirard School in Paris
 - e. She wrote, edited, and directed short films
 - f. French debut film: *Sugar Cane Alley* (1983)
 - g. With this film Palty emerged as possible the first black woman to direct a major studio production and also the first black director to shoot a mainstream production dramatizing the violence of South Africa's apartheid system.
2. South African drama
 3. Warner Brothers film initially, but was dropped and picked up by MGM
 4. White South African Andre Brink novel
 5. Hero of film is a white Afrikaner who is politicized into action against the evils of apartheid
 - a. "No doubt the studio felt such a hero was one the mass white audience could identify with."

6. Cast: Marlon Brando, Susan Sarandon, Donald Sutherland, Janet Suzman, Zakes Mokae, Winston Ntshona, and John Kani
 7. Film was a disappointment
 8. It was a predictable story
 9. “Unlike the Brink novel, Palcy’s film ended on a note of black resistance when the black character Stanley shoots and kills a white security police chief.”
- ii. Sympathy was given to a violated good white man

bb. Bringing History to Light: Glory

i. *Glory* (1989)

1. Directed by Freddie Francis
2. Brought attention to the story of the 54th Regiment, the first black infantry in the North during the Civil War
3. Focused on young white officer Robert Gould Shaw (Mathew Broderick)
 - a. Becomes the commander of the black regiment
 - b. His awareness about race established him as a sensitive hero while it also sent out a

reassuring message to the mainstream

audience:

- i. Here is a good, decent man who in important respects is removed from America's deplorable racial history. See, not all white people were bad!
4. Film is based in part on the letters of the real Robert Gould Shaw
5. Black actors:
 - a. Rawlins (Morgan Freeman), Thomas Searles (Andre Braugher), Jupiter Sharts (Jihmi Kennedy)
 - b. The runaway slave: Trip (Denzel Washington)
6. Climax: the battle at Fort Wagner in Charleston harbor
 - a. The regiment give their lives for the fight for a freedom they have never really had
7. Movie ends on a note of heroism and *also* a note of defeat for the 54th Regiment
8. Viewers left the theater with questions:

- a. Who were Trip and Rawlins really?
 - i. Why couldn't the film dramatize the lives of these men before they entered the war?
 - ii. Had these characters previous lives and motives been explored it would have donated to their dimensions

9. Film received great reviews

10. Nominated for five Academy Awards

- a. Denzel Washington won for Best Supporting Actor

cc. Denzel Washington: On the Road to Stardom

- i. By the time Washington filmed *Glory* he has been in film for almost 10 years
- ii. He was the son of a minister and his mother was a beauty shop owner
- iii. Grew up in Mount Vernon, NY
- iv. Studied for a time at a private boarding school in New York, later graduated from Fordham University, and attended the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco

v. After theater:

1. Roles in *Carbon Copy* (1981), *A Soldier's Story* (1984), *Power* (1986), *Cry Freedom* (1989), *For Queen and Country* (1989), *The Mighty Quinn* (1989), *Checkmates* (play, 1988)

vi. His characters were cool, seemingly detached yet intense, intelligent, and free of affectations; his explosive moments are layered with underlying calm control.

1. The Washington character never loses himself in his anger

vii. He emerged as a "true leading man": handsome, heroic, sexy, glamorous; precisely the qualities that struck filmmaker Spike Lee who watched women swoon over Washington added him to the film *Mo' Better Blues* (1990)dd. Driving Miss Daisy: The Matter of Perspectivei. *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)

1. Stars Morgan Freeman
2. Based on Alfred Uhry's Pulitzer Prize winning off-Broadway play
3. Directed by Bruce Beresford

4. Touched on issues of race and class as it dramatized the 25-year-old relationship (1948-1973) of a Southern Jewish woman, Daisy Werthan, and her black chauffeur, Hoke Colburn
5. Observed changing attitudes in the South:
 - a. Post WW II conservatism through the Civil Rights era
6. Daisy:
 - a. Actress Jessica Tandy
 - i. Temperament of a woman, who prides herself on being fair and open-minded, yet is unwilling to do away with old habits, customs and beliefs.
 - ii. Only after old age has set in does she reveal her true feelings for Hoke “Hoke, you’re my best friend”
7. Hoke:
 - a. Typically past servants in film would develop close relationships with their employers and/or

would communicate their true feelings about them

- i. Hoke did not do so
- ii. That lack of perspective was the film's great shortcoming
- iii. Morgan Freeman instilled a sense of pride, a cool and sometimes cunning, manipulative intelligence, and an unflinching perceptiveness—saving this film
- iv. At times Hoke even seems to feel sorry for Daisy who doesn't know how bad off she really is
- v. When the script does allow for this character to vent, he goes full throttle, letting his piece be heard whether Daisy likes it or not

8. Freeman's role drew the black audience

- a. He "uses his observations of black men (and women) before him to capture and convey the

speech patterns and rhythms—movements, gestures, postures—that remind us African Americans of another generation.

9. Film won 9 Academy Award nominations

- a. Freeman was nominated for the Oscar as best actor
- b. Tandy won Best Actress
- c. Film won Best Picture

ee. Morgan Freeman: The Long Journey to Get There

- i. *Driving Miss Daisy* took Freeman to the ranks of stardom
 - 1. During the time of release he was 52 years old
- ii. Born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1937
- iii. Grew up partly in Greenwood, MS and in Chicago, IL
- iv. In the early 60s, he finished serving in the Air Force and went to Los Angeles in the hopes of becoming an actor
- v. Landed theater roles in *Can Can*, *Hello Dolly* (Broadway's 1967 black version) and *Pearlie*
- vi. Also played Easy Reader in the PBS children's series "The Electric Company"
- vii. *Mighty Gents*

1. Play that earned Freeman a Tony nomination and a Drama Desk Award

viii. Appeared in:

1. *Coriolanus* (1979), *Mother Courage* (1980)-both stage performances
2. *Brubaker*, *Eyewitness* (1981) and *Death of a Prophet* (1981), *Harry and Son* (1982), *Clean and Sober* (1988), stage version of *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Johnny Handsome* (1989), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), *The Power of One* (1992), *Unforgiven* (1992), Director of the South African drama *Bopha!* (1993)
3. Daytime Soap Opera "Another World"
4. *Street Smart* (1987)
 - a. Plays "Fast Black" a pimp in New York
 - i. He is not the typical pimp character
 - b. He is given complexity and conflict with his culture and awareness of its deceptions and injustices

c. There are scenes where he is able to “send shivers through viewers”

d. Remains one of the best dramatic film performances of the 80s

5. Freeman won another Academy Award nomination in 1987

ff. Other Films

i. *Tap* (1989)

1. Gregory Hines film

2. Stars: Suzzanne Douglas, Sammy Davis Jr., Sandman Sims, Jimmy Slyde, Arthur Duncan, Pat Rico, Bunny Briggs, Savion Glover, Harold Nicholas of the Nicholas Brothers

ii. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988)

1. Wes Craven film

2. Based on the book by Wade Davis

3. Stars: Paul Winfield, Zakes Mokae, Theresa Merritt, and Kathy Tyson

4. Story about voodoo and magic in Haiti

iii. Filmmakers:

1. Eddie Murphy

a. *Harlem Nights* (1989)

- i. Stars: Redd Foxx, Della Reese, Jasmine Guy, and Arsenio Hall
- ii. Failed to evoke the atmosphere of 1930s Harlem
- iii. Could not successfully contextualized a basic formula piece with the African American cultural boundaries that might have given it some style or originality

2. Charles Lane

a. *Sidewalk Stories* (1989)

- i. Mostly black and white
- ii. 97 minute comedy
- iii. Lane starred, wrote, directed and produced
- iv. Shot in 15 days in New York on a budget of \$200,000
- v. Took a look at the plight of the homeless

vi. Won the Prix du Publique at the Cannes

Film Festival in 1989

gg. Closing the Era on the Right Note (pgs. 318-323)

i. *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

1. Spike Lee film
2. Most controversial and provocative film of the era
3. No other black film drew as much attention or had as great a cultural impact
4. Examined a day in the life of black residents in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant section and culminated in a violent racial uprising
5. New York Times, Vincent Canby "*Do the Right Thing* is living, breathing, riveting proof of the arrival of an abundantly gifted new talent."
6. *New York*, David Denby "a demonstration of the pointlessness of violence that is also a celebration of violence. Confusing? *Do the Right Thing* is going to create an uproar—in part because Lee, a middle-class black hoping to capture the anger of the under class, is thoroughly mixed up about what he's saying."

7. Film became a media event—a social phenomenon
8. Despite the warnings the film did not provoke riots or have any effect on black mayoral candidate at the time, David Dinkins, who was elected to office
9. For the black audience, many of the character types were immediately recognizable
 - a. And the fact that these characters had never been seen before intensified the excitement, connection, and level of identification
10. The language and humor were sharp and clever, with a ring of authenticity
11. The climatic racial confrontation in the final scene is what caused the uproar
 - a. So much real anger within the African American urban centers on significant social, political issues, the character “Buggin’ Out’s” rage struck some as displaced.
 - b. Some wanted more information about him or the other characters to fully comprehend the real forces and deeper field of oppression of

American life that their justified anger springs from.

12. Better than any other film, it touched on a great deal of the discontent and unexplained anger that was so much a part of urban life during the Reagan 80s

13. Said something that Hollywood avoided:

- a. Simply, that race relations in America remain appalling; that racism and ethnic tensions underlie the façade of American life.

