

"The Color Purple" has universal theme

a review
by Laura Nelson

"The Color Purple" offers three hours of rebirth and enlightenment. Based on Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and directed by Steven Spielberg, this movie transcends racial barriers and gives everyone a chance to relate to the universal theme of having one's inner beauty overlooked.

Yet blacks have a film that reveals the obstructions that hinder us, the love that overwhelms us and the bonds that hold us together.

"The Color Purple" begins with young Celie pregnant by her father, being criticized by his remark, "Celie, you got the ugliest smile this side of God's creation," thus forming a complex that will follow her for most of her life. Celie is molested by her father twice, both times becoming pregnant and having her children taken from her.

When Celie marries Mister, who wants to wed her sister Nettie, she leaves her father's

bondage for a life of humiliation with her husband. Celie's father and husband believe women are inferior to them, useful only as servants.

Celie finds true love and acceptance from her sister Nettie. When Celie leaves home, her father tries to molest Nettie and she leaves to stay with Celie. Then Mister tries to molest Nettie and she rejects him. Mister retaliates by forcing Nettie off his land because this will hurt the sisters more than anything else he could do. Celie asks Nettie to write and Nettie tells her and Mister that "ain't nothing but death gon' keep me from her."

Celie waits for Nettie's letters, which Mister hides. Celie assumes Nettie is dead. A turning-point comes, for Mister's eldest son, Harpo, is about to marry Sophia, the antithesis of Celie. Sophia is a strong, willful, outspoken woman. Harpo seems to have overcome his father's beliefs about women. Mister is angered by Sophia's mystical behavior and Celie is shocked. Harpo and Sophia are married and Sophia is the

stronger partner.

Harpo, confused by the role reversal, seeks advice from Mister who tells him, "Women are like children—got to let'em know who got the upper hand. Got to beat'em every now and then." Celie, conditioned to believe it is normal to be beaten, tells Harpo to beat Sophia. When Harpo tries and fails, Sophia goes to Celie, hurt by her betrayal.

The second contrast to Celie when Shug Avery, Mister's past lover, appears. Celie is amazed that a woman could be so free-willed. When Shug becomes free, Celie finds out that Shug has been rejected by her father because of the life she chose to live. As the two women become close, Shug penetrates Celie's loneliness. Shug gets to the heart of Celie's many complexes and tells her to "remember her name," in a song called "Miss Celie's Blues." Shug rejuvenates Celie.

"The Color Purple" reveals how an opportunity can never have the opportunity to be a whole person and how a person can be stripped

down to nothing. This happens when Sophia hits a white man and is imprisoned for eight years. The white characters are self-righteous and patronizing, always doing "so much for the colored people." Her "offense" kills Sophia's will.

As the lives of everyone in Celie's environment change, she desires nothing more than to be free of Mister's slavery. Shug returns married and intercepts a letter from Nettie. It is at this moment that Celie finds out Mister has been taking her letters.

Celie's hatred for Mister's abuse overflows and Celie's rebirth comes after she attempts to kill Mister. Celie tells Mister during a family dinner that she is leaving and all he has done to her will come back down on him. Mister, humiliated, tells her, "you black, you ugly, you stupid, you woman—ugly ain't nothing!" These words only give Celie hope, for she exclaims that though she may be all these things, "I'm here . . . by God, I'm here." With her new outlook on life and herself, Celie gives everyone—Sophia, Shug,

Harpo—a second chance to live.

"The Color Purple" reveals the process of rebirth and the chance to overcome all obstacles. All the characters represent people oppressed by themselves and others. Celie exemplifies the black woman struggling to deal with the definitions put upon her by sexist men. She is rejuvenated by sisterhood with women who have also been abused and neglected by men they love.

Although the movie has black characters, everyone can relate to the drastic consequences negativity can have on one's sense of self.

"The Color Purple" is not a movie of stereotypes. What is seen is the reality of living in the South in the 1920s. The film stresses the importance of fulfilling one's destiny and sharing one's love.

