Girls a more revealing documentary. Just as the "Bull" Connors of the South couldn't have existed without the George Wallaces, so Dynamite Bob couldn't have functioned without support from significant portions of the white community. Many Americans played a role as passive instrumentalists, persons who never spoke out against white supremacy or the violence of the Klan. Some viewers might expect a Spike Lee film to implicate the larger white community in the climate of racial hostility. Lee's focus in *4 Little Girls* on institutional versus individual racism, is a departure from earlier films *(School Daze, Do The Right Thing, Jungle Fever, Malcolm X)* which placed greater emphasis on individual conduct rather than institutional responsibility. With this, his first documentary, Lee adopts a diplomatic tone, handling the material with less partisan fervor and fewer authorial flourishes.

To its credit, *4 Little Girls* emphasizes the truism that America's racial turf war is at the intersection of race *and* class tensions. One of Spike Lee's subjects provides a salient example: "When blacks created a new, affluent neighborhood in the Fifties on the site of a former Birmingham garbage dump, the neighborhood soon became known as "Dynamite Hill" due to frequent bombings by jealous whites." In this respect, *4 Little Girls* recalls themes raised by John Singleton's *Rosewood* (1997), a drama based on a true story about the Klan's 1923 destruction of a black middle-class enclave in Florida.

With *4 Little Girls,* the director again evinces market savvy for timeliness. Lee has repeatedly culled characters and scenarios from daily headlines (e.g., *Do the Right Thing, Get on the Bus). 4 Little Girls* emerges at the end of the antifeminist, antigay, anti-Affirmative Action Nineties—aka the backlash era. Bombings and civil-rights injustices are again making news headlines. Fire bombings of predominantly black churches have risen in rural areas and legal wars are still being waged over small-town espionage. Recently, for example, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission—created in 1956, defunct since 1977—which employed agents and informants to unearth gossip about civil-rights activists and state voter registration drives, was finally exposed in 1996 after a twenty-one-year campaign to suppress the organization's files was derailed by the ACLU. In March 1998, one month after *4 Little Girls* premiered on cable TV, the Sovereignty Commission's records were made public at the Archives & History Department. This past July, three white men were charged with murder for dragging a black man to his death on a Jasper, Texas road. And, in August 1998, the murder of Vernon Dahmer—a black merchant killed in 1966 when the Klan firebombed his home in Hattiesburg—made headlines when district attorneys reopened his widow's case.

4 Little Girls is a tightly constructed, well-balanced documentary. Several sympathetic white liberals (e.g., attorney Bill Baxley, *New York Times* writer Howell Raines, author Taylor Branch, journalist Walter Cronkite) are depicted as fair-minded intellectuals capable of accurately assessing American race relations. Lee and Pollard also captured some incredibly ironic moments and images on film. In one of the final interviews, Chris McNair shows his favorite photo of Denise to the director. A bright-eyed, young black girl, posing proudly with her blonde-haired, blue-eyed doll, looks straight into her father's—and by extension Lee's—camera. This photo's messages are many. The image of Denise McNair clutching her white doll symbolizes black America's unrequited relationship to mainstream society. It signifies the efforts of black Americans, who, despite their cultural assimilation (and acceptance of mainstream norms), have faced a variety of rebuffs—segregation, racial violence, and institutional racism.

The American Dream was ironically one that cost many African Americans their lives. If America is the land of freedom and opportunity, the journey to freedom from slavery, the acquisition of civil rights and the quest for socioeconomic inclusion in America has, for black Americans, proven a hazardous road.—**Mia L. Mask**

Mr. Klein

Directed by Joseph Losey; starring Alain Delon, Jeanne Moreau, Juliet Berto, Michel Lonsdale and Suzanne Flon; VHS, color, 124 mins. Distributed by First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, NYC 10014

It is interesting that several people, all of them knowledgeable in film, to whom I mentioned that I was reviewing a film by Joseph Losey, all thought that Losey was British. One friend was totally stunned to learn that the director was born in Wisconsin (in 1909). But, of course, Losey was one of the more notable victims of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Blacklisted by Hollywood in 1952 for failing to appear before the committee (the director was in Italy shooting a film and unable to make it back in time), Losey sought exile in England, where, after a certain period of time, he made some of his best films, including *The Criminal* (1960), *The Servant* (1963), *Accident* (1966), and *The Go-Between* (1972), the last three featuring screenplays by British playwright Harold Pinter, with whom Losey tried for years to make a film based on Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu.* Shot in 1976, *Mr. Klein* is the first of three French-language films made by Losey in his final decade (he died in 1984).