14. Stars: Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Joie Lee, Robin Harris, John Turturro, Samuel Jackson, Rosie Perez, Giancarlo Esposito, Danny Aiello (won Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor)

15. Lee was nominated for Best Screenplay

16. Film gave way for “the oncoming arrival of a new brand of African American commercial cinema in which the subjects of race, racism, cultural bearings, and social/political problems would move to the forefront.

1. Chapter 10~The 1990s: New Stars, New Filmmakers, and a New African American Cinema

a. The 90s

i. Period marked by a shift in political views, social drives, and the expected fair at movie theaters

1. Events and issues:

2. War in the Persian Gulf

3. Stagnant economy

4. Big company layoffs

5. Soaring unemployment statistics

6. Continuing AIDS health crisis

7. Issue of sexual harassment that grew out of the Clarence Thomas—Anita Hill hearings

8. Complaints that the president—the first George Bush—was ineffectual in coping with massive problems

9. Racial tensions and divisions that had been swept under the rug most of the previous decade

ii. Rodney King

1. Man stopped by the police and brutally beaten,
allegedly for resisting arrest
2. Had the incident not been captured on videotape, it
most likely would have never come to public attention
3. TV news programs ran repeated airings of the beating
4. A nation sat stunned at the pointless violence
5. April, 29, 1992
 - a. The state found the 4 white policemen accused
of the beating were found innocent on virtually
all counts
 - b. Outrage in Los Angeles's South Central, led to
on of the worst civil disorders in American
History
 - i. LA looked as if it were going up in
flames
 - ii. 53 people left dead
 - iii. Property damage of over \$1 billion
 - iv. Long run issue: a judicial system meted
out justice differently to black and white;

a social system in which basic inequities
still persisted

iii. William Jefferson Clinton elected to President of the United
States

1. Nation appeared to be on a course to reshape itself
and redefine its destiny

2. Clinton appointed an unprecedented number of
African Americans and women to his cabinet

a. He also launched ambitious plans for a
national health program and welfare reform

3. It now was an era of growth and prosperity

4. Unfortunately Clinton was impeached for a series of
White House scandals

b. During the early 90s:

i. New interpretations of American history and culture came
about

ii. The traditional European achievements, cultural
contributions, attitudes, and values were openly
challenged...

1. Ex. In 1992, the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of America
- iii. A heightened awareness of the nation's social fabric: its ethnic diversity, no demanded a fresh view of America as a truly multicultural society—a view that had long been ignored in the history books and cultural studies
- iv. African American pop culture:
 1. Gave voice to social/racial concerns and issues
 2. Rap music, although criticized for its sexism and violent imagery, nonetheless sent out messages through its language and themes about injustices, rebellion and dissent, cultural pride, and a new brand of Black Nationalism.
- v. Film Images:
 1. Traditional Hollywood commercial cinema cast black performers like Denzel Washington, Wesley Snipes, and Whoopi Goldberg in leading roles
 - a. Some became superstar icons
 - b. Others starred in important supporting roles

- c. Old formulas were still seen, but some films introduced surprising implications
- 2. A movement of African American filmmakers
 - a. New kind of cinema
 - b. Part of the commercial mainstream: African American cultural signs, signposts, and boundaries
 - c. American movies had a new look and sound
 - d. New social problems and dilemmas
 - e. Later in the decade some filmmakers moved away from the typical race or protest subjects to discuss more general themes
 - f. Coming-of-age dramas
 - i. The new black middle-class
 - g. More African Americans would work in Hollywood than ever before in movie history
- c. The Good, the Bad, the Bonded, the Typed
 - i. Black moviegoers found pleasure in seeing more black performers in some of the big blockbusters...

1. *Die Hard 2* (1990), *The Fugitive* (1993), *A Few Good Men* (1992)
- ii. More interracial male bonding:
1. *Diggstown* (1992), *Iron Eagle* (year), *Gladiator* (1992), *Downtown* (1990), *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992), *Another You* (1991), *The Last Boy Scout* (1991)
- iii. Unusual roles:
1. *King of New York* (1990):
 - a. Found a following in the young urban black viewer, who may have found it close in style to their own attitudes and the gangsta rap they listened/lived through
- iv. The old types resurface:
1. *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991)-set in the South in the 1920s/1930s
 - a. Had tom-like characters, noble servants, and passive blacks
 2. *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992)
 - a. Ernie Hudson-desexed, frightened and childlike figure

3. *Regarding Henry* (1991)

- a. Large and strong characters, who housed an understated devotion, the black-man-as-caretaker

4. *Lightening Jack* (1994)

- a. Cuba Gooding Jr.: eye-rolling, childlike, mute sidekick to Australian Paul Hogan
- b. It was wondered why the director encouraged or permitted such an embarrassing performance
- c. *People* “a vile insult to Detroit,” “borders on racist,” “He’s so inarticulate, panicky and given to running away, that you half way expect him to say, ‘Feets, do yo’ stuff.’”

v. The “subtle” films:

1. *Mister Johnson* (1991)

- a. Attempted to deal in sensitive terms with the experiences of a black man in colonial Africa in the 190s

- b. But the film couldn't get inside the character's head to explain him culturally

- vi. The "distorted" films:

- 1. *Sandlot* (1993)

- a. Movie has no interest in explaining that the main character might have played against Babe Ruth in an off-season game, which sometimes occurred, when black players tested their skills against men from the major leagues
 - b. Terrible disregard for history and a gloss-over of past racism in American sports

- vii. Black actors and actresses in mainstream cinema, played characters that are now incorporated into concepts of American life, or perhaps movie life.

- d. Whoopi's Back (pgs. 329-336)

- i. Films:

- 1. *Homer and Eddie* (1990)
 - 2. *Ghost* (1990)

- a. Her frightened character should have stayed in the past, with the old stereotype that blacks were terrified of ghosts
 - b. Nonsexual, feisty nurturer
 - c. Film still took precautions not to generate any “unsettling thoughts” amongst viewers
 - d. Goldberg was the “life” in this film
 - i. She used her cultural bearings to give her character definition
 - 1. Ex. Language and expressions
 - e. Film was a hit, grossing over \$200 million
 - f. Goldberg became the second African American woman to win the Oscar, as Best Supporting Actress
 - g. No she believed she could play any role
3. *The Long Walk Home* (1990)
- a. She could not escape the nurturing theme once again
4. *Soapdish* (1991)

- a. Soap opera writer, and the best “friend” she can be

5. *Sister Act* (1992)

- a. Reno lounge singer who had witnessed a mom killing and hides out in a San Francisco convent where she pretends to be nun Sister Mary Clarence
- b. Race is a subject that this film assumes is of no importance to its mainstream audience
 - i. But there is one scene where it becomes a topic but Goldberg is ready for the comeback this time
- c. “For the most part, Deloris is removed from other African Americans. Somehow the filmmakers assume that their black character does not need cultural references (other than occasional jokes about race) or semblance of a black community to anchor her.”
- d. For African American audiences the films were funny but possible alienating

- e. Goldberg's look itself is exemplary of ethnic definition

6. *Sister Act 2* (1993)

- a. Here Goldberg's character is given a chance to interact with other black characters and lends her knowledge to a young black student:

Lauren Hill

ii. More Films:

1. *The Player* (1992)

2. *Sarafina* (1992)

3. *Made in America* (1993)

- a. Costarred her with her then real-life boyfriend, actor Ted Danson
- b. No matter their off-screen relationship, on-screen precautions were taken not to scare away any patrons with too explicit an interracial couple.
- c. Here Goldberg leads the viewers to believe that Danson is the father of her artificially

incriminated daughter (certainly not any physical contact!)

- d. When it looks as if the two may share a love scene, it is interrupted and comedy covers their feelings
- e. In the end, Goldberg discovers that Danson is not the father of her child
- f. It was interesting that even in the advertisements for the film pictured Danson and Goldberg standing very far apart

4. *The Lions King* (1994), *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), *Boys on the Side* (1995), *Moonlight and Valentino* (1995), *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), *An Alan Smithee Film: Burn Hollywood Burn* (1998), *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998), *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1999), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Monkeybone* (2001), *Kingdom Come* (2001)

- iii. It was said that in 1993, Whoopi was the “highest paid woman in the history of film”

- iv. “Though her films rarely matched her talents, Whoopi Goldberg never lost her comic timing and was at her best during those moments when she injected some down-to-earth common sense *attitude* into her dialogue.”
 - v. Her qualities as a person and talent was always able to shine through lesser roles
- e. An Emerging New African American Cinema
- i. During the time of Whoopi Goldberg’s success, mainstream cinema itself underwent changes...
 - ii. *Do the Right Thing* alone revealed the presence of a large black audience who were eager for movies with specific cultural references, subjects, issues, and stars.
 - iii. General white response: popular music by black artists had reached white music listeners
 - 1. Perhaps this could happen also with the emergence of more socially aware black films
 - 2. Retraining the mainstream white audience of true black culture and distinctions
 - iv. *House Party* (1990)
 - 1. Reginald Hudlin film

2. Produced by Warrington Hudlin
3. Music duo Kid' n Play
4. Very simple and basic storyline
5. Synopsis:
 - a. Kid is a teenage boy, who has been grounded by his father because of problems at school, but there is fun to be had and he devises a plan to sneak out and party with Play while his parents are out of town.
 - b. The film follows Kid as he endures a series of nighttime adventures and dilemmas, especially the fun had in between.
 - c. Kid is not as "cool" as play but he aspires to be
 - d. The audience is exposed to the latest hip hop dance styles, hairstyles (including Kid's mile-high high-top fade), slang, music, and attitudes
 - e. Kid deals with the demands of school, parents and peers; also experiencing his first love.