As Shug said, ". . . pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in the field and don't notice it . . ."—in essence, it angers Him when we all fail to notice the beauty we have inside—as beautiful as the color purple.

Attack on movie: critic fails to grasp his own story

a column
by Karen R. Taylor

As a black woman, I am not angry at Hollywood for adapting Alice Walker's masterpiece to the screen. However, I read with great dismay Courtland Milloy's article, "A 'Purple' Rage Over a Rip-Off" in the Metro section of the Dec. 24 issue of The Washington Post. It included uninformed, malicious and callous attacks on Alice Walker, Shirley Chisholm and Whoopi Goldberg.

Regarding Alice Walker's book, "The Color Purple," Milloy stated, "I got tired a long time ago of white men publishing books by black women about how screwed up black men are." The real issue here is that the book openly deals with incest and sexual abuse. It is a marvelous story of human dignity and triumph. Incest and sexual abuse cross race and cultural lines. It is time that society deals with these issues whether the victim is black or white. And books

written by black women deserve to be published regardless of the race or sex of the publisher. By the same token, black men should also deal with the black experience.

Milloy states that the movie was shown as "part of a fundraiser for the National Political Congress of Black Women, headed by the former representative Shirley Chisholm," who announced when the group was formed that she was "sick and tired of being mistreated by black men and white women." The only relationship of this to "The Color Purple" that I see Milloy trying to draw is that black women should never speak out when they are being mistreated.

Milloy is equally demeaning to black actresses and actors. He says that "Steven Spielberg wouldn't pay top dollar to get a real actress to play the part of Celie. He got Whoopi cheap, and the rest of the cast, too." Who is a real actress? Those who advertise

Jordache jeans and Maybelline products? Milloy's attack against black artists comes at a time of high unemployment and on the heels of Cicely Tyson's lament that the industry should be open to minority applicants regardless of how the roles are written.

As a black female, I applaud the book and the movie. Unlike Courtland Milloy, I understand that a movie is merely a series of scenes spliced together from which a theme is generated. In the case of "The Color Purple," there are three themes: love, survival and dignity in the face of adversity.

I would like to thank the Alice Walkers, the Shirley Chisholms, the Gwendolyn Brooks, the Maya Angelous, the Winnie Mandelas, the Ida B. Wells and many more black women to come for having the courage to write, to speak, to tell our collective story. It is Milloy's story too, even though he has difficulty accepting it.

Belle hosts own show

by Dee Little

"I've always wanted to be a television host, but I never dreamed that the chance would come this soon," says senior Cassandra Henderson.

In June, she wrote a letter to Mid-Atlantic Productions and it has led to her becoming the host of the "Steppin' Out" show Fridays at 12:30 a.m.

Cassandra criticized a show called "Perspective."

"The entire show was awful. The technical difficulties were unreal. The hostess was inarticulate. The show was such a mess, it shouldn't have been aired until all the wrinkles were ironed out. I was so angered by this, I wrote the station and told them exactly how I felt," she explains.

As a result of the letter, she was invited to visit the station, and this led to an audition and her landing the job.

Once Cassandra started her new job, her dream came into perspective.

"Being a talkshow hostess was my ultimate goal. I just never realized that I would have it at 21 years of age. I remember in high school, my friends called me Barbara Walters, and it's ironic because a lot of people here at Bennett call me that also," she explained.

Cassandra not only hosted "Perspective," but she also produced, did interviews, and wrote her own material.

"I felt so free with everything. My reporter and I would put our heads together and come up with ideas for a program, get them confirmed, and the rest was up to me. I had a chance to use my imagination and state my opinion," she says.

In "Steppin' Out," she does just about the same things, but she's a little bit more excited about this program. She explains, "I'm really excited about 'Steppin' Out' because of the visibility of the show . . . Channel 48 reaches most of North Carolina. It allows me so much exposure."

Cassandra is enjoying "celebrity treatment." She wishes

that everyone would jump at every opportunity she can. She emphasized that the first opportunity can be a great experience.

