

Point of View

EDITORIAL

BLACK PRESS INVITES HOLLYWOOD TO CONFERENCE TABLE

The Black Press of America has decided to invite Hollywood to the conference table.

The racism and poor representation of blacks and black subject matter in the film industry can no longer be tolerated. The movie industry is one of the most segregated major industries in America.

Why?

The Black Press would like to ask Hollywood first. The industry will be given a fair chance to state its case before the Black Press will institute action. Giving Hollywood a chance, first, to explain itself and its actions is both responsible and professional.

While the Black Press wishes to be fair, professional and responsible, the Black Press does not invite either an insult to its intelligence or its dignity.

We all look at movies. Some things are very obvious and very real. The Black Press of America does not intend to argue to define the obvious. It intends to ask for reasons and rationale for the obvious. The Black Press wishes to work in harmony with Hollywood to bring about positive and needed changes. Should appropriate changes fail to materialize, effective action must be taken.

It is a fact that between 450-460 movies are released by Hollywood yearly in America.

It is a fact that most of those movies are lily-white. There are no black actors or actresses in most of those movies. Some don't use a single black extra to simply walk across the screen. No blacks are on the technical crews that make those pictures. No blacks are hired in any staff capacity for many of those movies.

Maybe there is a "bouyancy factor" that operates in terms of the skills needed for blacks to work in front or behind the camera in Hollywood.

If so, the Black Press would like to ask Hollywood to define that factor so that some remedy can be sought that will facilitate hiring blacks in fair and representative numbers both in front of and behind the cameras.

Among the few black films made or the few roles for blacks in non-black movies, Hollywood most often demeans and defames blacks. Almost always, blacks are comics and in comic situations bucking their eyes and cussing.

There is no balance.

Hollywood is supposed to represent fantasy and glamour. Where is the fantasy and glamour for blacks.

Since the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) started rating films, some 3,795 films distributed have received an "R" or an "X" rating. That's many, many times more than all the black films made during the same period. Hollywood's story departments are more receptive to blood, sex, gore and violence than it is to the broad variety of good black stories.

Since 30% of the one million movie tickets sold yearly are sold to Blacks, that is difficult to understand. The Black Press wishes to hear Hollywood's explanation for this.

Hollywood releases more foreign films yearly than they do black films or films that hire black people in any capacity. Hollywood is thus doing more to provide jobs and income for foreigners than it is for native black Americans who have roots and a stake in this country.

Again, Hollywood has its reasons for this. The Black Press would like to hear them.

Black films have been the most successful specialty films in Hollywood history. They have brought the highest return per dollar invested of any films Hollywood has ever known including many so-called "blockbusters." Seventy-eight percent of Hollywood's movies lose money while less than 10 black movies have ever lost money in the first 100 years of Hollywood.

Maybe Hollywood has its own business principles that are different from those that function in other major industries. The Black Press would like to learn of these business principles.

Black faces are absent when one walks the studio lots

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

"WIN, JESSE, WIN"

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson's decision to once again seek the Democratic nomination for President of the United States has implications far beyond next

year's Democratic convention. While listening to Jackson make his announcement speech at the Raleigh, N.C. Civic Center, I realized that the future of this nation

is contingent upon how well our national political process is able to respond to both the challenge and the opportunity.

Jackson is now considered by the established media and professional pollsters to be not only a serious candidate but the leading candidate and, as a result, presidential politics will never be the same. But what is more important than the fact that Jackson is running is the

more humane. It was interesting to listen to white farmers from the mid-West who had come to Raleigh to declare their support for Rev. Jackson. They stated that Jackson is the only candidate who offers them hope and a way out of their economic crisis.