6. *House Party* was an expansion of a short film by Reginald Hudlin that he created while a student at Harvard
7. It had no great messages or social significance
8. “Pleasant, agreeable, and paced at a fast clip with some bright, invigorating colors, it had some likable performers:
 - a. Robin Harris-Kid’s father
 - b. Christopher Reid
 - c. Tisha Campbell
 - d. Martin Lawrence
9. Presented black teenagers for the first time as only “likeable kids
10. Expression of traditional attitudes:
 - a. Black women are presented in color categories
 - b. Middle-class “good-girl” Sidney (Kids love interest) is played by the lighter skinned Tisha Campbell

- c. Brown skinned A. J. Johnson plays the “faster” (more promiscuous) girl Sharanne from the projects
 - i. Her family in the projects are crude or brash people
 - ii. “We’re to be comically appalled by these lowlifes! When fun is poked at the bourgeois—the older middle-class black Americans, however—it is done in more restrained, even deferential terms
- d. In many 1990s films by young black male filmmakers, dreamgirls were often lighter actresses

11. Film received much praise

12. Budget of \$2.5 million, earned \$25 million

13. Two sequels were made:

- a. *House Party 2* (1992)
- b. *House Party 3* (1994)
- c. Both starred Kid’ n Play
 - i. The pair also starred in *Class Act* (1992)

14. There was also a final *House Party 4* starring the popular boy band Immature

15. Reginald Hudlin also directed *BeBe's Kids* (1992), *Boomerang* (1992), *The Great White Hype* (1996), and *Ladies' Man* (2000)

a. Another promising director:

i. James Bond III

ii. At 24 years old he wrote, directed, produced, and appeared in *Def by Temptation* (1990)

f. Charles Burnett: A New Career Direction

i. Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi

ii. Grew up in South Central Los Angeles

iii. Studied electronics in college but changed his major to filmmaking

iv. First film: *Several Friends* (1969)

v. Attended graduate school at UCLA

1. His thesis film *Killer of Sheep* (1977), was highly praised

a. A metaphor and all too cruelly real

b. Won the Critics Prize at the Berlin International
Film Festival in 1981

- vi. Later Burnett wrote and directed *My Brother's Wedding* (1984) and *Bless Their Little Hearts* (1984)
- vii. In 1990 he created *To Sleep with Anger*
 - 1. Centered on a black couple, originally from the South but now living in Los Angeles with their two sons
 - 2. Film won the Special Jury Prize at the 1990 Sundance United States Film Festival
- viii. Other films and projects:
 - 1. *The Glass Shield* (1995), TV dramas: "Nightjohn" and "The Wedding"
- ix. *Chameleon Street* (1991)
 - 1. Independent film by Wendell Harris
 - 2. The story of Douglas Street-a man who posed as a reporter, an exchange student at an Ivy League university, a lawyer, a doctor (successfully performing 23 operations)
 - 3. Film emerged as a study of both identity and alienation

4. This man, lonely and adrift, is clinically and contemptuously aware that he lives in a culture that has no place for him unless he is able to assume a socially acceptable role
 - a. The fact that he is a black man makes the question of identity and role assumption all the more affecting
5. Film did not successfully reach the black audience in part to its structure, tone, and distant protagonist as with its lack of theater dates
6. But what I did accomplish was exploring new subject matter and structure

g. A Breakthrough Year

- i. March 18, 1991 *Variety* front pages reads “Blacks Taking the Helm”
- ii. “Black directors are making an unprecedented number of pics this year, pics that distribs hope to sell—like the rap and Motown many are scored to—in the mall as well as the inner city.”

- h. 13 films directed by African Americans were scheduled for release that year
 - i. 20 others starring black actors were scheduled for release
- i. By now, it is estimated that some 25% of the movie going public was African American
 - i. This gave great optimism about the future of black films
- j. *The Five Heartbeats* (1991)
 - i. Directed by Robert Townsend
 - 1. Also directed the not-so-great films: *The Meteor Man* (1993) and *B.A.P.S.* (1997) (stood for Black American Princesses)
 - ii. African American pop group
 - iii. Film struggled to cover too many subjects—the Mob in the music industry, racism, exploitation, drugs, familial tensions, even religious redemption—it seemed unable to focus long enough on any topic.
 - 1. Film gave a very narrow understanding of the female characters
 - iv. Actors: Leon as Michael Wright, Diahann Carroll, Chuck Patterson and Harold Nicholas

k. New Jack Movies (pgs. 341-342)

i. *New Jack City* (1991)

1. Directed by Mario Van Peebles, son of filmmaker

Melvin Van Peebles

- a. He came to directing after serving an apprenticeship as an actor
- b. As a teenager, he played the young Sweetback in his father's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*
- c. He earned a degree in economics from Columbia University and worked as a model and an actor in films: *The Cotton Club*, *Exterminator II* (1984), *Rappin'* (1985), *The Delivery Boys* (1986), *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986), *Jaws: The Revenge* (1987), and *Identity Crisis* (1990); also appeared briefly in the TV series "LA Law" and the series "Sonny Spoon"
- d. He lacked the ingredients to be a great movie star

2. This film was fast-moving, gritty, pulsing with tension and threat from its opening view of a tight New York City while Queen Latifah briefly raps on the soundtrack
3. Wesley Snipes gives a charismatic performance, amongst other things
 - a. Played the drug kingpin Nino Brown, in hot pursuit of money and power
 - b. Success at any cost!
4. “Seems to have sprung from the hip of *Super Fly* with some help from gangsta rap”
 - a. Both films focusing on businessmen dope dealers and their drive and macho power
 - b. Both of these characters are able to survive the mean streets and do so while living in high style
5. The film celebrates Nino as a hero, but his foul live catches up with him and he is punished

6. Focus was on crack and capitalism, violence and vengeance, and all the efforts of the law enforcement to trap Nino
 - a. It looked as if it leaped out of the headlines from current news
7. Its gangster motive appealed to the young listeners and followers of gangsta rap and also the rappers themselves
 - a. Ice T, a well-known rapper at the time plays the role of the cop out to arrest Nino (an irony though due to Ice T's personal feelings towards the police force)
8. Other cast members: Allen Payne, Vanessa Williams, Mario Van Peebles himself, Judd Nelson, and Camila Johns whose previous role as Nola Darling in *She's Gotta Have it* helped launch a new kind of black screen heroine.
9. *New Jack City* was a solid hit with young moviegoers
10. Shot on a budget of \$8.5 million and within weeks grossed over \$44 million

11. Mario Van Peebles later directed the black western
Posse (1993) and *Panther* (1995)

I. A Black New Wave

i. Following films:

1. Bill Duke directs *A Rage in Harlem* (1991)

a. All star cast: Gregory Hines, Forest Whitaker,
and Robin Givens

2. Later Duke directed *Deep Cover* (1992), *Sister Act 2*
(1993), the nonblack *Cemetery Club* (1992)

3. Charles Lane

a. After *Sidewalk Stories* he directed *True Identity*
(1991)

4. Joseph Vasquez directed *Hangin' with the Homeboys*
(1991)

5. Michael Schultz directed *Livin' Large* (1991)

6. Matty Rich (19 years old) directed *Straight Out of*
Brooklyn (1992), and *The Inkwell* (1994)

ii. At this point in time film had not had so many black artists
working behind the cameras since the 70s

iii. Other creative artists:

1. Ernest Dickerson-cinematographer
2. Same Pollard-editor
3. Wynn Thomas-set designer
4. Ruth Carter-costume designer
5. Robi Reed-casting director
6. Russell Williams-sound wizard
7. Terence Blanchard-musician

m. John Singleton's South Central (pgs. 343-347)

- i. Graduate of the University of Southern California Filmic Writing Program

1. Here he turned his camera to a coming-of-age story in South Central Los Angeles

- ii. One of his most successful: *Boyz N the Hood* (1991)

1. Film opens in 1984 as young Tre Styles and friends, while walking to school discuss the gunshots they heard the night before
2. Tre is presented as a young boy who has "maybe" two choices: gang life or college life

3. Angela Basset (Tre's mother) sends him to live with his father (Lawrence Fishburn) to allow him to teach Tre "how to be a man"
4. Fishburn is a stern but honest father figure, who allows Tre to see possibility in the confusion found in his surroundings
5. Singleton was eager to bring to the surface certain subjects and issues: unwanted pregnancies, the use of condoms, AIDS, gentrification, racism
6. This film idealized Furious and stressed the role of African American fathers, while rarely drew its women with much insight or sympathy
 - a. Most of the mothers in the film are portrayed as insensitive and irresponsible
7. Included are scenes of children walking through mean streets where they might encounter a hostile group or stumble across a dead body
 - a. Film's opening statement: "one out of every twenty-one black American males will be murdered in their lifetime"

- b. Comment in film: "Most will die at the hands of another black male"
8. Sound is a very important factor in this film, including gunshot pops and buzzing helicopters hovering above the neighborhood
9. "Fierce male camaraderie"=Singleton's belief that this type of African American male bonding preserves the men but also can lead to their destruction
 - a. When the young males refer to one another as "bitch" (weak or powerless), the language is *authentic* in reflecting their distrust suspicion, or dislike of women
10. Stars: Lawrence Fishburn, Tyra Ferrell, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and rap star Ice Cube
11. Film earned Singleton an Oscar nomination as Best Actor as well as the youngest directorial nominee ever
12. Film also emerged as the most successful black genre film in movie history at that time

