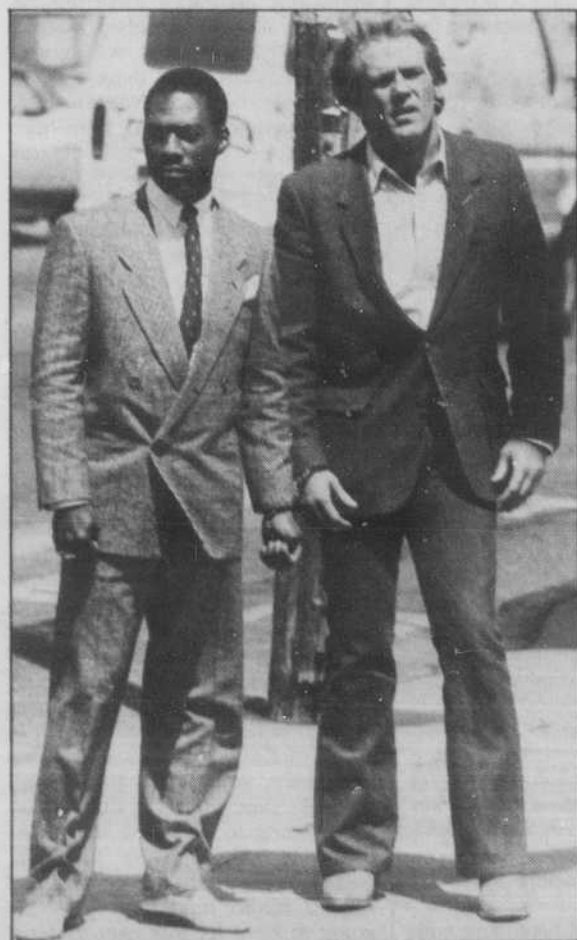


# Eddie Murphy

**In 48 Hrs., Murphy plays convict Reggie Hammond who reluctantly assists tough cop Nick Nolte in finding some cop killers. That's director Walter Hill in the beard.**



a car causes crew members to smile nervously.

Murphy, standing next to Walter Hill, watches as the two stunt doubles of him and Nolte run through the scene. He nods approvingly as his look-alike launches two quick jabs into the Nolte-double's face. But this is not a fight that Hammond is destined to win. After having a garbage can bounced off his ribs, the Murphy look-alike is hoisted high overhead, and given a full body slam into a pile of garbage.

After the stuntmen finish, Murphy will take the place of the double to enable Hill to get close-up shots of Murphy in the scene. Hill turns to Murphy. "So, what do you think of your first fight scene?"

Murphy shrugs. He's a little apprehensive about going before the cameras to take a pummeling, so he tries to joke. "It's okay, but do I have to be thrown in the garbage?" It's a rhetorical question. Murphy walks across the street, ready to film the scene, as the crew members gather to watch Murphy in action. During his work on the film, he has earned their respect as a professional, and particularly from the film's director Walter Hill.

Hill, of course, had every reason to worry about working with someone who had never done a film before. But he had worked with Murphy on television and sensed his potential. "On *Saturday Night Live*, Eddie was clearly a comedic performer, but one who lent himself to doing acting," Hill says. "I didn't want to hire a comedian, I wanted an actor. But at the same time, I wanted someone who would be spontaneous and bring something comedic to the part."

Hill thinks his gamble paid off. And he believes that Murphy's doing a dramatic role for his first movie will pay off for Murphy, as well. "To me," says Hill, "it's an indication of his intelligence not to run off and do *Meatballs 3* for his debut film. It's good to take on a different kind of problem and be perceived in a different kind of context."

It's a strategy that obviously didn't escape Murphy, either. He had been offered many films, but decided to sit back, take his time and analyze all the offers without rushing to any one picture. "Rather than do a comedy, which was what everyone was expecting," says Murphy, "I thought I'd do a serious movie. I doubt if I'll ever do anything that has this much seriousness again. This is a great experience, but my heart is in the yuks."

Murphy, like many a young comic before him, refined his skills at that great comic breeding ground of American society known as high school. His childhood was not without the little traumas that are a part of growing up. Murphy's parents were divorced when he was three and his father, Charles, a New York policeman, died when Murphy was 12. After Eddie's mother Lillian remarried, his step-father Vernon Lynch moved the family from Brooklyn to Roosevelt, Long Island, a predominantly black middleclass suburb, where Murphy grew up with his two brothers. It was Roosevelt High School where Murphy came into his own.

Aside from the run-of-the-mill practical jokes, such as calling in bomb scares, spraying mace in the hallways, or giving wedgies (ripping out someone's underwear from the rear) to unsuspecting classmates, Murphy mastered the art of the devastating New York putdown, known as ranking. "I was able to rank on people real good," says Murphy. "And whenever there was a talent show, I was always selected to be the emcee."

"See, the kids at Roosevelt had this real short attention span. If you weren't any good in the first two or three seconds of your act, they heckled you. They needed someone who could keep control, so I'd rank them. Like, 'Hey, your mother's got a wooden leg with a kick stand.' That would shut them up. Eventually I started doing impressions and stuff, but my act was basically all putdowns."

At 16 Murphy started doing talent shows, wangled his way onto some cable TV shows and was even finding steady work at one Long Island comedy club. Armed with self confidence and the rudimentary beginnings of an act, Murphy was on his way. "By this time, I was performing three, four times a week. And my report card was showing it." But still, Murphy was pocketing more money than he ever had and this enticed him further.

