

FILM

A stunning TV docu-drama on the slave trade

THE FIGHT AGAINST SLAVERY

Written by Evan Jones
Produced by Christopher Relling
for BBC and Time-Life TV

This six-hour documentary-drama has slid onto the airwaves via independent TV stations almost surreptitiously. It's as if critics and entertainment page editors had exhausted themselves in their effusions over *Roots* and had not an adjective left to spend on a far more penetrating, better written, acted and produced treatment of the same material.

Since *The Fight Against Slavery* is a British effort (despite the collaboration of Time-Life TV) it focuses on British participation in the West African slave trade, British efforts to outlaw it by an act of Parliament, and the struggle of Jamaican blacks to achieve full emancipation.

Evan Jones, who gets a solo writing credit, describes himself as the descendant of Jamaican slaves and slave-owners. Perhaps because of this heritage, or perhaps because he has done a solid job of historical research and a brilliant job of translating it into dramatic scenes, he is able to supply the shadings that make

'My message? that those who do not understand the past are condemned to repeat it.'

the story completely believable and profoundly illuminating.

Instead of cardboard figures of evil (or weak) white traders, masters and overseers, and admirable, but mostly impotent black victims, Jones gives us a full spectrum of complex and contradictory human beings on both sides of the color line—people who change as events act upon them, repent of wrong-doing, seek absolution in "works" against the institution of slavery, or grow from submission to defiance.

We meet African renegades who grow rich on the traffic in their compatriots; white captains and surgeons whose stomachs are turned by the experience of the Middle Passage, some of whom turn to drink, some to religious abolitionism; planters who are ut-



Accommodations in the hold of a "tight packer" on the Middle Passage.

terly corrupted by their position; missionaries who try to bring religion without freedom and become unwitting accomplices in rebellion; politicians who temporize with speeches about "achieving what is possible without tearing the party apart," others who persist fanatically; and awesomely heroic black martyrs who give their lives where the sacrifice makes sense.

Jones has used historical figures—famous and obscure—and has made them completely real, with the assistance of a superb cast of actors, black and white. All the major incidents are authentic, and so is much of the dialogue. (The speeches in Parliament are all taken from Hansard, the official record.)

Locations are equally authentic: on the slave coast of what is

now Ghana; in the old cities and back country plantations of Jamaica; and the manors and landscapes of western England. The House of Commons as it was in the 18th century, when American independence was being debated along with the abolition of the slave trade, is painstakingly and effectively reproduced.

But it is to the script that the major credit for achievement must go.

Even with the type of promotion that *Roots* got from ABC, *The Fight Against Slavery* might never achieve the kind of ratings that shake the sponsor tree. It is too good, or we are too accustomed to the not-so-good. But it will leave a deep imprint of truth on the mind and hearts of those lucky enough to see it.

They will have learned some-

thing of the history of the slaves as well as the slave-makers, and how what Jones calls "the vested interests" behaved in this connection. Asked what he considers the message of the drama, Jones answered, "If there is one, I suppose it's that those who don't understand the past are condemned to repeat it."

It seems unlikely that there will be another mass enslavement of one race by another, but the last lines of *The Fight Against Slavery* point the direction in which one may look for the repetition. As recently liberated black men are driven to the same hard labor by the lash of hunger, one of them speaks—over the image of the noose—the bitter truth that slavery comes again in different disguises.

—Janet Stevenson

Truffaut's latest film: a gentle satire on macho sex

THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN

Written and directed by Francois Truffaut
Nestor Almendros, director of photography
Distributed by Cinema V, not rated

Truffaut's *The Man Who Loved Women* is a film about a man who did not love women, made by a man who does. Witty, wise and charming, it is a film about sex without love, about changes in the relationships of the sexes.

A hearse drives past. One car after another pulls up to an immense stone wall. One black clad woman after another gets out. Some come singly, some in pairs. The last dashes up in her little car, throws a black coat over a tennis dress and joins the parade. The stage is set for gentle humor.

As the graveside service begins one woman (Brigitte Fossy) moves apart from the rest and becomes the narrator who leads you into the story of the man who could attract so varied a feminine cortege.

Bertrand (Charles Denner) was a bachelor, fortyish, who worked in a testing laboratory and made a good enough living to have an apartment packed with books, some nice furniture, some snobby. His main passion was chasing girls, all sorts of girls. Legs, more than any other part of the

anatomy, turned him on. But initial unavailability is what really got him going.

In the hands of a less sophisticated and gentle director *The Man Who Loved Women* could have been a Lubitschian comedy. But Truffaut is too aware and too human to fall into such a trap. Bertrand is not just a macho sexist. He is intelligent, sensitive, capable of feeling guilty about using a woman, and as much used by women as they by him.

This is what the laughter is about: the games men and women play with and on each other in their sexual contests. Bertrand describes them in his memoirs, trying to understand why he has never been able to make a lasting commitment to any woman, never wanted any of them to stay with him through the night.

There is Delphine (played by Nelly Bougeaud) who delights in dangerous situations. She enjoys sex most when there is the possibility of being discovered, like "making love" in the model bedroom of a department store. There is Liliane, the hard-headed waitress who can flip a masher over her shoulder in an expert Judo maneuver; Helene, a woman his own age who turns him down. (He's too old for her; she is at the age when she likes young men.)