- iii. By stressing the violence and conflict within the black community the white audiences appealed to the film and gave them a “pass.”
- iv. Singleton’s next film:
 1. *Poetic Justice* (1993)
 - a. Focused on a young beauty parlor worker and poet, Justice played by pop star Janet Jackson
 - b. After her car fails her, Justice must travel to her hair competition with a friend (Regina King) who is riding with her new boyfriend and his work buddy (Joe Terry & Tupac Shakur)
 - i. From LA to Oakland the foursome ride in a mail van
 - ii. Along the ride experiences vary from alcoholism, physical abuse, and truth of the characters trying past
 2. *Higher Learning* (1995)
 3. *Rosewood* (1997)

- a. It can be said that Singleton must have been disappointed by the response received from previous film *Rosewood*
- b. Here he dramatized a long-lost episode in American history: the murder of an unknown number of African Americans and the annihilation of a nearly all-black town in Rosewood, Florida
- c. In the early 20s these people were brutally murdered by an angry white mob from a neighboring community
- d. The false accusations of a young white woman, who claimed that she had been raped and beaten by a black man sparked the murderous sweep
 - i. When in actuality the rapist/attacker was her white lover
- e. Critics complained that the film failed to create convincing, realistic characters and that even

its powerful theme was reduced to the stuff of melodrama.

- f. Cast: Don Cheadle, Ving Rhames, John Voight, Ester Rolle
- g. Singleton explored some of the paranoia and hysteria as well as unbridled racism that can erupt from a lie

- 4. The next film went commercial: the remake of *Shaft* (2000) starring Samuel L. Jackson and following in 2001 he returned to South Central with the film *Baby Boy*
- 5. Singleton's next films were more reminiscent of the 70s films, focusing on young African American males coming of age in tough urban settings, their lives often defined by the racial dynamics and racism of the dominant culture
 - a. Drugs, crime, violence, death on the streets
 - b. Women were rarely developed characters, sometimes treated as "disposable items."

- c. Most of the films also ended on a grim, nihilistic, yet realistic note
 - d. Some of these were successful, but this new *home-boy cinema* were infused with a hip hop/rap aesthetic and sensibility, and were made to appeal to the young.
 - e. Unfortunately, the films (in general) failed to create a diversity of images, settings, and themes.
 - f. The new African American cinema needed to move beyond the “hood” to include other, varied aspects of black life, goals, tensions and dreams.
- n. Rising from the Dust
- i. Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1990)
 - 1. Dash studied film at New York’s City College and later the American Film Institute and UCLA
 - 2. Her short films:
 - a. *Diary of an African Nun* (1977)-based on the Alice Walker story

- b. *Four Women* (1978)
 - c. *Illusions* (1982)
 - 3. For 10 years financing, shooting and film completion was a struggle for Dash
 - 4. *Daughters of the Dust*
 - a. Set in the Sea Islands off the South Carolina coast in the summer of 1902
 - b. Looked at the experiences of a family of Gullah women on the eve before they leave for life on the mainland
 - c. The family matriarch-88 year old Nana Peazant played by Cora Lee Day
 - d. She is aware that upon this move the women risk losing their cultural roots, customs, rituals, beliefs, history, and identities by going North
 - 5. Cast of African American actresses of different colors:
 - a. Barbara O, Alva Rogers, Kaycee Moore
 - b. Helped to break the traditional mold
- ii. Leslie Harris

1. Another African American director
 2. Directed *Just Another Girl on the IRT* (1993)
 - a. Focusing on a young woman coming of age in
New York
- o. More by Spike (pgs. 349-362)
- i. No African American filmmaker had received more attention than Spike Lee
 - ii. New films: *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Jungle Fever* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992)
 - iii. *Mo' Better Blues*
 1. Focuses instead of on a doomed and drugged-out hero, an almost ordinary but talented young middle-class musician, trumpet player Bleek Gilliam, played by Denzel Washington
 2. Critics were disappointed in the film
 3. Female characters seemed categorized into the standard nurturing Good Woman verses the career-driven, sexier Bad Woman (Joie Lee and Cynda Williams)

4. After the main character gives up his art for a middle-class lifestyle, some wondered if it might have been a wish-fulfillment for Spike Lee, who might have been telling his father, musician Bill Lee, that he should have given up his music and spent more time at home with his family.

iv. If Lee's *School Daze* was an attempt to look back, then *Mo' Better Blues* could be an attempt to examine his life after his success; it is his her-and-now film

1. "Throughout its subtext is about show business, success, glamour, beauty, the struggle for artistic expression amid the pressures of a demanding career."

v. *Jungle Fever* (1991)

1. The story of an affair between a black architect and his young white secretary

2. Stars: Wesley Snipes, Samuel L. Jackson, Lonette McKee, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and Annabella Sciorra

3. It seemed as if Flipper Purify (Snipes) had the perfect life and a happy marriage with his beautiful light-skinned wife

a. But this was negated by his intense relationship with Sciorra that was depicted as merely two people caught up in the sexual mythology of one another's races.

4. This film deals with this pair's relationship in interesting ways

a. Sciorra is beaten by her father when he discovers she is dating a black man

b. Snipes brings her to dinner to meet his family and the strange silence leaves much for the viewer to interpret

c. Snipes wife has a girl "pow wow" about the lure of white women and how they are trying to "steal" their black men

vi. *Malcolm X* (1992)

1. Some 27 years after Malcolm's assassination there had been a renewed interest in his life and politics

2. Young black people had begun wearing all things “X” and “By Any Means Necessary (hats, tee-shirts, bags etc.)
3. Malcolm X once again represented rebellion against a racist system
4. For the older generation, he was an uncompromising hero; whose words were as relevant in 1992 as in 1962.
5. Controversy even rose when talk of this film came about
6. Film was based on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley
7. The drama:
 - a. His Nebraska family terrorized by the Klan
 - b. His mother’s desertion of her family following his father’s death
 - c. His early adulthood as a hustler in Boston
 - d. His years of imprisonment where he undergoes a political/religious awakening through the Nation of Islam

- e. His trying and dangerous years in New York as a nationally known leader
 - f. His 1965 assassination at age 39 in New York's Audubon Ballroom
8. Much of this film's strength lies in Denzel Washington's performance
- a. He brought this character to life, not for what had been criticized, but for his true power and revolutionary politics
- vii. With Success Comes Backlash
- 1. Once Lee emerged as possibly, next to Steven Spielberg, the most famous film director in America the African American community as well as others found any inconsistencies in Lee and his film
 - a. Some said that he suffered from the elemental delusions about Hollywood and "some off base assumptions about contemporary African-American culture"

- b. Lee's outspokenness not only about the racism in the industry but about racism in America did not win him many friends in Hollywood
 - c. His films were denied the recognition they deserved and the type of honors that would enable them to reach larger audiences
 - d. Criticism included his: treatment of women (many feminists have a terrible outlook on Lee), his sometimes jumbled political comment, and his weak development of character and stories
2. Still his films remained among the most vital American films of the early 90s
- viii. The middle 90s
- 1. Still Lee received much criticism
 - 2. As his films became more interesting it became harder to be critical for some
 - 3. *Crooklyn* (1994)
 - a. Based on a script by Lee, his sister Joie Susannah Lee, and his brother Cinque Lee

- b. The story of a family of four brothers and one sister in the 70s
- c. This was one of the first films to develop a female character and give her a point of view

4. *Clockers* (1995)

- a. Drama focused on a white cop's determination to find a killer in a drug-infested Brooklyn neighborhood

5. *Four Little Girls* (1997)

- a. Documentary about the four black children who were killed in the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham
 - i. This tragedy roused the civil rights movement

6. *He Got Game* (1998)

- a. Story of a convict who-while temporarily released from prison tries to persuade his son to play basketball—tries to reach out to this young man and show him the love he feels he has failed in previous years

7. It was here it was discovered Lee's ability to create mature films that give commanding performances and show emotion on a grander scale

8. *Get on the Bus* (1996)

a. Story of a group of African American males who board a bus in South Central Los Angeles that will take them to the historic Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

b. Film wanted its audience to understand the diversity and the divisions as well as the ties that existed within the African American community; also to see the way these black men have been shaped by religion, politics, or personal ethics and their cultural experiences.

ix. *Summer of Sam* (1999)

1. Bold film for Spike Lee

2. Very large nonblack cast

3. Stars: Ben Gazzara, Anthony LaPaglia, Patti LuPone, Jennifer Esposito, Michael Badalucco

4. Written by Lee along with Victor Colicchio and actor Michael Imperioli
5. Set in a working-class Italian-American neighborhood in the Bronx during the summer of 1977 when the serial killer David Berkowitz, aka the “Son of Sam,” put a fear like no other into New Yorkers
6. Instead of focusing on the killer himself, Lee focused on the impact it was having on the people
7. During this time New Yorkers were a very “free” people, experimenting with their sexuality and drugs, along with environmental issues like heat waves and black outs feeding the frenzy
8. Critiques:
 - a. Some argued that Lee was insensitive to Italian Americans
 - b. Some accused him of insensitivity to the families of the victims of the serial killer
 - c. Others dismissed the film—*Summer of Sam* appears destined to appeal to later generations as a film that summarizes some of the moods,

passions, and trends of a distinct period in American social history.

