

Violence on TV, in movies reflects reverse racism

By Peter Collier and David Horowitz

The other morning television viewers were treated to a surreal dialogue between *Today Show* host Bryant Gumbel and Hollywood's Laurence Fishburne, star of *Searching for Bobby Fischer* and other recent hits. The two men had hardly begun discussing Fishburne's latest success and his astronomical rise in the film world, when the conversation, inevitably it seems these days, turned into a diatribe about Hollywood's racism.

Gumbel asked Fishburne if it was easier now "for an African-American male to get work in Hollywood." Despite his own multimillion-dollar success, Fishburne couldn't say realistically that it was, except for himself, "Wesley" and "Denzel." Other African-American actors still had to "do the traditional types of roles that we've had to do." Here Gumbel coupled his thought: "Pimps, hustlers, gangsters," while Fishburne added "junkies, thieves, racists."

It was quite a spectacle. Here were two men making millions of dollars as African-American mega-stars, complaining about the white conspiracy to deny them success. (And of course it was not just Wesley Snipes and Denzel Washington, but also

Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey, Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Danny Glover and Spike Lee who can call their own roles and tunes in today's Hollywood.)

Deploring the unreformable reality of American racism has become a ritual for African-American celebrities, almost like presenting an apartheid pass in order to retain their status in the community, even when their life experiences argue the exact opposite.

Who, today, would deny the fact that in the institutions of slavery and legal discrimination, America committed a great crime against African-Americans and also against itself? The question is whether the cause of a racially plural society is advanced by denying the reality of redress that has already been made, or progress that has already been achieved.

Has white Hollywood conspired, for example, as Jesse Jackson has claimed, to portray African-Americans as "more violent than we are"? (*New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1989)

The reverse, in fact, is closer to the truth: in real life, African-Americans commit more than 50 percent of the violent crimes, including 55 percent of the homicides in America, but on television whites commit 90 percent of the homicides and most of the violent crimes. As Bruce Sallan, former ABC Vice

President has said "Almost every villain (on TV) you see is a WASP."

Nor is this an accident. It is the result of a calculated effort.

Last April, NBC broadcast a made-for-TV movie called *Moment of Truth: Why My Daughter?* It was the true story, filmed in documentary style, of a mother's search for justice after her daughter was raped, tortured and killed. But the producers made one small change in translating reality on the screen. The real rapist/killer was black. For TV he was made white.

Even simple gangster films are often written to portray whites in a way that feeds racial paranoia. Fishburne starred in *Under Cover*, in which every white is a vicious knave and the plot revolves around the blood libel that the American government is part of a conspiracy to spread drugs to the ghetto. (The screenwriter, it happens, was white.)

Does the derogatory portrayal of whites as racist oppressors have a social impact? We think it does. Anger often leads to action. We think there is a connection between socially sanctioned racism and other facts. The Los Angeles riots, for instance. Another Fishburne movie, *Boyz 'N the Hood*, featured a speech by the hero again accusing the government of conspiring to spread drugs in the ghetto. It also accused Koreans

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of conspiring to buy the ghetto's real estate out from under the black community. If these libels did not inflame passions in Los Angeles, we don't know what would.

The politically correct will predictably condemn the exploration of these ideas. It is unfashionable to discuss socially sanctioned forms of racism. Yet not to discuss them is to enter into another kind of conspiracy, the failure to speak clearly in the past has helped to create the present situation in which fabricated racism feeds directly into the real thing. If there is a new racism in America it is one that is based on dou-

ble standards and special preferences, along with a sentimental attachment to persecution, that add to a kind of social blindness.

Hollywood contributes to these double standards by portraying the white community as more vicious, racist and mean-spirited than in fact it is. We do not think such distortion serves the interests of racial harmony or of the black community.

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