



Another Tall Tale

One of the unpleasant aspects of this world of modern mass communication is that, when nothing is going on a lot of people go hungry, so it is that the mass communications boys have got to talk as though something is going on even when all is deadly dull. It keeps bread on the table and beer in the bucket. Thus in this election year as the Republican candidate reposes on the front porch and the Democratic candidate makes a windy hind of himself, the media boys have had to confect a little suspense, keeping some Americans from falling asleep and others from dying of laughing fits. The suspense-packed issue that they have whipped up this month is called the "possibility of a coattail effect." Supposedly, as this dreary campaign slumps along Americans are to sit on the edges of their chairs, wringing their hands over the perplexing question of just how many congressmen and senators of the Republican variety Mr. Nixon will bring into office with him.

Of course, the Democrats should not worry too much based merely on the evidence of numbers. The numbers favor them. The Republicans need thirty-nine accretions in the House and five in the Senate (this would tie things up in the Senate, allowing Mr. Agnew to tip the balance for the GOP). Such an accomplishment would, obviously, demand a pretty potent coattail, for only fourteen of the thirty-three Senate seats at stake now belong to Democrats.

But, nevertheless, according to the pundits, Mr. Nixon's lead is now so shattering that the rest of his campaign just has to be history making and that means something like a complete reversal of roles in Congress. Phooey and blah! I no more expect to see a legislature filled with Republicans, next term, than a legislature filled with vegetarians. As recent scholarship has shown, an increasing number of discriminating Americans are voting a split ticket. Further, the great boon of redistricting that was once expected to usher in an era of matchless democratic precision has actually encouraged incumbents to protect themselves in each new round of redistricting. Finally, and most important of all, the philosophical substance of our parties no longer makes much impression on an individual voter. Certainly the Republican Party no longer can be called a party of fixed principles, for what does the typical Republican promise that differs from a run of the mill Democrat? When a party no longer embraces a set of identifiable or comprehensible princi-

ples that deeply touch the needs of men, there just is no reason for men to identify strongly with a political party. Today's political parties do not address themselves to the personal and enduring needs of the citizens. And so long as this is the case citizens will not identify themselves deeply with the party.

Now, in the political era just passed people did identify strongly with the Republicans or with the Democrats, and those people who survived from that era

David Brudnoy:

Black Mischief

From *Stepin Fetchit to Slaughter* ("Jim Brown is Another Black Superman!" blares the *New York Daily News*): Progress. The Negro has been discovered as human being. He has his new filmic heroes. He rises to mythic heights of Identity. To equality through separatism. To Power. *The Man is Black*. *Melinda* is — well see her, starring Calvin Lockhart and Rosalind Cash. *Superfly* is oh my. *Blacula* sucks blood. Soul blood.

Go back, back, way back to early movies, to those medieval times when Negroes were ill-served by carpetbaggers and scallwags *a la* Hollywood (*Birth of a Nation*.) To the travesty-stereotypes of Negro lethargy, bumbling (Jack Benny's Rochester), cringing ("Feets, if you's ever served me, serve me now!" — the terrified Negro servant to Charlie Chan), smiling, grinning servility ("Aw, Miss Lou, ah don' mind staying 'round to help you" — the Negro maid to Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong*, mindless stupidity ("I don' know nothin' 'bout birthin' babies, Miss Scarlett" — Butterfly McQueen as Prissy to Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*), venality, natural rhythm. An undeniably sad record of misrepresentation, distortion, prejudice-confirming portrayal of colored people in the American film.

Then the gradual opening up, broadening, humanizing in the 1950s and 1960s — Harry Belafonte, Satchmo, Dorothy Dandridge and above all, Sidney Poitier: superspade, the Negro better than most Caucasians, oh-so-sympathetic friend of the young blind white girl in *A Patch of Blue*, devilishly clever cop in *They Call Me Mister Tibbs*, super-brainy son-in-law-to-be in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and on and on. An abysmal half-century of misuse at the hands of the film industry superseded by an evolved generation

will continue sedulously to vote for their respective party, as Everett Ladd and Charles Hadley have so convincingly argued in *The Public Interest* (Spring, 1971). But younger voters will not be so easily regimented behind a party. For it means no more today to be a Republican than to be a supporter of the Chicago Bears. To support the Bears is merely to carry an enthusiasm — admittedly a pretty bizarre enthusiasm — and it goes no deeper. So it is with Republicanism.