*The Gong Show* was in its heyday at this time and many comedy clubs would advertise Gong Show Nights, an anything-goes assortment of potluck comedians who vied for a \$50 cash prize. "Whenever I needed money, I would scan the papers for a bar holding a Gong Show Night. It was easy money, no problem."

"Eating Boogers—that was my killing routine. Then, Butterflies Landing on S-t. Classy stuff. And Farts. Farts was a killer. You could always count on Farts. I'd be driving to a club, figuring out my set. I'd think, I'll do Eating Boogers, Butterflies and Farts—Killer set."

He was travelling more and more and when he was finally graduated from high school, Murphy attended Nassau Community College for all of two weeks. But Eddie knew that his future wasn't to be found in the hallways of a bock palace. "If you want to be a performer," he says, "and you are going to school, I think you're wasting your time."

"I wasn't concerned about his future," says Eddie's mother Lillian. "Although he wasn't keeping his grades up, I knew he would end up doing something where he wouldn't have to get his hands dirty." Murphy found himself in his comedy. By the time he was 18, Murphy was touring the country, playing nightclubs. "I had gone

past Eating Boogers, and had a classy little act," says Murphy.

The comedian was performing at a Ft. Lauderdale night club during the summer of 1980 when Bob Wachs, Murphy's manager, summoned him to New York and sent him to audition for what was to be a new and improved version of *Saturday Night Live*. The entire cast had left, and NBC was starting over, from scratch. "I submitted Eddie," says Bob Wachs, "and through a series of very gruesome, long hard interviews and auditions, Eddie got the part."

It took six auditions during a one month period before Murphy received the word that he had been hired. Murphy remembers well the resistance he had initially before trying out for the show. "I really didn't want to be on *Saturday Night Live*. I wanted to be a stand-up comic. I mean, I was 19, travelling all over the place, making like \$500 a week, while my friends were all working in department stores. My life was perfect."

That life changed when he became a feature player, a sort of second stringer who did bit parts in sketches, during the 1980-81 season. But what was thought to be a blessing almost turned out to be the kiss of death during that disastrous season, which almost saw the show destroyed.

After Lorne Michaels, the show's original producer, left along with the rest of the charter member irregulars, NBC, with much hoopla, promoted Jean Doumanian, the associate producer, to the top spot. Doumanian took control and hired a new cast, new staff, new writers and gave the show a new look, namely failure. Once the crown jewel of late night comedy, the Doumanian reign was like a string of paste pearls. *Saturday Night Live* earned universally negative reviews and the ratings began to take a nose dive.

For the 1981-82 season, Doumanian was ingloriously put out to pasture, as were all but two of the original cast. The survivors were Eddie Murphy and Joe Piscopo. With Dick Ebersol, the NBC program executive who was in charge of the show's original launch in 1975, appointed to the helm, SNL made slow, but steady improvements last season. One reason was the spotlighting of the talents of Murphy, who was allowed to cast off his feature status. He became a full-fledged cast member and given almost total freedom. He now writes his own material, is allowed to regularly introduce off-beat characters, and is pulling in a reported \$4,500 a show.

Murphy was upset at being held back his initial year with the show. "They said I was too young and I wouldn't know how to handle success. That was Jean. She told me, 'We don't want another Freddie Prinze on our hands.'" Yet Murphy refuses to lay blame with Doumanian for the show's eventual collapse.

"Jean meant well. She just had no comedic background. You have to blame the network. I mean, if I was driving down the street with Stevie Wonder and said, 'Stevie, you drive,' you can't blame Stevie if we crash. You have to blame me."

As for Murphy's long term goals, don't look for any crashes in his future, although the Freddie Prinze syndrome is something that he thinks about, even jokes about. "In the true tradition of young celebrity, I think I'll die in a plane crash."

"No, look, I'm not dying no time soon. I want to be the first guy to ever be successful at an early age and not croak and not kill himself. That's my plan. Stay successful and not die. I'm 21 years old, I don't see myself puttering out. Or I hope not, anyway."

Looking to the future, Murphy hopes to do a feature film that he is writing called *I'm Gonna Get You, Sucker*, a sendup of black exploitation films. He should have plenty of time to finish writing it. Murphy plans to leave *Saturday Night Live* at the end of its current season and take a much deserved rest. After all, last season's edition ended on May 22. Two days later Murphy was in San Francisco filming *48 HRS.*' exterior street scenes with Nick Nolte. He's been working ever since.

Now, on a Los Angeles street corner taken over by movie people, Murphy is about to fight. Director Walter Hill gives the orders. "Places. Roll 'em."

All goes well, with Murphy ducking and rolling with the punches. The crowd grows larger as the scene unfolds. The climactic moment has arrived. The stuntman places one hand between Murphy's legs and the other on his back, lifting him high into the air to slam him into the pile of trash.

The director yells, "Cut." As Murphy is hoisted overhead, there's a smile on his face as wide as a tunnel. "Let's try it again," says Hill.

Murphy runs through his paces a second time, on the receiving end of the fast and furious blows. He is picked up and without a hitch is slammed down hard into the pile of garbage. Hill looks pleased. "That's a keeper," he says.

The crowd, which has grown to nearly concert size, breaks into a round of spontaneous applause, while Murphy, in the pile of trash, looks around, puzzled, then gets up slowly, slightly disoriented.

Bouyed by the mixture of attention and relief that the scene is completed, Murphy pulls himself together and starts walking methodically to the stunt double, his mood growing more lively with each step.

Finally, Murphy is standing face to face with the massive stuntman. He looks him in the eye. "I kicked your butt, sucker," says Murphy.

They both break out laughing, and Eddie Murphy walks to the street corner and readies himself for the next scene.