9. *The Original Kings of Comedy* (2000)

- a. A comedy performance at the Charlotte Coliseum in North Carolina
- b. Stars: Steve Harvey, Cedric “the Entertainer,” D. L. Hughley, and Bernie Mac
- c. This may have been one of the most hilarious comedy shows of time
- d. The comedians donated that “unpredictable” comedy, and some ugly truths about family life
- e. This tour drew in huge black crowds and grossed \$37 million nationwide
- f. Still, the downfall was the lack of appeal of these comedians from mainstream America
- g. It was evident that this film was made for African American audiences
 - i. But it also had a following amongst the younger white moviegoers

10. *Bamboozled* (2000)

- a. Centered on a suffering television company, looking for the next big hit
- b. The main character, a writer, Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans)
 - i. He decides to go even further in his rejection of his own blackness and create the “New Millennium Minstrel Show” with the help of two homeless black men, one who can tap and a hype man to go along.
- c. Here Lee takes a stab at some of the black sitcoms then popular on TV networks such as the WB and UPN
- d. If the question were to ever be asked...how would today’s viewer react to blackface minstrelsy? It was answered here
- e. This film raised many issues and closes with a scathing montage of racist imagery in movie history, including clips from cartoons and footage of some of the screen’s great white

icons in blackface, even Fred Astaire himself
as well as Bugs Bunny

p. Other New Directors and Films

i. William Greaves-Former actor and documentary filmmaker

1. *Symniopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (1967) (later released in 1991)

a. Experimental movie about making a movie

ii. Allen and Albert Hughes-21 year old twins

1. *Menace II Society* (1993)

a. Graphic radical depiction of stunted teenage lives

2. *Dead Presidents* (1995)

a. Drama of the life of a young African American man from his youth in the Bronx in the 60s through his experiences in Vietnam to his return to the states—and what he then sees leaves him torn and deciding to perform a bank heist

3. *American Pimp* (2000)

4. *From Hell* (2001)

iii. Earnest Dickerson

1. *Juice* (1992)
2. *Surviving the Game* (1994)

iv. Haile Gerima

1. *Sankofa* (1993)

v. Thomas Carter

1. *Swing Kids* (1993)
2. *Metro* (1997)
3. *Save the Last Dance* (2001)

vi. Rusty Cundieff

1. *Fear of a Black Hat* (1994)
2. *Sprung* (1997)

vii. Tim Reid

1. *Once Upon a Time We Were Colored* (1996)

viii. Kevin Hooks

1. *Strictly Business* (1991)
2. *Passenger 57* (1992)
3. *Predator II* (1992)
4. *Ricochet* (1991)
5. *Fled* (1996)

- ix. F. Gary Gray
 - 1. *Friday* (1995)
- x. Steven Carr
 - 1. *Next Friday* (2000)
 - 2. *Set It Off* (1996)
- xi. Ice Cube
 - 1. *The Player's Club* (1998)
- xii. The next directors to appear were more focused on the young hip hop audience
- xiii. Michael Martin
 - 1. *I Got the Hook Up* (1998)
- xiv. Hype Williams
 - 1. *Belly* (1998)
- xv. Christopher Scott Cherot
 - 1. *Hav Plenty* (1998)
- xvi. Antoine Fuqua
 - 1. *The Replacement Killers* (1998)
 - a. This film marked a new wave for black filmmakers

- b. It was the first to try and tap into the international audience

- 2. *Training Day* (2001)

- xvii. Malcolm Lee (cousin of Spike Lee)

- 1. *The Best Man* (1999)

- a. Tapped into the young educated audience
- b. Story of young black professionals

- xviii. Rick Famuyiwa

- 1. *The Wood* (1999)

- xix. Kwyn Bader

- 1. *Loving Jezebel* (2000)

- xx. Gary Hardwick

- 1. *The Brothers* (2001)

- xxi. Keenan Ivory Wayans

- 1. *Scary Movie* (2000)

- a. Spoof of youth-oriented horror films
- b. Publicized its “multicultural cast”
- c. Grossed \$150 million
- d. Became the most successful movie ever directed by an African American filmmaker

2. *Scary Movie 2* (2001)

xxii. White filmmakers working with the race theme

○ Steve Anderson	▪ <i>South Central</i> (1992)
○ Anthony Drazen	▪ <i>Zebrahead</i> (1992)
○ Jonathan Kaplan	▪ <i>Love Field</i> (1992)
○ John Turtel Taub	▪ <i>Cool Runnings</i> (1993) & <i>The Air Up There</i> (1993)
○ Tamra Davis	▪ <i>CB₄</i> (1993) & <i>Who's the Man</i> (1993)
○ Fred Schiespi	▪ <i>Six Degrees of Separation</i> (1993)
○ Jeff Pollack	▪ <i>Above the Rim</i> (1994)
○ Boaz Yakin	▪ <i>Fresh</i> (1994)
○ Neil Jordan	▪ <i>The Crying Game</i> (1992)

○ Marc Levin	▪ <i>Slam</i> (1998)
○ Julian Schnable	▪ <i>Basquait</i> (1996)
○ Mike Leigh	▪ <i>Secrets and Lies</i> (1996)
○ James Toback	▪ <i>Black and White</i> (2000)
○ David Gordon Green	▪ <i>George Washington</i> (2000)
○ Steven Spielberg	▪ <i>Amistad</i> (1997)

q. Carl Franklin: Film Noir from Another Point of View

- i. This new director proved to be one of the most interesting and perhaps most stylish of the new bunch
- ii. Son of a brick mason who died just before Franklin was born
- iii. Mother worked as a cleaning woman until an accident where she was partially blinded by laundry solution
- iv. Grew up in Richmond, CA

- v. Studied at the University of California at Berkley and planned to become a teacher or lawyer
- vi. A teacher persuaded him to appear in an August Strindberg film *Miss Julie* (1982)
- vii. In 1971 he decided to move to New York
 - 1. Starred in *Cymbeline* (1999) and *Timon of Athens* (1981)
 - 2. Also was involved in plays at Lincoln Center and the Arena Stage in D.C.
- viii. He returned to California and found work on the TV series “The A-Team,” “Caribe,” “Fantastic Journey,” and “McClain’s Law”
- ix. Realizing that his acting career may never take off he decided to apply to the American Film Institute and study writing and directing
- x. *One False Move* (1992)
 - 1. Impressive independent film
 - 2. Won the attention that he needed to begin his directing career
- xi. *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995)

1. Hollywood film starring Denzel Washington
2. Part old-style film noir—with paranoia, corruption, and complicated story line that one anticipates in films of the 40s
3. Had a distinct twist: this time everything comes from the point of view of an African American man
4. Film is a spin on the “Tragic Mulatto” tale
 - a. But unlike past films, when interacting with this mulatto there are no out of control sexual sparks or sensuality from her character
5. Film was praised and “no Jim Crow signs appear”
6. Although this film was critically acclaimed, the box office did not reflect
 - a. This lead some industry observers to the conclusion that audiences were not interested in period dramas—or black films with more serious themes

xii. *One True Thing* (1998)

1. White cast including Meryl Streep, William Hurt, and Renee Zellweger

- xiii. Franklin realized that the key for survival for black filmmakers—in a Hollywood not eager for more adult black films—was to be known as capable of handling any kind of production
- xiv. For years white directors had been creating black films, it was only fair that black directors would be eligible to create non-black productions as well
- r. Actresses in Search of Roles
 - i. The 90s were still not the best of times for African American actresses
 - ii. New black women in film:
 - 1. Tisha Campbell
 - a. *House Party, Boomerang, Another 48 Hours* all produced in 1990
 - 2. Robin Givens
 - a. *A Rage in Harlem* (1991) and *Boomerang*
 - 3. Sheryl Lee Ralph
 - a. *Mistress* and *The Distinguished Gentleman* in 1992, *To Sleep with Anger* (1990)
 - 4. Teresa Randle

- a. *King of New York, The Five Heartbeats, Malcolm X, Sugar Hill, Beverly Hills Cop III* all produced in 1994
5. Cynda Williams
 - a. *Mo' Better Blues* and *One False Move* (1992)
6. Thandie Newton
 - a. *Jefferson in Paris* (1995), *Besieged* (1998), *Gridlock'd* (1997), *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000)
7. Tyra Ferrell
 - a. *Jungle Fever, Boyz in the Hood, Poetic Justice*
8. Nia Long
 - a. *Boiler Room* (2000), *The Broken Hearts Club* (2000), *Big Momma's House* (2000), *The Best Man* (1999)
9. Regina King
 - a. *Enemy of the State* (1998), *Down to Earth* (2001)
10. Vanessa Williams (later known as Vanessa L. Williams)

- a. *Eraser* (1996), *Hoodlum* (1997), remake of *Shaft*

11. Aaliyah

- a. New up and coming singer
- b. *Romeo Must Die* (2000)
- c. Was signed to star in the *Matrix* deals but was killed in an airplane crash before production

