

THE ENTERTAINMENT SEEN

"Native Son", The Movie: A Social Protest Statement or Just Another Night at the Movies?

by Kamau Anderson

In 1940, Richard Wright published the novel "Native Son" as a literary protest of the social plight of young Black males in America. Now, in 1987, we have a movie based on that novel that most of America is watching mainly for just another night at the movies. The conditions in the life of the young Black male that motivated Wright to write the novel forty-seven years ago, has not improved, and, in fact, has gotten worse and is approaching genocidal proportions.



Claude Brown, who wrote about inner city life for Black males in his classic novel "Manchild in the Promised Land" (1965) recently made the following statement about the present situation for Black youths: "It was difficult for me and my generation. Now it is impossible." Why would Brown make such a statement today about Black youth? What was the real message of the movie, "Native Son"? Well, about 50%, that's one-half, of the prison population in this country are Black males, while the same group is only 6% of America's population; the leading cause of death among Black men is murder; more than 40% of Black teenagers are unemployed; some 20% of Black youths will drop out of high school; and more than 55% of the next generation of Black males are being raised, not in a two-parent household, but by Black women. If this trend continues, by 1990, approximately 70% of Black male America will either be in prison, or be psychologically medicated on some form of drugs, or have died a violent death.

I am not a movie critic (there's too many of them in the unemployment lines), so I'm not going to tell you how good or bad the cinematography was or what scenes were left out of the movie that were in the book. In most cases when there is a movie adaptation of a novel, all of the scenes in the book usually don't make it onto film and "Native Son" is no exception. What I hope would be understood from the movie is the message that Richard Wright attempted to communicate to America about the mental and physical destruction of the Black male, mainly by forces in society that seemed beyond his control. Wright states in the introduction to the novel that Bigger Thomas is a product of America. From the first time the Black male set foot in America as a slave to the present, his very essence has been under attack from the powers that define the American reality. If the Black male consciously realizes the social conditions of his people and asserted his manhood (i.e., Nat Turner, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and countless others) to improve the quality of life for them, he would be quickly checked or eliminated. A subtle part of Bigger Thomas' personality reflected this type of consciousness, but it laid dormant waiting for the right stimuli to awaken it. Bigger clearly knew the root cause of his (the Black male) dilemma, but was confused as to how to solve it. In his genetic memory, he knew that he was suppose to be fighting something or somebody to break the chains of poverty, character degradation and humiliation. So he lashed out against those who were trapped in the same environment that he was; his family, friends and other Black males.

Richard Wright used the horrible crimes of Bigger Thomas to develop his theme and dramatize the plight of Black men caught up in a sense of hopelessness.

As I was leaving the movie house, several comments were overheard about how vicious and ruthless Bigger was in killing and disposing of the white girl. I would imagine that if the scene of Bigger smashing his girlfriend's head in as she slept and dumping her down an air shaft was left in the movie, Wright would not have had a porkchop's chance in a lion's den of getting his central theme across. Admittedly, the story of the Black youth in America could have been told in a more palatable fashion, but Wright is a writer and he used the novel as the medium to tell his story.

Today, there are far more Bigger Thomas than in 1940. They are protesting and rebelling in the only unfocused manner that they know how. If we, as Black people, and the rest of America don't listen and understand the protest statements that this very powerful human resource is making, it's going to be a long intermission for what was thought to be just another night at the movies.

Act One

by Ken Covington



ABOUT TOWN

- Bee G's 5700 N.E. Union, 281-1176
Fri.-Sat., Norman Sylvester
- Brasserie Montmartre 626 S.W. Park, 224-5552
Fri.-Sat., Dennis Springer Quartet
- Hobbit S.E. 39th & Holgate, 771-0742
Fri.-Sat., Mel Brown Quintet w/ Bud Shank
- Key Largo 31 N.W. 1st, 223-9919
Fri.-sat., Calvin Walker; Sun., Ritmo Tropical
- Last Hurrah 555 S.W. Alder, 224-1336
Thurs., Dan Reed Network; Fri.-Sat., Cool 'R
- O'Callahan's 11650 S.W. Canyon, 626-2223
Mon., Dan Reed Network
- Remo's 1425 N.W. Glisan, 221-1150
Fri.-Sat., Bigg Bangg Band; Sun., Ron Steen
- Salty's foot of S.E. Marion, 239-8900
Fri.-Sat., Don Latarski Band
- Shanghai Lounge 0309 S.W. Montgomery, 220-1865
Sun., Cool 'R
- Starry Night 8 N.W. 6th, 227-0071
Sat., The Neville Bros.
- Third Ave. Club 309 S.W. 3rd, 222-9180
Thurs.-Sat., Ron Steen Band

Word of the Week: Matriarch—a woman who rules a family, group, or clan.

Color of the Week: Camel Brown



The Neville Bros. bring their one-of-a-kind mixture of blues, reggae and rock to the stage at The Starry Night on Sat., Feb. 21.

Women's Day Celebration

Portland's annual celebration of International Women's Day will take place this year on March 7 at the Northwest Service Center from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. All people are invited to attend and participate in this celebration of women and their accomplishments. This event will have a strong multicultural, international flavor to it, as it is indeed a celebration of all women.

During the day, there will be many activities from which to choose: films, art exhibits, poetry readings, folk singing, dance performances, live music, dramatic presentations, ethnic food booths, arts and crafts sales tables, and organizational information tables that will be operating throughout the day. At noon, there will be a political forum, speaking to the issue of Women and Social Change.

Tickets are based on a sliding scale of \$7, \$8, \$9. Children 12 and under are free. For information, contact Tess Wiseheart, 236-2451.

Red Cross First Aid Class Scheduled

Red Cross will sponsor a Multimedia First Aid class at Emanuel Hospital, 2801 N. Gantenbein, on Saturday, February 28, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Participants will earn Red Cross certification upon completion of the class.



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- Tuesday, Feb. 23
COOL 'R
- Wednesday, Feb. 25
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