



The Compass



Movie Review

School Daze: controversial film focuses on black conflicts in U.S.

By Lisa Gregory

"I wouldn't give my college education up for anyone, not even Jesus Christ himself," says a college student in Spike Lee's hit film *School Daze*.

Set in Mission College, a fictitious black institution located somewhere in the south, the film deals with many topics that are part of everyday life for black college students.

First, *School Daze* deals with the social activist who feels that it is his duty to enlighten his fellow students as well as the world about the problems faced by South African blacks.

The outspoken apartheid opponent, played by Larry Fishburne, also has to deal with his on-campus enemies: the Gamma Phi Gamma fraternity, and their witty leader, portrayed by Giancarlo Esposito.

The Gamma Phi Gamma's are by far the most elite and influential fraternity on the Mission College campus. The pledges of this fraternity would do anything, say anything or be anything to get into this socially prominent organization.

Spike Lee, who also directed *School Daze*, plays a Gamma pledgee in the film. The fraternity's initiation rituals are mentally and emotionally draining, physically unbearable, socially disgraceful, and down right inhuman.

"We were most kind to the

college fraternities," Lee said in an interview. "Most initiations are much worse."

School Daze also focuses on the prejudices that are within the black race—on which lighter skinned blacks look down on their darker skinned brothers and sisters.

The poor, short-haired, dark-skinned blacks were called 'pick-a-ninnies; the middle class, long-haired, light-skinned blacks were referred to as "wanna-be's," as in "wanna be white."

Lee's treatment of this issue makes a powerful and relevant statement about prejudice in the black community; however, his categorizations are oversimplified and over-

emphasized. Many blacks cannot be neatly placed into either of these two categories.

School Daze also exploits black women and presents most of them in a negative light.

The female characters lack substance and the ability to stand on their own. They are, for the most part, portrayed as stereotypes, whose only values lie in their singing, dancing and performing sexual favors on command.

Yet, Lee has said he is prepared for the controversy that will result from the film.

"*School Daze*" is a much more mature work than *She's Gotta Have It* (Lee's first film)," he said.

"It deals with bigger, more important issues. This film is about "our existence, about being black in white America, and to me, there is nothing more important than that."

The film fails to reflect Lee's viewpoint, however. The film does not deal with black existence in white America; rather, it deals with black conflicts in black America—in the black culture.

School Daze covers many aspects of college life, ranging from homecoming to romance. Scenes switch back and forth between characters who have individual problems and interests. In spite of the confusing plot sequence, the film's ideas and messages are conveyed clearly.

Although *School Daze* has its shortcomings, the film is good because it has the power to make the viewer think.



Above, Lee directs a scene from *School Daze*, featuring Fishburne, who portrays a student civil rights activist.

Book Reviews

Gaines spins a tale of murder

By Lavette Washington-Bias

Ernest Gaines, author of *The Autobiography of Jane Pittman*, again captures the South's oppressive attitude in his newest novel, *A Gathering of Old Men* (Alfred Knopf, New York).

Set in Louisiana during the early 1970s, the story chronicles the events following the murder of Beau Boutan, a Cajun farmer. The murder takes place on Marshall Plantation, owned by a strong-willed and head-strong young white woman, Candy Marshall.

Candy does everything to protect her residents, and treats them as equals. Candy claims to have killed Beau Boutan, but no one believes her. Just before she calls the sheriff to report the crime, she gathers together a dozen or more aging black men, each of whom carries a recently fired shotgun; all the men claim to have shot Beau.

Sheriff Mapes, in his effort to

find the real killer, finds that he can't penetrate the circle of protection the old men have formed around the real murderer. The story reveals that the Boutan's family years of oppressive practices have given the old men more than enough reason to seek vengeance.

The novel is told through the voices of the men and women affected by the Boutans:

The narrators include Mathu, Mapes, and Candy.

Mathu speaks for all the black men gathered when he voices his fears of the consequences he might suffer due to his actions; Mathu also speaks for the others when he admits he feels good standing up for something, just this once.

Mapes gains respect in the old men because of their suffering, as he listens to each one's encounter with the Boutan family.

And Candy is determined to stand against the law and the Boutans alone before she lets

anyone harm her people—even if it means she must defy the people she is trying to protect.

Other characters include Gil Boutan, Beau's brother, who tries to convince his father that seeking revenge would serve no purpose, and who is disowned by the family as punishment. Gil, the only one to leave the Bayou, is an all-star football player for LSU.

As the story reaches its climax, the reader sees the complex relationships between blacks and whites, the reasons behind the burst of courage in the old men, and Candy's pride. And the reader sees conflicts between old and new ways, between the dark past and the more hopeful future.