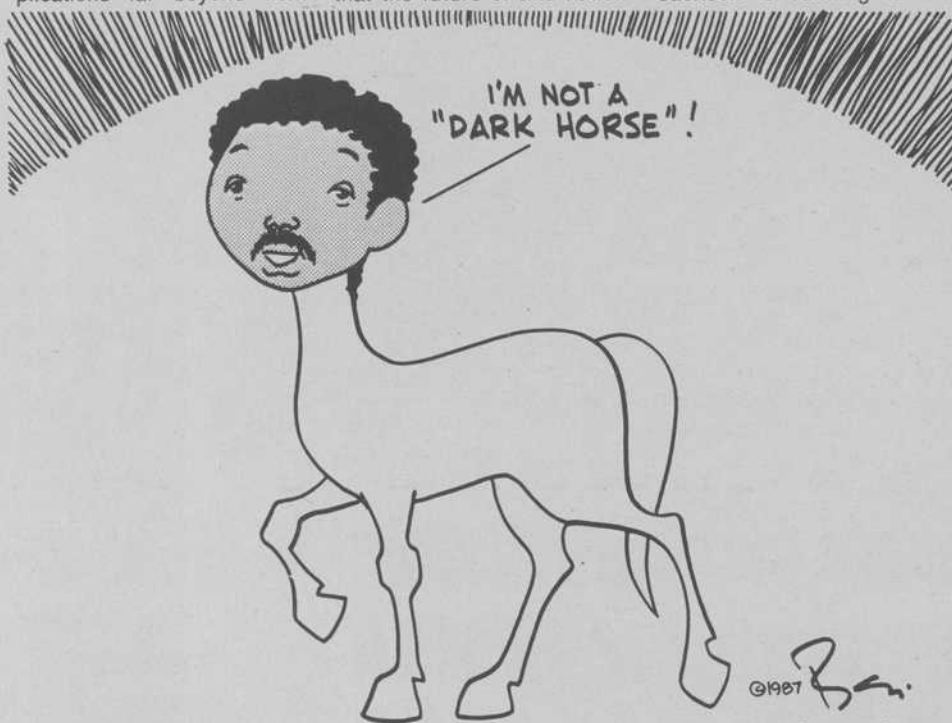
Jackson is also the only candidate to challenge the economic injustice created by U.S. multi-national corporations — corporations which have eliminated the jobs of U.S. workers in order to exploit the workers of third world countries. Self-determination, human rights and economic justice are the basic principles of Jackson's foreign policy.

The day after Jackson's speech I travelled by plane from Raleigh to Chicago. While waiting to get my boarding pass I looked around and noticed a long multi-racial line of people of different ages waiting to board the plane. I soon discovered they were among the more than 6,000 persons who had attended the National Rainbow Coalition Convention. There was a sense of joy and excitement as those in line began to embrace and congratulate each other on their mutual sense of accomplishment. Many of them now realized that the diversity of the Rainbow was more than just theory; it was a living reality. The hope is that this kind of political organizing and mobilizing, across racial and economic lines, will become the basis of a progressive transformation of this society.

For me, there are moral and theological implications of the Jackson candidacy that go beyond politics. In the Black church tradition we affirm that "the Lord sure moves in mysterious ways." At a time when there has been a dramatic increase in racially motivated violence and other acts of overt racism across the nation, an African American emerges as a major leadership figure for the whole nation. At a time when President Reagan and conservative political forces seem determined to continue leading the nation toward greater racial and economic

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and production company facilities of Columbia, Paramount, Universal and other studio lots and production company facilities of Hollywood. In South Africa, it may be argued that Blacks are back in the tribal homelands or in the mines and factories when they are not visible on the urban streets. Hollywood can't say that blacks are "on location" because blacks have been exiled from Hollywood. They simply don't exist.

The Black Press will be sending a personal letter to the heads of the major studios and production companies and distribution companies appraising them of our concerns.

The Black Press will appoint a special committee to meet with representatives of the film industry individually and collectively for immediate dialogue.

No studies or special reports are necessary. We are all intelligent enough to see what is happening to blacks in the film world. We can count. We see the lack of black faces in front and behind the camera. We are in our communities. We hear the grumbles and complaints from our people daily as they decry no black movies and others that demean us.

We don't need the stall of internship programs. There are black producers, directors and others ready to ply their trade now. They need opportunity now not tomorrow.

The Black Press lauds efforts to make the sports industries responsible and responsive to fair and just treatment of blacks after the demeaning remarks by Al Campanis. As bad as the sports industries are, they are better than the film industry across the board. The film industry must not be spared.

To ask for equitable treatment by Hollywood which strives on our dollars is fair and just. For Hollywood to refuse to be fair is un-American and that should be met with the effective American right of protest.

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