



Varied Roles For Actor



VERSATILE ACTOR--Ossie is shown as detective in "The Outsider," prior to his starring role in "The Scalphunters" as a runaway slave. (See Hollywood Happenings)

ONLY IN Hollywood could a man be a New York cop one day and a runaway slave the next.

And that's exactly what happened to actor Ossie Davis recently. Last month he was at Universal portraying a tough New York detective in "The Outsider," a two-hour movie-for-TV which will also be a series this winter.

This month, however, Davis is at United Artists starring as Joseph Lee, a runaway slave in "The Scalphunters," one of two upcoming movies dealing humorously with slavery. The other is the Harry Keller-Peter Stone production, "The Skin Game," which has a white man selling his black friend, helping him to escape, splitting the money with him, and moving their scheme to another town.

Sidney Poitier, perhaps not appreciating the humor in such a situation, or maybe simply too busy starring in films elsewhere, has turned down the lead in "The Skin Game" and the production, at this writing, is yet to be cast.

DAVIS, ON the other hand, speaks easily of this new trend in movie scripts. He admits that it's unusual to find a slave and the subject of slavery being treated with any degree of humor, especially the kind of biting humor in this picture where we're laughing, not at the slave so much, but the ridiculous situations in which he finds himself--including slavery itself.

"Unfortunately," says Davis, "we've hardly used our national funnybone to attack the race problems. Humor has a way of putting things into perspective and we will have successfully solved these problems when we can get together one day and have one big hell of a laugh at them.

"Ethnic humor in particular," Davis continues, "is an awareness of the difference between what is and what ought to be. If we're healthy people, we can laugh at that." In fact, Davis estimates that films in this vein can make as profound a contribution to solving the overall problem as the efforts of our great civil rights leaders.

"MOVIES LIKE this have to have an impact, immediate and widespread, on the total racial situation," he says. "It gives the American audience, both black and white, a chance to see a Negro who, though a slave, is presented as a human being caught up in unfortunate circumstances and wrestling like hell to get out of them.

"All people can identify with that man, understand him, and condemn the system that keeps him from making his dream of freedom a reality--whether it's the outright slave system of the past or the nebulous type of suppression which exists today. They can see how un-American it is to keep a man down for any reason.

"Now, men like Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King, A. Philip Randolph and all the civil rights leaders have a tremendous moral burden on their shoulders. They must always present the most serious aspects of the problems facing our country.

"HOWEVER, there finally comes a time when the human spirit rebels against being told what to do, even though the directives are reasonable and right. Then the best way to reach people is with humor, since it can make serious points in a light-hearted way.

"Humor is universal and it's able to show what great fun awaits all of us when we discard the ridiculous nonsense with which we've become burdened. What marvelous people human beings are when you can catch them without their rifles, their knives, or their causes waving like banners in the wind.

"If the kinds of characters found in 'The Scalphunters' and 'The Skin Game' succeed, perhaps slaves will become accepted among the folk heroes like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett

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and others America has produced."
 One unpleasant fact remains, however: In defending a character like Joseph Lee, Davis runs the risk of coming under fire from other Negroes for playing a black slave whom whites will laugh at on the screen.
 "That's true," he admits, "and it's actually easy to understand. Negroes will fear that the humor won't be understood as being humor, but will be interpreted as fact and used against us at this stage of the game."
 "THEY'RE AFRAID whites will say 'Aha, that's how Negroes really are. Therefore, let's never allow them into our schools, neighborhoods and families'. But I hope people will recognize the fact that the character Joseph Lee, since he didn't accept the idea of a slave life, wasn't really a slave."
 "The same can be said of the character in 'The Skin Game'. These men fought the system. Despite the amount of humor in the scripts, they emerge as heroes. Black people, as well as whites, will be proud of them."

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Anti-Semitism Deplored

ATLANTA - (NPI)--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has issued a sharp denunciation of anti-Semitism, declaring that hatred of Jews "injures Negroes, because it upholds the doctrine of racism which they have the greatest stake in destroying."

At the same time, he took issue with those who condemn Israel or uncritically support the Arab cause. Israel's right to exist as a state--and to be secure from aggression--is uncontestable, he said.

"THE GREAT powers have the obligation to recognize that the Arab world is in a state of imposed poverty and backwardness that must threaten peace and harmony," he added.

Arab leaders, he said, are more concerned with oil wells than the plight of their people.

Declaring that his Southern Christian Leadership Conference has frequently denounced anti-Semitism, the Nobel Peace Prize winner asserted that hatred of Jews is used "to divide Negro and Jew, who have collaborated in the struggle for justice."

NAACP NAT'L OFFICE IN EXPANSION MOVE

NEW YORK - (NPI)--The NAACP's national office has moved to its new location, at 1790 Broadway, amid expansion of the organization's program and staff.

The Association had been headquartered in the Wendell Wilkie Memorial Building, 20 W. 40th St., for 22 years.