The women are not played as foils to Bertrand or as abstract



Delphine (Nelly Bougeaud) watching Bertrand (Charles Denner) watching a girl go by.

symbols, but as lovingly observed individuals, delightful in their own right. Some are sad, looking for completion in a man unable to complete himself. Others are strong, tolerating him for the pleasure of the moment. Aurore, Isabelle, Fabienne, Genevieve, Denise, Nicole, Uta—delicious miniature portraits. And then Vera, marvelously played by Leslie Caron. The film is so economically made that one can conjure up the entire love affair between Vera and Bertrand in the brief encounter in the cloak room of a Paris hotel.

The Man Who Loved Women is Truffaut's sixteenth film since *Four Hundred Blows*, of which one is reminded by the flashback scenes of Bertrand's adolescence. He has become a master of simplicity. He knows when to use the cliché image to advance the tale quickly: Bertrand opens his window; there is the Eiffel Tower; he

has gone to Paris.) But he can also invent the symbolic image that avoids the cliché: the lady who shared his evening has brought Bertrand breakfast on a tray; they kiss; a kitten finishes the breakfast on the tray with gusto. A girl borrows her grandmother's dress; Bertrand must undo 137 buttons before he can arrive at the girl.

When the lines are of no importance, exterior sounds overpower the human voice like a love scene in a thunderstorm, or when Bertrand's editor takes him to see the memoirs being set in type. What matters is that Bertrand's book is being printed, so the sound of the linotype drowns out all conversation.

In all Truffaut's films there are real places and people work at real jobs. Bertrand's laboratory where he tests the action of turbulence, air on planes, waves on ships, is interesting. The publish-

ing house that accepts his book is believable.

The locations are one of the pleasures of the film. Montpellier must be a very pretty city—modern buildings mixed with ancient ones, parks and trees. A small bistro, a fancy Paris hotel, Nestor Almendros has made them all look beautiful.

Charles Denner is marvelously funny as the obsessed Bertrand. There is a sweetness to his character that makes him appealing and vulnerable. But one has no difficulty seeing that Bertrand's infantile immaturity makes him the victim of his own behavior as well as its perpetrator.

Truffaut takes a very dim, if affectionate view of his hero. He leaves you with the impression that it is the women he is betting on.

—Mavis Lyons
Mavis Lyons is a film editor in New York and reviews films regularly for IN THESE TIMES.

Business VS. Capitalism



Gary Sinick

By Chuck Fager

This summer in San Francisco, a turning point of sorts was reached in the development of alternative business enterprises. July 14-28 the first classes of the New School for Democratic management were conducted, with more than 90 students enrolled.

"Too many people in alternative economic ventures have confused being anti-capitalist with being anti-businesslike," says David Olsen, head of the New School for Democratic Management. He's out to change that.

During these two weeks, workers from food coops, feminist record companies, bakeries and even newspapers located up and down the Pacific coast and from as far away as New Mexico dug in to courses on such basic business concepts as accounting, budgeting and marketing, along with more theoretical topics like how to run a small business democratically without burning everybody out.

The reason this quiet and little-noted course of instruction can be called a landmark is perhaps best summed up by David Olsen, the school's organizer and coordinator: "Too many people in alternative economic ventures have been confusing being anti-capitalist with being anti-businesslike," he says.

"And so, for as much as ten years now people have been trying to make new kinds of enterprises work without much real success. Now some people are ready to outgrow these anti-businesslike attitudes; they realize that this doesn't mean giving up or selling out their politics. We're helping them confront issues like wages, planning and growth that have too often been obstacles to their success. Our students see that they need basic training to cope with these matters and achieve their own objectives."

Naturally a self-selected group like the New School's first students can't be regarded as any sort of reliable cross-section of the people interested in alternative business. Yet just the appearance of such a school, and its success with its first curriculum should be music to the ears

of those people—and they are many—whose experiences with alternative economics has been marked by high ideals undermined, high hopes dissipated and high energy eaten up by frustration, failure and alienation.

Burnout and waste.

Working on the school has certainly been good for organizer Olsen's spirits. He had been through just such a set of experiences—on both ends. A Berkeley graduate in English, he was heavily involved in the anti-war movement during the Indochina years. Later, in Cambridge, Mass., he joined a radical collective called the Africa Research Group. "We tried to support the group through publication and sales of the results of our work," he recalls, "but we could never get that really together."

During this time he was asked to serve on the board of a local activist foundation, the Cambridge Ministry to Higher Education, which made grants to many alternative enterprises. "Our Board looked at a lot of groups, and handled even more proposals," he says, "and after a while I could see patterns in their success and failure. Too many groups would begin some project with a lot of enthusiasm and not much money, they would go for about two years or maybe a little more, and then they'd falter and usually fold up. The people who had been involved would end up feeling very burned out, and many ended up abandoning their work for change entirely."

"I saw this pattern as a tremendous waste of resources—a waste of money, of human potential and of political capital as well. People in the communities where these projects were located learned not to trust these efforts. They couldn't depend on alternative institutions, and so if anything their dependence, however grudging, on mainstream institutions was ultimately increased."

Olsen's interest in a new kind of business school as a means of breaking up this unhealthy pattern began in his reflections on these experiences. He also drew on the work of radical economists like Derek Shearer, who had studied the history of the New Democratic party in British Columbia, a democratic socialist party which took power some years ago.

"Once the party had won the provincial elections for the first time, the leadership discovered that they had no one who knew how to actually run the government machinery," Olsen says. "So they began to talk about the need for a school of management that would be built around the new values they were trying to embody."

Successful beginning.

Olsen's idea actually got off the ground in the spring of 1976 when he persuaded the Foundation for National Progress, a corporate offshoot of the monthly magazine *Mother Jones*, to give him a grant that would enable him to develop a proposal for the school.

He then worked for eight months do-

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