12. Halle Berry

- a. *Boomerang*, *Strictly Business*, *Jungle Fever*, *The Flintstones* (1994), *Loosing Isaiah* (1995), *The Rich Man's Wife* (1996), *B.A.P.S.*, and *X-Men* (2000)
- b. It was her topless scene in *Swordfish* (2001) that caused an uproar of her "exploitation"
 - i. Few believed in Berry's star power
- c. *Monster's Ball* (2001) was her ticket to fame and won her an Academy Award

iii. Alfre Woodard

- 1. For a time she was taken the most seriously by the critics in Hollywood

2. Grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma
3. At the young age of 15 she decided she wanted to be an actress
4. Graduated from Boston University and moved to LA
5. After being spotted by director Robert Altman in a production of "*for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*"
 - a. She then was cast in the Altman film *Health* (1979) and *Remember My Name* (1978)
6. She received an Oscar nomination for her performance in *Cross Creek* (1983) and *Extremities* (1986)
7. Other films:
 - a. *Scrooged* (1988), *Miss Firecracker* (1989), *Grand Canyon*, *Rich in Love* (1992), *Bopha!* (1993), and *Heart and Souls* (1993), *Blue Chips* (1994), *Crooklyn*, and *Down in the Delta* (1998)

8. Sometimes her comparison was Cicely Tyson—perhaps because both were darker black women who played dramatic roles
9. *Passion Fish* (1992)
 - a. This film was one of the few movies that reflected on the lives of women and did not venture far from traditional images of African Americans
 - b. Question: why does such a fantasy—black women as nurturing, caretaking marvels at helping poor white women untangle the knots in their lives—linger on, even in the mind of a contemporary independent filmmaker?
 - i. Perhaps because it is a tradition that has been engrained in history, and those same filmmakers have grown up with their passion for film being attached to the old time stereotypical roles given to blacks

s. *Waiting to Exhale: Reaching the Black Female Audience* (pgs. 372-376)

- i. Released in 1995
- ii. Based on African American writer Terry McMillian's 1992 best selling novel
- iii. Directed by Forest Whitaker from a script by McMillian and Ronald Bass
- iv. Film centered on the lives and romantic tensions of four young African American women
- v. Savanna (Whitney Houston)
 1. Searching for "Mr. Right," and dealing with a pushy mother who would like her to wait for a married man to leave his wife for her—most likely would have been waiting for the rest of her life
- vi. Bernadine (Angela Bassett)
 1. Has built a company with her husband but is now dealing with this man's decision to leave their marriage and family for another woman (her being white is even salt in her wounds)
- vii. Gloria (Loretta Devine)

1. A hair dresser who has had very little luck with love, making advancements to her son's father, who reveals later that he is gay

viii. Robin (Lela Rochon)

1. So desperate for a man, she waits in the background for a married man to choose her; dates a drug addicted party guy with illegitimate children, and is left with a decision of a lifetime, one that will hit the female audience hard

ix. This film is vibrant.

1. From the music they listen to, the movies and television programs they watch and the celebrities they refer to

x. The film's direction was said to be "bland"

xi. It was the actresses that gave this film some style and vitality and at odd moments a sweet sensitivity

xii. The actions these women take to fight back against the men who hurt them are representative to perhaps what many African American women have either done or fantasized doing.

1. They brought to life...burning clothes, outing men for the liars they were, confronting the phony lives they promise and dealing with personal issues only other women can relate to
- xiii. Most reviewers didn't like the film, but others regard *Waiting to Exhale* as a "hit"
- xiv. Film became loved and frequently watched film by many African American women
- xv. It was even the best we have seen of a couple of the actresses, who after the film had meek careers.
- t. Angela Bassett: Still Holding Her Breath
 - i. Grew up in St. Petersburg, FL
 - ii. "Single-parent family, welfare, same song, second verse"
 1. What she told *The New York Times* January 29, 2000
 - iii. Graduated from the Yale Drama School and went on to stage performing
 - iv. Portrayed real-life women:
 1. Betty Shabazz in *Malcolm X*
 2. Katherine Jackson in TV's "The Jacksons"
 3. Tina Turner in *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1993)

- a. Based on the autobiography *I, Tina*
 - b. Film left viewers on an emotional high
 - c. Bassett won a Golden Globe Award and an Oscar nomination as Best Actress by accomplishing a difficult task: she established her own screen identity while playing a woman known to millions
- v. Her following role was with Eddie Murphy in *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995), and *Strange Days* (1995)
- vi. Other films:
- 1. *Contact* (1997), *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1998) (another Terry McMillian novel production, dealing with a woman having a “cougar-like” relationship with a much younger man), *Music of the Heart* (1999), *Supernova* (2000), *Boesman and Lena* (2000), *The Score* (2001)
- vii. It was said that Bassett's performances were strangely reminiscent of Joan Crawford: even when she tried to play it soft and vulnerable, she still had hard edges
- 1. A tough cookie who couldn't be trifled with

2. Also like Crawford, Bassett had an under layer of anger—perhaps due to a restlessness that sprang from her awareness of her position in the industry; the fact that she had to fight ten times harder than anybody else just to stay in place in Hollywood

u. Whitney Houston: Pop Goddess Turned Movie Star

- i. Of all of the *Exhale* actress Whitney Houston's career looked the most promising
- ii. It was her role in *The Bodyguard* (1992) that spanned her early onsite of stardom
 1. A thriller/melodrama with a romance between a black pop star (Houston) and her white bodyguard (Kevin Costner)
 2. Lured audiences in with the idea of an interracial relationship
 - a. But race is actually never discussed in the film
 3. Film was really an "ideal white male fantasy"
 - a. Costner is a strong, sensitive fellow always in control, able to protect her when no one else can

4. Houston did a credible job but it was the fact that she was a more convincing personality rather than character
- iii. As time went on Houston began a whirlwind relationship with singer Bobby Brown
 1. Here is when the rumors began fueling of possible drug abuse, extravagant shopping sprees, and her huge outrage
 2. These rumors however did not seem to affect her as an actress, if anything with more drama comes more public fascination
 - iv. Other film:
 1. *The Preacher's Wife* (1996)
 - v. After the release of *The Preacher's Wife* reviews were not consistent and the film did not do so well in the box office
 - vi. Originally Houston earned the rights to star as Dorothy Dandridge in the film depicting her career
 1. But she became a media spectacle; battling personal traumas (a heavily publicized miscarriage)

2. It may have been determined that at that stage in her life Houston was too venerable and insecure about playing such a role

3. The role was eventually given to Halle Berry

vii. Talk came of Houston starring in other roles, but these never materialized and as years went on she refocused on her singing career, and also on many negative forces that still plague the public opinion of her today

v. Post-*Exhale* Women

i. After the success of *Waiting to Exhale*, one might have expected a steady lineup of films about African American women

1. Generally, Hollywood operated in cycles: if one film pulled in huge audience, ten more versions of that same type were bound to be produced

2. This however, didn't happen in this case

ii. There were some interesting films that did center on African American women

iii. *Set It Off* (1996)

1. Stars: Vivica A. Fox, Jada Pinkett, Kimberly Elise, and Queen Latifah
2. Stars these four women dealing with their lives, children and personal battles
3. These emotionally bruised women—seeing money as the way out and up—“successfully” pull off a bank robbery
 - a. The women decide to continue with their robberies, only to be left dead, scarred or scared for the remainder of their lives
4. So much about the film was obvious and understated that it reminded one of certain Blaxploitation-era films
5. Vivica proved to be an actress in need of a director to tell her when to tone it down, she needed much individual direction
6. Jada Pinkett went on to star in *The Nutty Professor* (1996), and *Bamboozled* (2000)
7. The real surprise in this film was Queen Latifah
 - a. Previously a hip hop goddess who had only small or supporting roles in her film career

- b. “Latifah unleashed her vitality and bold sexuality, making her butch Cleo boldly funny and resilient; a take-charge sister who isn’t afraid of anything
 - c. Latifah followed with roles in *Living out Loud* (1998) and *The Bone Collector* (1999)
- iv. *Soul Food* (1997)
- 1. Story of an African American family, the loss of their family’s staple, and the drama that unfolds after her death
 - 2. Stars: Vanessa L. Williams, Vivica A. Fox, Nia Long, Brandon Hammond
 - 3. The film was a tough one to gain momentum from industry heads.
 - a. It was singer/songwriter/producer Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds along with his wife Tracy that decided to back the film, its production as well as the soundtrack (which became a powerful marketing tool for this film as well as other black films)

4. *Soul Food* grossed \$43 million at release
 - a. Also proved successful with the same female audience that Babyface attracted with his music
5. The important thing about this film was not that “it was about an African American family, but that it was about a family”
6. Issues with the screening of this film lied in the narrow range of theaters who would book them
 - a. “But most African American films usually don’t play in more than 1,100 (theaters). So if Oprah recommends a film, some of the [white] women can’t go out to see it because it’s not playing in their neighborhood, but some place on the other side of town where they’re less likely to go. That’s why it’s hard for black films to get the big [\$100 million] numbers ”-Kenneth Edmonds

w. Oprah’s Opus: *Beloved* (pgs. 389-393)

- i. Produced in 1998

ii. Although based on the Toni Morrison novel, one could say that It was Oprah's adaptation

iii. Oprah had become one of the most famous women in America

1. A true phenomenon that was written about and discussed continually.

2. Her talk show had soared in the ratings

a. So had her miniseries "The Women of Brewster Place"