"I just wish that everyone would take the challenge, especially my Bennett sisters. If it weren't for this first opportunity, I don't know what would have happened to me after graduation. Now I have the confidence and the know-how that assure me a job after graduation," she says.



TV host: Senior Cassandra Henderson wrote a letter and landed a show. (photo by Myra Davis)

Smoking is addictive

You need to quit

Kicking the smoking habit is as difficult as taking physics first semester freshman year.

So if you want to quit smoking, it is important to plan your counterattack against the nicotine impulse. It's one thing to jump in the '73 Toyota on the spur of the moment and head for Ft. Lauderdale for spring break, but kicking the smoking habit takes planning.

How do you plan your freedom from cigarettes?

Robert Shipley, Ph.D., director of Duke University Medical Center's Quit Smoking Clinic, said planning your freedom from cigarettes depends on skill rather than will power.

Those skills include the knowledge of how to prepare yourself to quit, how to break the physical addiction to nicotine and how to maintain a nonsmoking lifestyle.

"Smokers have to learn how to relax without a cigarette, how to deal with the temptations to smoke, how to handle their anger in other ways than having a cigarette, and how to handle other activities usually associated with smoking," Shipley said.

First, students should determine a practical rather than an ideological reason to quit. Quitting smoking because you lose your breath from climbing the dormitory stairs can be more motivating than quitting only because you 'ought' to quit.

Shipley, who smoked for 10 years before quitting, said that most ex-smokers soon forget why they quit in the first place. He said those wanting to quit should post their reasons in prominent places to constantly remind themselves of their intentions.

Next, decide whether you want to try quitting cold turkey or whether you want gradually to reduce the amount of nicotine inhaled.

Shipley said you should avoid trying to quit by gradually reducing the number of cigarettes. Trying to end a love affair by gradually seeing the person less and less. Perhaps it can be done, but it is very painful.

If you choose a gradual route, try to reduce your nicotine by no more than 40 percent each week. If you're smoking Marlboro Kings now, which contain 1 milligram of nicotine, you should switch to a brand with .6 milligrams of nicotine, such as True 100s, for one

week, then to a brand with .3 milligrams, such as Kent III Kings. Then, with less nicotine in your system, quit cold turkey.

"A lot of smokers who switch to low-nicotine cigarettes don't like the brand so they find it easier to quit altogether," Shipley said. Also, smokers usually feel better after gradually reducing nicotine intake and it gives them self-confidence to quit, he said.

Those switching to brands lower in nicotine are cautioned, however, not to compensate by smoking more cigarettes or drawing smoke deeper into the lungs.

No matter how you plan to quit, it is important to enlist allies, Shipley said. Tell these friends or relatives of your plans to quit, ask for their support and discuss with them specifically how they can help. You might ask them to help talk you through an urge to smoke.

Finally, look at the calendar and plan a quit-smoking date. And don't choose a date associated with stress, such as exam time.

Then avoid temptations to smoke by destroying your cigarettes. Keep away from smokers and smoky places. Shipley said quitters should avoid the party scene for at least a couple of weeks.

If you go to a party and drink, the temptation may be too great to avoid a drag.

Pulling out of the party circuit for a while may be difficult, but no one said quitting smoking was easy. "Under the best of circumstances, smoking is a very difficult habit to break," Shipley said. "Studies have shown that quitting the smoking habit is as difficult as quitting heroin or other drug addictions."

Once smokers kick the habit, they should develop coping techniques to help them from picking up another cigarette. Remind yourself that urges to smoke are only temporary. Think about what you can buy with the money no longer wasted on cigarettes.

Properly express your frustrations and anger. Pound a pillow. Take a walk. Find a cigarette substitute, such as gum or sunflower seeds.

But, most important, stay on the wagon. Three of four ex-smokers who have just one cigarette after the quit date return to regular smoking.

And, after six months of freedom from smoking, celebrate.