



WALTER BURRELL

Hollywood Happenings

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Is it advantageous for a Negro actor to be dark-complexioned when seeking a film role? Among Negro actors themselves there are two sharply divided opinions. This week we explore the view shared by actor Rockne Tarkington. Next week an opposing stand will be offered by noted actor-singer, Brock Peters.)

"There's a unique and quite new type of color prejudice being practiced in Hollywood these days and all you have to do is stop and think of the Negro actors you've seen recently on television or in the movies and you'll realize what it is right away.

"Think about it; what do Sidney Poitier, Hari Rhodes, Ossie Davis, Ivan Dixon, Brock Peters, Bill Cosby and all the other working Negro actors have in common?

"It's simple; they're all dark-complexioned. In short, they all present the near or pure African image of the American Negro."

THE WORDS are those of actor Rockne Tarkington and when I talked with him recently on the set of his current movie, "Criss Cross," he revealed some interesting opinions on what producers, directors and casting executives look for when they cast Negro actors.

"The situation has gotten to the point where you have to have a very Negroid appearance to be cast in a film," Rockne continued. "But don't get me wrong, I'm as much in favor of the current swing toward pride in blackness as the next Negro. It's gotten out of hand in films.

"It may be that the white people who're doing the casting really have good intentions. Actually, they probably think they're being quite liberal in casting a Negro in the first place.

"BUT WHAT they're probably failing to see is that without really thinking about it, they're falling into the old stereotype trap which says that 'all Negroes look alike and they're all one color: black'.

"Of course, the exact opposite is the truth and American Negroes fill in virtually every shade from white to black, though you'd never realize it when you look at a TV screen or motion picture. The selection is, to say the least, limited."

With light-brown coloring and a look of the Far East about him, Rockne is one of those Negroes who would look just as much at home in Arabia or Morocco as he would in New York or L.A. He insists that his color has been a stumbling block to his career. Nonetheless, any Negro who saw him on the screen would undoubtedly identify Rockne for what he is.

THE PROBLEM seems to be, however, that perhaps the white audiences might become confused. As one Hollywood producer put it, "I can easily understand the fair-skinned Negro actor's problem--and I'd even have to admit having contributed to it.

"But we still have to realize that the vast majority of the white American public still has to be educated about what American Negroes look like. They still experience difficulty accepting the idea of a Negro with straight hair (blond, at that), fair skin, etc., in real life, so how can we expect them to believe it on a movie screen?

"When a producer decides to use a Negro actor in his film, can you blame the guy for wanting to use someone whom there will be no doubt about? Of course not."

And Rockne has another problem: at 6'5" and with a stature rivaling that of Sampson, he presents a definite leading man-type image. He found out how hazardous this can be when he was cast as a regular on the "Tarzan" TV series.

"DURING THE first five segments of the show, my fan mail was running five to one over

Locals Fete Fellow Alumnus



Members of AM & N College Alumni Association at special meeting called to honor fellow alumnus Dr. Lacy Bell, Director of Physical Education Department at Hampton Institute, who was a recent visitor to the City--Shown seated (from left) are Mrs. Laceryne Simmons, U. W. Winfrey, Dr. Lacy Bell, James Gay and Mrs. Lillie A. Scott... Standing (left to right) are La Neal Rayford, Lee Rayford, Aubrey N. Baker, Mildred Brown, Ethel Johnson, Henry T. Simmons, Dorothy Houston, Jewel Scott, Naomi Gaynes, Charles Cooper, Sr., Emily Meads, Albert T. McCoy, A. Rosalyn Moore, and Clinton Wright. Members not shown are Annie Norwood, Elsie Sellers, and Bernice Moten.

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Ron Ely, who plays Tarzan, and you can believe that neither Ron nor the show's executive staff liked that situation at all. My contract wasn't renewed."

So what's an actor in Rockne's situation to do while waiting for audiences and films to catch up with reality? "I've done very much the same thing that Frank Silvera resorted to. I've become a linguist and survived by playing Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Islanders, etc. In 'Criss Cross' I'm playing a Bahamian.

"Sidney Poitier once told me he hoped that within the next couple of years the industry would start using Negro actors of my type for Negro roles. I certainly hope so."

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BECAUSE Sal Mineo looks so young and has played so many juvenile roles, he has a hard time convincing people he's no longer a teenager.

But the handsome actor, who will star in an upcoming CBS movie titled "Escape From Zahrain" (Fri., Mar. 17), states firmly that "I'm 28 years old and completely involved in adult life."

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IF THERE IS any particular personality or subject relating to the Negro in Hollywood which you would like to read about in this column, why not let me know about it? Address letters to me in care of Universal City Studios, Universal City, California.

Jo Mackey Council

The regular monthly meeting of the Jo Mackey Neighborhood Council will be held Monday, March 27, 500 Miller (Aloha Trailer Court) at 7 p.m.

Council members have stepped up a campaign to arouse greater community interest and participation by urging that every Council Member make him or herself a committee of one to get at least one other member of the community involved and that everyone bring his "pet peeve" (what he dislikes the most in the community) to Monday's meeting as well as any and all suggestions for what will be helpful to the neighborhood and the community.

Civic Pride is first with community service workers who share a hope that it is also No. 1 with their fellow residents.

NAACP Execs Hit Jackpot

NEW YORK - (NPI)--The Rockefeller Brothers Fund has granted the NAACP \$100,000 over a two-year period to strengthen the executive staff working on programs financed by the organization's tax-exempt Special Contribution Fund.

Of the total grant, \$60,000 is for use this year. The remainder is allocated to 1968. This is the first Rockefeller Brothers Fund grant to the NAACP's executive staff.