Ernest Gaines has created a novel of tension and drama in *A Gathering of Old Men*. The novel is a powerful portrayal of the struggles of our ancestors, both distant and recent, and the hardships they had to endure. It is truly a memorable story.

Beloved evokes haunting power

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison's latest novel, the main character, Seth, struggles to separate the past from the present.

Seth, an escaped slave, also jeopardizes her life, because she refuses to live as a slave. She is a strong, vividly drawn character, who is able to maintain her sanity despite the loss of her husband, Halle, and a child.

Beloved is an intruder who has all connections to Seth's past. *Beloved* is a strong force, almost appearing as the supernatural in the narrative. The past has be-

come a ghost in the house, running Seth's two sons away, and stirring up Baby Suggs' sadness.

In *Seth*, the past becomes a major part of her life since *Beloved*'s appearance. The presence is both haunting and soothing. Paul, a fellow slave, also becomes a big part of Seth's life. They each share their years of captivity and freedom in the apparition of *Beloved*, whose expressionless eyes and doomed childhood belong to the hideous logic of slavery. *Beloved* comes, as daughter, sister and seduc-

trous from "the place over there" to claim retribution for all she has lost.

Seth's biggest struggle is to keep *Beloved* from gaining full possession of her present, and to keep the past where it is. This struggle forms the dramatic center of the novel.

Beloved is as intense as it is enjoyable. Morrison is the prize-winning and renowned author of such novels as *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. *Beloved* is still another example of her remarkable talent for writing powerful fiction.

'Bravo!'

Photos by Richard McIntire



(left to right) Freshman Vincent Swift, Bonnie Cuffie, Sean Sharpe, and Harvey Bullock, Jr. shrug during the University Player's production of *Fantastiks*. The production received high praise in area newspaper reviews.



Harvey Bullock shows his disgust at his son (Sean Sharpe), whom he sees as a "hopeless case."



Sean Sharpe, the hopelessly romantic son, gazes dreamily into space.

Play Review

Young lovers tricked by dads in hit musical, *The Fantastiks*

By Nancy Porter

The University Player's production of *The Fantastiks* truly lived up to its name. The play was fantastic.

This highly successful and long-running musical relates a charming tale of two young lovers who sneak around the wall their fathers have built in order to prevent them from meeting each other.

At least, that's what the young lovers think. Like the cardboard moon over the set, their assumption about the wall's purpose is an illusion. The young lover's fathers have built the wall to make their children think they are trying to prevent them from meeting.

The fathers—delightfully portrayed by Harvey Bullock, Jr. and Vincent Swift—actually want their children to fall in love. The wall is only a trick.

In their efforts to play Cupid, the fathers enlist the aid of a mysterious bandit, El Gallo, played by Carlotta Jordan. Jordan's beautiful mellow voice fills the Little Theater, as she sings her first song, "Try to Remember."

Jordan—perfectly cast as the

narrator—puts great feeling into her lines, and executes her movements with bewitching grace. Joran's professional training at the Manhattan School of Music is evident in her diction, her bearing, and her style.

The fathers hire El Gallo to attempt to kidnap the daughter, and force the son to fight for her, thereby winning her love.

Bonnie Cuffie plays the 16-year-old girl with exuberance and feeling; Sean Sharpe is equally effective as the boy. Sharp's shy sensitivity presents an interesting contrast to Cuffie's verve and impulsiveness.

Cuffie and Sharpe perform several songs together, including the beautifully wrought, "Metaphor," and "Soon it's Gonna Rain."

After their initial declarations of love, the young couple argue, and Sharpe goes off to explore the world, and experience life. He returns to find that what he wanted all along was right under his nose.

El Gallo's accomplices are Henry and Mortimer, played by Jonathan Baxley and Allen Tom Williams.

Baxley and Williams played their parts well and with humor.

It was especially funny to see Williams, dressed as an Indian, but speaking in a British accent. The antics of Williams and Baxley provide some of the funniest moments in the play.

The mute, played by Carmen D. Lord, adds many magical touches to the play. Lord demonstrates the power of a mime to involve the audience's emotions. She greatly enhances the mood of tenderness between the young lovers, when she stands behind them, streaming confetti to create the illusion of falling leaves.

The two young lovers are happy until the wall is destroyed, and then they are not sure about their love. It takes the boy's suffering—and the wisdom they both gain from their separation—to reunite them.

A yell of "bravo" from the audience at the final curtain sums up this review of *The Fantastiks*.

The production was directed by Shawn Smith, and choreographed by Gene Owens. Lynne Chapman was the production stage manager, and Billy C. Hines the vocal director.

The musicians were B. Dexter Allgood, piano; Willie McElroy, synthesizer; Robert Thomas, bass, and David Albert, percussion.