

BILLIE ROWE'S NOTEBOOK

N'YORK CITY -- One of the developing mysteries, perverse and seemingly unfathomable, revolves around why Hollywood -- and TV, too -- slumbers while the nation thunders for a continuation of the black saga so vividly started by the super-spectacular "Roots." Mystifying is why a trend has not developed in the flick and dial empire to produce more stories dealing with the continuing drama of the struggle of blacks the world over. When "Scarface" hit the movie jackpot, the producers flooded the market with gangster films. When "Seventh Heaven" burst like a flower in the long ago, Hollywood served up scads of fluffy love stories. And when "Covered Wagon" waa-hoed across the movie prairies, it set in motion a trend of thundering herds of intemperate Westerns. After each big hit, a trend sets in, but curiously none has yet come after "Roots." Here we are months after Alex Haley's epic has been acclaimed a TV masterpiece and no one has produced a single major opus to further document the historic Black Story which since 1517 -- and more so today -- has raged on the world scene.

Acclaimed the world over for its unsurpassed drama, "Roots" now rests on library shelves, rests on its laurels, so to speak, as if the writers are not convinced that the Black Story continues to blaze from the unknown Continent of Africa to the Plains of Georgia. The stories are there. They have their roots in "Roots" but no trend for continuing dramatization of unparalleled black drama and comedy, the main ingredients of the theatre. Surely the literary world did not stop spinning after Shakespeare. Hollywood didn't close shop after "Gone With the Wind." And now the folly of the producers comes into perspective. They did not develop a sure-fire trend in the wake of a sure-fire hit. And the fallacy in their thinking will continue to haunt them because "Roots" has become a subject of undiminished interest. It has captured 37 nominations for "excellence," leading all other shows as a board of experts gets ready to name No. 1 at the 29th annual Emmy Awards to be staged for the TV industry Sept. 11.

It is an all-time enigma that no one seems willing to launch a series to capitalize on the proven success of the 12-part TV show that registered an all time audience impact because of Haley's hell-raiser, "Papillon," a great movie, dealt with one escapee from a French prison. Steve McQueen's escapades pale into insignificance when compared to the heroic dashes for freedom by slaves during pre-Civil War days. There are elements of unsurpassed drama and pathos during that pulsating period when the underground railroad ferried slaves by the hundreds northward to Ohio, Boston, Canada, New York with spine-tingling frequency. This was raw drama -- the dash to death or freedom and it is only one of several scripts that come to mind as we tip off Hollywood and TV writers. Indeed there is already a script entitled "Underground Railroad," by William Crain, a fine black writer and his colleague, Sonja Ellingson-Jones, a white school-teacher-researcher. Black and beautiful Melba Moore has expressed interest in this work and Sammy Davis, Jr. has been handed a script. It remains to be seen whether someone can unravel the strange mystery to transform this and other historic events into acceptable vehicles for audience viewing. Other scripts can be woven around the legend that both Cleopatra, the Egyptian eye-ful, and Hannibal, who led an elephantine horde over the Alps, were truly black. There are black figures galore -- the bugler at Valley Forge, the 332nd fighter group; Dorie Miller, at Pearl Harbor; Henry O. Flipper, the first black to graduate from West Point (1877) and those other contributors who gave meaning to the Bill of Rights. Surely the material is there. Wake up, Hollywood, NBC, ABC, CBS!

And while we're at it, ponder the fate of the real life actors who played Chicken George (Ben Vereen), Fiddler (Lou Gossett), young Kunte Kinte (LaVar Burton), and the

grown-up Kinte (John Amos). Of course, Vereen achieved notoriety in "Pippin." But Amos walked off "Good Times" and copped out of "Future Cop." But don't you forget. All four are deserving of better recognition. Don't take our word for it. The quartet, has been nominated for "best single performance" in a drama or comedy. And NO -- repeat NO -- other actors -- were nominated in that category.

We are not attempting to raise a hearing, red or black, but it seems to us that with talent of that stature, and with the acknowledged historic background for future documenting the saga of the blacks, someone is missing the boat. It ain't us.

Rep. Parren J. Mitchell, Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus; Terence Todman, Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Department of State; James A. Joseph, Under Secretary of the Interior; and Alexis Herman, Director of the Women's Bureau, headlined the roster of speakers who addressed the 34th National Convention of Delta Sigma Theta in Denver. Loved their theme -- "An Agenda for Change." --- STAY LOOSE.

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O. I. Institute

O.I. - Institute (Operation Independence, Inc.) announced that the modern facility, which houses a pre-school and day care center, will be opened to interested community parents, the media, and the general public on the final Sunday afternoon in August. The open house is planned to introduce the educational arm of the operation to the public of Las Vegas.

The open house will also serve as the public debut of the Center's new Director, Dr. Corene F. Casselle. Since obtaining the leadership of Dr. Casselle, the Institute has placed added emphasis on an early learning atmosphere for children whose parents wish them to gain educational skills during the pre-school years. In addition to directing the overall daily activities of the O.I. - Institute, Dr. Casselle will personally teach learning skills to the children while training other professional and paraprofessional teachers in the proven techniques she employs in pre-school learning.

Pre-registration for O.I. - Institute Day Care and for the educational arm, ISIS (Institute for the Study of Individual Skills), will be held from the 15th of August through the 26th of August between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The open house will be held at the school, which is located at 1966 Genoa Drive (in the center of the Sierra Nevada Arms Apartment Complex) on Sunday, August 28, 1977, between the hours of 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. The general public is cordially invited to attend the open house and inspect the facility as well as to meet the new Director and the staff of the Center.

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