I believe the make up of the next legislature will be about the same as it is at present. There is only one occurrence that might interfere with my conclusion. If two or more Senate seats fall to Republicans, Mr. Byrd and one or more of his colleagues from the south might cross over to the Republican side causing Republican domination in that chamber. This is an outside chance and unlikely. Thus the big story of the month is not much of a story after all, and next year we can expect to see President Nixon struggling again with his unwieldy and un-productive alliance in a relatively unchanged legislature. □

of fanciful, albeit complementary, glorification at the de-prejudiced hands of the same film industry. On balance I prefer the sanitized, romanticized, deodorized Negro of yesterday's film to the grossly maligned nigger of long ago. But each twisted reality, though so do most films.

Granted, within the past ten years or so, American movies have done somewhat better with Negroes in *peripheral* roles. An attempt at "fairness" in films marched apace with the same trend on television: with an almost embarrassing fealty to the aim of putting at least one Negro into every TV program's regular cast, the tube gives us a Barney for "Mission Impossible" and a Mark for "Ironside," while the cinema follows suit.

But in both media, producers have failed to produce, to come up with believable Negro characterizations for lead roles. The breakthrough of "I Spy," which almost (but not quite) gave equal billing to Bill Cosby with white Robert Culp, preceded "Julia," a pleasant middle-class fantasy — not that there aren't middle-class Negroes, but simply that "Julia" somehow didn't make it — which was followed by Redd Foxx in "Sanford and Son," a sort of poor relation to "All in the Family." Rowan and Martin's "Laugh-In" has been most successful in using Negro comedians in ways that both show off their special talents and avoid tokenism, romanticization, condescension and exploitation. "Laugh-In's" imitators have followed a similar pattern. And Flip Wilson has made it to the very top on TV — in comedy. Yet believable Negro lead characters in straight dramatic roles have not developed on TV to any great degree.

But at least the tube's excesses in star-

ring roles ("Amos and Andy" then, "Sanford and Son" now, for instance) have been minor, and TV's attempts at accurate representation in secondary roles has been notable ("Mod Squad" is superlative in this regard). While the same thing can be said for the cinema about the latter point, regrettable caricaturing has now become almost standard in that medium in lead characterizations. Although an individual theatre movie usually costs more to make than any one segment of a television series, there are no theoretical limits to the number of movies that can be made, whereas prime-time TV series are necessarily quite a few each season. TV producers fear to make a colossal mistake that will haunt them for twenty or thirty-nine episodes, and so timidity reigns on TV far more than in the movies. Accordingly, daring can more easily prevail, for better or worse, in the theatre cinema. Unfortunately, the result has been not many bold, successful films depicting Negroes in major roles at least as true to life as those depicting whites, but rather a spate of really poor flicks starting probably with *Shaft* and from there multiplying almost geometrically, getting more frequent — and worse.

Shaft spawned *Shaft's Big Score*, a lamentably gross rip-off; more will come of that lineage. *Superfly* and *Slaughter* are out of *Shaft*, abortively. *Blacula* would be camp, though camp is dead, were it not so unintentionally awful. Originally designed for TV, and showing it, *The Man* wound up on your downtown picture show screen owing to an accurate evaluation of the level of cinema tastes of the average American film-goer. As the "black" film perhaps taken most seriously in the last two years, *The Man* requires at least a bit more discussion.

The President, Vice President and House Speaker all go to their reward, simultaneously. Which leaves the President Pro-tem of the Senate, a Negro (James Earl Jones) put there out of fashionable considerations. Hence: a Negro President, all of a sudden, who decides to *Assert Himself*. Best by faddish radicalism at home (a with-it offspring who chides him for his Brooke-ishness) and restless political power-brokers beating the drums outside, *The Man* can't "hack it."

The fact of the matter today, and for the foreseeable future, is that only a Negro as competent, Establishment-liberal, and smooth as Edward Brooke of Massachusetts is likely to sit in the Senate. A Brooke could indeed become President Pro-tem of the Senate. In the highly implausible event of the deaths of those ahead of him in the line of presidential succession, such a man could become President of the United States. Or, four years hence, vice presidential candidate with someone like Spiro Agnew at the head of the ticket, and then president. Such a Negro politico would not be *The Man*. Any honest attempt to picture Negroes in politics at the highest levels, in a film shot in 1972 about the approximate present, might be expected to start with things as they are. *The Man*

doesn't. The best of a bad and extensive lot of what might be called Black Fantasy films, *The Man* is nonetheless dismal.