3. She formed her own production company

a. Produced films for television

iv. *Beloved*

1. Disney Touchstone Pictures film

2. A historical drama

a. Recounted some of the terrors and brutalities of slavery

3. Opening character:

a. Sethe played by Winfrey

b. Lives in a home outside Cincinnati that seemed haunted

- i. Floorboard shake
 - ii. Grunts and cries are heard
 - iii. Corridors turn red
 - iv. “A house peopled by the living activity of the dead”
- c. Witnessed a series of devastating human atrocities
 - i. Slaves sold, tortured and killed
 - ii. Even saw her own mother hanged
 - iii. Fortunately she was able to escape the same fate
- d. Decided to cross over into Ohio from Kentucky
 - i. While taking the voyage she gave birth to her youngest daughter
- e. After settling in Ohio, her former slave master returned to take her back
- f. She attempted to kill her children to keep them from being enslaved
 - i. She did indeed murder her oldest daughter

- g. Years later she meets a woman named
“Beloved”
 - i. She wonders if this woman is the spirit
of her dead child
- 4. Film was shot on a \$53 million budget
- 5. Estimated \$30 million for marketing the film
 - a. Proved to be the most expensive film then ever
made about the African American experience
- 6. Opened with great fanfare
- 7. *New York Times*: “view in Hollywood as almost a test
case of whether studios will continue to finance the
handful of serious films each year on black themes.
The thinking is that if this film, given its pedigree,
blanket marketing campaign and potential attraction
to women, can’t make it, how man can?”
- 8. *Beloved* spelled the end of Hollywood’s periodic
attempts to do more serious films about the black
experience in America
 - a. Failure also seemed to spell the death of the
back woman’s film

9. Beah Richards

- a. Films: *Hurry Sundown* (1967), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), *The Great White Hope* (1989)
- b. TV: "Franks Place," "Roots," and "The Bill Cosby Show"

x. Movies for the Smart Young Hip Crowd: *love jones* and *Love and Basketball*

i. *Love Jones* (1997)

- 1. Appealing to a young and post-grad-age generation
- 2. Stars: Nia Long and Lorenz Tate
 - a. Juggle their love for one another with the demand of their art and their own self-absorption

ii. *Love and Basketball* (2000)

- 1. Appealed to a similar young black audience
- 2. Stars: Sanaa Lathan and Omar Epps
 - a. Unusual story of a young black girl and a young black boy who grew up together in middle-class black Los Angeles

- i. They are bound by their affection and
their love for the game of basketball
- y. New Actors (pg.395-402)
 - i. Unlike the actresses
 - 1. African American male stars still found the male-dominated industry more receptive to their talents
 - ii. Audiences too note of:
 - 1. Giancarlo Esposito, Roger Guenveur Smith, Mykelti Williamson and Lorenz Tate
 - iii. Also:
 - 1. Forest Whitaker
 - 2. Jamie Fox
 - 3. Tupac Shakur
 - 4. Marlon Wayans
 - 5. Sean "P. Diddy" Combs
 - 6. Don Cheadle
 - 7. Ving Rhames
 - 8. Will Smith
 - a. Was able to escape "typing" in his films

- b. Moviegoers found him rather bland and without much of an edge
- c. *Enemy of the State* (1998)
 - i. Carried a film and revealed an interesting character
- d. After *Enemy of the State*, Smith had proven his capacities
- e. Over the next 5 years he starred in box office hits
- f. Talk was circulated that “he would replace Denzel Washington as the top African American actor in the movie colony.
- g. Still he had a few films that didn’t live up to his blowouts

9. Martin Lawrence

- a. Starred in supporting roles initially
- b. Had his own sitcom “Martin”
- c. Starred, co-wrote, executive-produced, and directed:

i. *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*

(1997)

1. Film was “misogynistic, hateful
mess that trashed its leading lady

- a. But proved to be a box-
office success.

10. Chris Tucker

- a. Also rose to stardom through caricature
 - i. Screechy voice and enough eye-pops
and facial muggings to make Mantan
Moorland blush
 - ii. Looked as if he belonged in a Hollywood
film of the 30s
- b. Starred in a few supporting roles
 - i. But non showcased his talent
- c. *Money Talks* (1997)
 - i. This was the role he needed
 - ii. After he was able to star in other large
films where he was the main character

1. Lighting up the screen with his
“Coon-like” comedy

11. Chris Rock

- a. Worked his way up from supporting roles
 - i. *New Jack City* (1991)
 - ii. *Boomerang* (1992)
 - iii. *CB4* (1993)
- b. More important roles
 - i. *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998)
 - ii. *Dogma* (2000)
 - iii. *Nurse Betty* (2000)
 - iv. *Down to Earth* (2001)
- c. But into the late 90s Rock became a favorite
for his comedy on the “Chris Rock Show”

12. Cuba Gooding Jr.

- a. Won an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor of
1996
 - i. *Jerry Maguire*
- b. Other films:

- i. *Boyz in the Hood*, *A Few Good Men*,
Instinct (1999), *What Dreams May*
Come (1998)

- 1. These films as well as some
others were not box-office hits
- 2. They did little for his career

- c. First lead role:

- i. *Men of Honor* (2000)

- iv. African Americans occupied unique positions of some
influence and power within the industry

- v. At the end of the decade 6 remained:

- 1. Eddie Murphy
- 2. Wesley Snipes
- 3. Laurence Fishburne
- 4. Morgan Freeman
- 5. Samuel L. Jackson
- 6. Denzel Washington

- vi. Eddie Murphy: All Grown up, Looking for a Place to Go

- 1. Remained a well publicized actor
- 2. *Another 48 Hrs* (1992)

- a. Film failed to take its central characters and their relationship to a new direction

3. *The Nutty Professor* (1996)

- a. Played the character “Sherman Klump”
 - i. He develops a crush on Jada Pinkett’s character
 - ii. He believes that because of his size she will not fall for him
 - iii. As a scientist he is able to develop a serum that alters his genetics instantly
 - 1. He becomes “Buddy Love”
 - 2. Buddy is obnoxious and a loud-mouth
 - a. Much different from Sherman
- b. This film proved he was able to meet moviegoers expectations
- c. He also cast himself to play the parts of many of his family members

- i. Dressed in full makeup and suits to enhance his size it was still difficult to tell it was Murphy
4. After *The Nutty Professor*.
 - a. Murphy returned to a few sub-par films
5. Eddie Murphy's career had its ups and downs
 - a. A few great hits
 - b. A few disappointments
- vii. Laurence Fishburne: From Child Actor to Leading Man
 1. Born in Augusta, Georgia
 2. Grew up in Brooklyn, New York
 3. Acted as a child:
 - a. Soap opera "One Life to Live"
 - b. *Cornbread, Earl, and Me* (1975)
 - c. *Apocalypse Now* (1979)
 4. His later films were mostly supporting roles and some television appearances
 5. As far as African American male movie stars
 - a. Fishburn did not have the "typical" look

i. Still he proved to be a great actor with
staying power

6. Starred in *What's Love Got to Do With It*

a. His role as "Ike" won him an Oscar nomination
as Best Actor

7. His next films were a rollercoaster

a. Some were just not the right fit for his strong
personality

viii. Wesley Snipes

1. His physical appearance was truly that of a star in the
90s

2. He played a series of dramatic leads

3. From the Bronx

4. Studied at New York's High School for the Performing
Arts and New York's State University College in
Purchase

5. His first films were all about athletes!

6. His path to stardom came with more important roles
a. *Mo' Better Blues & Jungle Fever*

i. After starring in these films his career
was on the rise

b. He also played the “Buck” character in some
roles

7. Perhaps his most “daring” role:

a. Played a cross-dresser (drag queen) in *Too
Wong Foo: Thanks for Everything, Juie
Newmar* (1995)

8. At the end of the 20th century audiences no doubt
believed that race/culture still played some part in
everyone’s life.

z. Character Actors Turned Stars: Morgan Freeman and Samuel L.
Jackson (413-422)

i. Morgan Freeman

1. Persona was a smooth blend of intelligence,
assurance, and a keen self-awareness
2. He could be cunning, perceptive, shrewd, resourceful,
ruthless yet always endowed with a no-nonsense
sense straightforwardness

3. In each film Freeman starred in he portrayed the roles
brilliantly

4. He set the bar for other African American male actors

ii. Samuel L. Jackson

1. Born in 1968

2. From Chattanooga, Tennessee

3. Attended Morehouse College

a. Where he was known for being a rebel

b. Very fitting for the characters he would later
play

4. He once said that his ambition was to develop in to a
solid working character actor like Morgan Freeman

5. Quentin Tarantino's Films:

a. Cast Jackson in *Pulp Fiction* (1994)

i. Presented a bizarre plot of small-time
hoods, drugs, killings, betrayals, blood
and gore.

ii. Jackson Received an Oscar nomination
as Best Supporting Actor

b. Another Tanantino film:

i. Jackie Brown (1995)

1. Tale of a bizarre underworld
2. Pam Grier was at the center of
this film
3. Had many ingredients of early
Blaxploitation films
4. Unlike Blaxploitation films:
 - a. Was not a pop declaration
of war between black and
white
 - b. Race is not a big deal

6. Overall Jackson's career began to flourish with the
occasional flop film

- a. They would even seem strange, as if he was
either too good or too solid for the roles

*aa. Denzel Washington: Leading Man, Occasional Romantic Hero,
Enduring Superstar*

