

ENTERTAINMENT

Halle Berry to star Oprah-presented story on love

By Sally Stone

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ABC, on Feb. 22 and 23, will air "Oprah Winfrey Presents: The Wedding."

The two-part miniseries stars Halle Berry as Shelby Coles, a young woman who must choose between two suitors: the poor white musician she's engaged to, played by Eric Thal, ("Six Degrees of Separation") and a successful black man who has decided to divorce his white wife and marry Shelby, played by Carl Lumbly ("Cagney & Lacey").

The other stars in this production are Shirley Knight, the film, theater and television star who plays Gram, Shelby's grandmother, along with Lynn Whitfield ("Eve's Bayou"), Michael Warren ("Buffalo Soldiers"), and Richard Brooks ("Law and Order").

"The Wedding" is based on a novel by Dorothy West, described in literary circles as the last surviving member of what was once called "The Harlem Renaissance." It tells the story of a family living in a wealthy African-American community in Martha's Vineyard. The matriarch, Gram, is the daughter of a slave owner. She is determined that each succeeding generation of her family be lighter in color than the last, until there is a generation that no longer "betrays" its black ancestry.

"To tell you that I was excited and honored to be asked to be part of this film can't even begin to describe how I felt," Berry said. "First, it was something Oprah was doing,

so I knew it would be important and special. And then there's the story, which I believe is one of the most powerful I've ever seen done on film."

Asked what she felt was the most striking aspect of the story, Berry said, "The way this family wants to manipulate the future. We all want a better life for our children and their children. But what this family wants is, somehow, to blot out the black part of their heritage by creating a family that will look absolutely white."

Is that because they feel white people have more access to the American dream?

"I think it's more than that. After all, these are wealthy people. They're educated. They're middle-class. But they're uncomfortable with the fact that they're identifiable blackness is something to be ashamed of, and they see the only way out of that so-called problem is to create a family that is ultimately white. As a matter of fact, in the story, one of the daughters married a man they didn't approve of because they felt he was too dark and they put pressure on her to end the marriage." That would make them sound like racists.

"They are, in that they have bought into the prejudiced assumptions about black



OPRAH WINFREY

people being inferior to white people."

Said Berry, "This sense that



HALLE BERRY

having lighter skin is better than being darker also reflects the black experience during

slavery when your skin color often was the difference in how you might be treated. The lighter-skinned slave worked in the house and was treated better than the darker-skinned slave who worked in the fields and lived under much harsher conditions."

Berry, whose father is African-American and whose mother is white, says that she recalls, as a child wanting to have blonde hair and blue eyes.

"But that wasn't because I thought a person with blonde

hair and blue eyes was somehow better than anyone else. It was because my mother is blonde with blue eyes, and I love my mother. I think every child who loves their parents wants to be as much like them as possible. As I grew older, I continued to find ways to identify with my mother, but for reasons that have little, if anything, to do with how she looks, but for who she is as a person."

Berry said that if the film (See Berry, Page 17)

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