I captioned this piece "Black Mischief," borrowing a good title from an Evelyn Waugh book. But since whites are also responsible for some of these films — and almost totally to blame for what occurs on television — the burden of guilt can be spread together and equally. If the Negro film audience is so witless as to accept these movies seriously, they more or less deserve what they'll get; if white film-goers — and critics — can't bring themselves to excoriate these sillinesses, out of fear perhaps of appearing "racist," they demonstrate, in effect, a genuine facet of racism: condescension. □

EDITORIAL II

(continued from page 4)

It has not been "man" but specific Arab governments that have allowed the terrorists to operate in and from their states, supplied them with money, arms, and ammunition, and encouraged them to carry on their activities. It has not been "man" but Red China and the Soviet Union that have given diplomatic support and even directly supplied arms to the terrorists. To treat the slaughter in Munich as an example of "man's inhumanity to man" is to deprive the event of its particular reality and make it difficult to determine who is responsible and, therefore, who is to blame.

As for the proposition that "violence solves nothing," it is just as meaningless as the proposition that "violence solves everything." The fact that the proposition is meaningless does not trouble the people who utter it, for they are not aware of its meaninglessness. What they are aware of is their abhorrence of violence, their commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, and their desire to see violence end. When they say "violence solves nothing," they are not so much stating a fact as declaring a faith and expressing a hope. By repeating propositions like "violence solves nothing," they are trying to persuade others not to use violence. But people such as the Arab terrorists and their supporters are not going to take such propositions seriously. The only people who are likely to take such propositions seriously are people who are not disposed to use violence in the first place, and some of these people have the responsibility of coping with the terrorists. Propositions like "violence solves nothing" will not influence the

terrorists, but they may inhibit other people from taking strong action against the terrorists.

Mourning—and moralizing—over dead Jews is an old tradition, but this tradition should at least be supplemented by vigorous efforts to protect Jews and other people from being attacked and killed by Arab terrorists. Such efforts should include thorough intelligence work to detect Arab terrorists and planned terrorist operations, adequate security measures to thwart terrorist operations that are actually carried out and swift and severe punishment for terrorists who are captured. Our government and other governments—if there are any—that are neither totally committed to the Arab states nor totally committed to being non-committed can put diplomatic and economic pressure on the Arab states that harbor terrorists and other states that support them. Some people argue that it would not be "pragmatic" to put pressure on these states, but a pragmatism that consists essentially of making arrangements with anyone under any circumstances, and that is uninformed by either ends or values, must result in political ruin or, perhaps what is worse, the ruin of the people who adopt it.

For its part, Israel should maintain its determination to combat the terrorists wherever it can. Fortunately, Israel has not been seduced into paralysis by those who lament "man's inhumanity to man" and proclaim that "violence solves nothing." Like all civilized and decent people, the Israelis are reluctant to use violence but they know, from many years of horrible experience, that, if civilized and decent people are to live in peace, barbarians and butchers must not have their way.

Israel should attack the terrorists and it should receive the support of our government for doing so, not only because it is practically necessary but because it is morally imperative. To attack people who conceive and carry out such acts as the murder of the eleven Israeli Olympians is, among other things, to give concrete expression to moral outrage. Violence has spread wantonly in recent years leading some persons to conclude that violence benumbs a man's senses and a nation's conscience. This is a dangerous misperception. It is not so much that our senses have been benumbed by violence as it is that we have failed to respond with morally justified action. It is not numbness that has set in; it is paralysis—paralysis induced by fatuous moralizing. Moral sentiments that are not given concrete expression become inauthentic or extinct, and moralizing is not an acceptable substitute for concrete moral action. To do little or nothing but moralize over the slaughter at Munich is not a sign of a higher morality or even of pragmatism. It is a sign of cowardice and indifference, and such a sign can only encourage the spread of lawlessness, mayhem and death, not only in the Middle East but throughout the world.

Terry Krieger

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

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