- i. No African American actor has surpassed Denzel*

ii. He has developed himself into a character that no matter what the topics of his films are...people will want to see the film simply because he is the star

iii. He has also won countless awards

1. But his role in *Training Day* (2001) won him the Oscar as Best Actor

a. That same year at the Oscars Sidney Poitier was honored for his “trailblazing” career

i. Also Halle Berry became the first African American woman to win an Oscar as Best Actress

bb. Throwbacks to the Past (pgs. 429-433)

i. Even during the supposedly new liberal Hollywood of the late 90s—the age of mega-black stardom and mega-black salaries—Hollywood remained a town where certain color lines were still drawn—where there remained *acceptable* roles for African American performers

1. Black moviegoers were often surprised to see distressing inmates—obvious throwbacks to the past—in such films as *Bulworth* (1998), *The Green*

Mile (1999), and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*

(2000), *The Patriot* (2000), *Traffic* (2000)

2. All of these films pictured black actors and actresses reverting back to the old Tom-type caricatures

ii. "...Hollywood was still, in the year 2000, disinclined to let black actors play human being human beings."-*New York Times*, A. O. Scott

iii. During the 90s African American superstars were born

1. A change was signaled at the tail end of one century and at the start of a new millennium

iv. It was also realized that in the movies it is always important for the audience, black and white, to understand who is telling the story, whose point of view those screen images are coming from, what is being told, and what is not being said in feature films.

v. At the start of the 21st century

1. American cinema found itself undergoing yet another transformation because of the presence and contributions of some remarkable African American talent

2. Maybe now cinema—the idea behind the early independent race movies—might full emerge as mainstream cinema

a. Altering American popular culture

i. Invigorating it with new rhythms, insights, perspectives, and a new aesthetic

vi. The talents of black artists have buoyed hopes and farfetched dreams

vii. After viewing African American film history in its almost 100-year span

1. One might ask exactly what goes into the making of a decent, humane black film?

a. Exactly what should the new black artists give to their audiences?

2. There are no definite outlines of what should be done

a. From the knowledge of the past one does have an idea of the possibilities, the potentialities, of a new black cinema

3. If there are to be significant African American films:

- a. The black actors, the directors, the writers, the producers, and the technicians who are now being given a chance to work must articulate the contemporary African American's mind, his/her point of view, aspirations, and goals.
- b. The black filmmaker must come to terms with the world in which he/she lives, no matter the location.

4. The dignity of the African American man and woman:

- a. Traditionally lain in his or her ability to face reality

- i. No matter how senseless it may seem

- ii. Then, if lucky, they can alter that reality.

- b. Politics and History.
- c. Romance and adventure
- d. Love and hope

- i. The subjects are limitless.

viii. "Yesterday may not have been great. But the talents of some extraordinary past black film artist make us believe that tomorrow has to be better"-Donald Bogle

APPENDIX B

Chapter 1

1. Circa or “c.”
Ex. (c. 1911)
2. Slapstick Comedy
3. Close-Up.
4. Cross
5. Rapid-fire Editing
6. Iris
7. Split-screen Shot
8. Realistic Lighting
9. Impressionistic Lighting
10. Guise-Disguise or cover up

Chapter 3

1. Effrontery
2. Kowtowing
3. Enigmatic
4. Rogue
5. Microcosm
6. Senegambian
7. Apotheosis
8. Christian Stoicism

Chapter 4

1. Impetus
2. Formulaic
3. Hollywood B Movie
4. Melodrama
5. Bourgeoisie
6. Obscurity

Chapter 5

1. Cain (“a bit of cain”)
2. Penal Institution
3. Masochistic
4. Anti-Semitism

Chapter 6

1. Apathetic
2. Kitsch
3. Miscegenation
4. Integrationist

Chapter 7

1. Insolence
2. Psychodrama
3. "B" movies
4. Protagonist

Chapter 8

1. Tenements-dwellings/home
2. Blaxploitation
3. Capitalistic society

APPENDIX C

Chapter 1

1. “No-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English Language”
>After reading the quote above, do you believe that this assessment may still be a living stereotype of African American men? Explain your reasoning why you believe this to be true or untrue.
2. “He may have been looking for a blue heaven, but he certainly did not want a black one”
>After learning about *The Masher*, what were your initial feelings? Does it surprise you to learn African Americans were not included in a hypothetical “blue heaven”?
3. During the first appearance of the Mammy, she was with husband. Throughout film she has become sexless, and most unattractive. Why do you think the husband figure was removed from the stereotypical Mammy role?
4. In *Birth of a Nation*, black militia dictated the new ways they preferred to be treated made several announcements.
Go to this Website and View Film:
http://www.archive.org/details/dw_griffith_birth_of_a_nation
>After watching the film, of those announcements, which do you believe were the hardest for the white townspeople to adhere to? Which was their “last straw”?
5. Name 3-5 African American male actors who have never starred in at least one comedic role.
6. Give 3-5 examples of prominent darker skinned actresses who have been given the same levels of sexuality or appeal in their films, as do lighter skinned actresses

Chapter 2

1. Are there any actors today who you have seen bucking their eyes, or performing any of the typical coonin/tomming characteristics?
2. Go to this website:
http://www.ovguide.com/movies_tv/the_little_rascals.htm
Is the dialect used, mannerisms, and scenarios the same for the white and black children? Are they portrayed the same/as equals?

3. After reading the section on the film *Free and Equal* (1915), do you believe that film today has changed in the way it portrays African Americans?
4. Imagine if minorities were still not allowed to star in film, do you believe that the film industry would be as profitable?
5. In the film *Hallelujah* (1929), Donald Bogle described the representation of black women as: “exotic sex objects,” do you believe this to be true today?

Chapter 3

1. Why do you believe many of the characters listed that began with flourishing careers took on weaker roles that could potentially end their careers?
2. Name 5-7 African American actors who have appeared in 26 films.
3. Name 3-5 of the most important Paul Robeson films, and why they were significant.
4. Do you think it is still true of African American actors safety in roles based on the previously “accepted” stereotypical Negro roles?
5. What was the highest cost per film during the 30s? Which film, and why do you think the large contribution was made for that film?

Chapter 4

1. What do you believe the term “teasing brown” represents?
2. “Octavus Roy Cohen created a series of all-Negro shorts that made fun of Negro lawyers and doctors by depicting them as familiar coons”
 - a. >Why do you think this was an easy target or an obvious joke?
3. Google 3-5 of the Black Film Companies mentioned in the reading...what were your results? Explain what you found and the level of ease/difficulty in finding the companies.
4. Why do you think the increase in Black film companies was or had to be labeled as an “underground movement”?
5. After reading this chapter, list 5 reasons why you believe Oscar Micheaux was more successful than his predecessors.

Chapter 5

1. There were many great African American performances during this era. Choose one film, the star character: name three significant things about him/her, what type of character (tom, coon, mulatto etc.) did they portray?
2. Perform a small research of actor James Edwards. Why was his career cut short unexpectedly?

3. Why do you think sex appeal was accepted from African American women far easier than that of a male?
4. After learning about the film *Intruder in the Dust* (1949), do you believe its has been films such as this that has impressed the belief that African American men are treated unjustly by the justice system?
5. Why do you think Donald Bogle chose to call the 1940s the “schizophrenic 40s”?

Chapter 6

1. Written history can be questionable at times, why do you think that Dorothy Dandridge was the first woman to have such a remarkable skin tone? Do you believe it was her skin tone? What other qualities could have donated to her fan appreciation?
2. Name 3 characters in film today, which you believe would be exemplary of heroes for the Integrationist Age.
3. Do you think films with mainly African American casts are representing a “fake world”? Choose an example film and explain your choice.
4. Who do you believe are African American characters who represent the Sidney Poitier of our time?

Chapter 7

1. Choose one of the “Black Art” films mentioned and name 3 reasons why it was a significant film.
2. Do you believe the family’s acceptance of Sidney Poitier’s character in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), was realistic? Why or why not?
3. Research the actor Jim Brown. What was the initial response from the audience?
4. Research the “Watts Riot.” Why did they begin? What was the outcome?

Chapter 8

1. Describe the “Watergate affair.” Who was involved, and what were the important issues?
2. What was the highest grossing African American film during this era? Why did it draw such a large audience? What was its significance?
3. Name 3-5 films where you believe the music donates the most important element to the film. Explain why.

4. The phrase “its only entertainment” has been used repeatedly to describe films that may be offensive or inappropriate. Why do you believe such material entertains Americans?

Chapter 9

1. Why do you think the “Era of Tan” came into existence? Why did films want to make audiences forget the blackness of a black star?
2. Name 3-5 “buddy films” that have been produced in the last 5 years. What makes them “buddy films”?
3. Can you name a “buddy film” where the African American character involved is in charge?
4. Do you believe that it is still a fact that the more an African American actor plays safe/stereotypical roles they will have more prosperous careers? Explain your answer.
5. What type of trend do you believe films in this era are taking? Which direction did they send African American characters? (back or forward) Explain your answer.
6. In the film *Glory* (1989), the climax occurs when a black military regiment gives their lives for “freedom.” Do you believe this is a modern-day portrayal of early Toms who would have sold themselves back into slavery to protect their Massa? Explain your answer.
7. Go to this website:
<http://www.africanaencyclopedia.com/apartheid/apartheid.html>
 What are the 3 most significant details of the apartheid in South Africa? What was the most troubling/interesting detail you found? Explain its importance?

Chapter 10

1. What were some of the issues that lead up to the riots in LA following the Rodney King beating?
2. What was “driving while black”?
3. What about Whoopi Goldberg made her an important actor in this era?
4. Research the film *Chameleon Street* (1991); what was the outcome of the main character?
5. What is the feminist opinion of Spike Lee?

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