Alain Delon stars in Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein.*

Mr. Klein stars Alain Delon, who also coproduced and who played the assassin in Losey's 1972 *The Assassination of Trotsky,* as a wealthy, French Catholic art dealer named Robert Klein living in Paris during the Second World War. At the beginning of the film, he discovers that he has been mistaken for—and/or has been set up by—a second "Mr. Klein" who in all probability is Jewish and who in fact may be a part of the Resistance. Klein immediately takes the matter to the police, only to find that, rather than isolating himself from the Jews, he is increasingly suspected of being Jewish. Unable to produce an important family document, and unable to track down the "other" Mr. Klein, who throughout the entire film remains an unseen, Kafkaesque enigma, Robert Klein first loses all of his rights as a businessman and then, ultimately, in spite of the efforts of his solidly bourgeois, solidly French Catholic lawyer (Michel Lonsdale) to get him out of the country under an assumed name, is shipped off to a concentration camp in a boxcar.

Interestingly, *Mr. Klein* brings together in a single film the two most important facets of the Losey vision that manifests itself in his best films. On the one hand, there is the political activist who visited the U.S.S.R. in the mid-Thirties, worked with Bertolt Brecht, helped create *The Living Newspaper* (sponsored by the WPA), ran a political cabaret, and launched his film career in 1948 with *The Boy With Green Hair,* a pacifist allegory with a strong antixenophobic message reflecting the American witch hunts that were already underway. Losey and Pinter's offbeat depiction of class struggle in *The Servant* remains one of the most savage on film. On the other hand, there is the Joseph Losey who found himself totally at ease with the linguistic and narrative enigmas of Harold Pinter, and who in 1968 made *The Ceremony,* a film so embedded in unexplained ritual and in ambiguities, both psychological and narrative, that it borders on the experimental, even while starring Elizabeth Taylor and Mia Farrow.

In *Mr. Klein,* Losey, just for starters, keeps the other Mr. Klein so hidden that the audience can never be sure that this mysterious figure—or his girlfriend, who parallels Robert Klein's live-in mistress (the late Juliet Berto)—even exists. In *Mr. Klein*'s Kafkaesque labyrinth, every hoped-for exit opens onto an even gloomier new entrance. Nor do Losey or screenwriter Franco Solinas

ever clarify just what it is that drives Robert Klein to obsessively, à la Dostoevsky, pursue a disastrous route when it is clear that, by such acts as visiting the other Klein's rundown apartment, he is digging himself into a bottomless pit. Is Robert Klein bent on self destruction? Is he guilt-ridden and single-handedly atoning for the hideous sins of the French establishment against the Jews? There are no easy answers. Even the film's audience is left having no idea of which way to root. Do we hope that the cold and fairly antipathetic Robert Klein finds his way out of the mess so that he can rejoin France's anti-Semitic upper crust? But can we take pleasure in seeing yet one more figure, even Robert Klein, handed over to the Gestapo by the Vichy regime's ruthless police?

There are more touches of genius in *Mr. Klein* than a review of this length can possibly do justice. In the opening sequence, for instance, we see a doctor examining a stout, nude woman. Only after the action continues through a series of quasianthropological scrutinizings do we gradually realize that the woman is being tested for Aryan characteristics. Following Robert Klein's first visit to the police, an ominous, never-explained long shot lasting under twenty seconds and containing no dialog shows a silhouetted man entering a room and convening a meeting. Throughout the film, in fact, Losey inserts shots of police officers gathering for raids, shots all the more disturbing by remaining only marginally related to the film's principal narrative. For a brutally anti-Semitic cabaret scene, Losey avoided realistic staging that could arouse anti-Semitic passions in the movie audience. In the process of stylization, the scene becomes even creepier through its utter incongruousness. At the same time, the location cinematography, by Losey regular Gerry Fisher, creates an almost palpable sense of the gloom hanging over wartime Paris, with muted colors that almost melt into the black and white in which Losey had wanted to photograph the film.

One must, furthermore, thoroughly admire the performance of Alain Delon as he creates a character making every attempt to maintain composure on an impossibly pretty face while moving inexorably into the depths, whether of despair, self destruction, or self sacrifice—or all of the above—we will never know. Suzanne Flon also offers a particularly harrowing portrayal of the friendless, frightened concierge of the building where the other Mr. Klein has lived.

Ultimately, *Mr. Klein*'s political impact is all the more devastating because of the distance the film keeps from its subject (characteristically, Losey shuns close-ups on any of his actors) and because of its enigmas—Bertolt Brecht and Harold Pinter merged into a singularly disturbing vision via which, first and foremost, we experience the absurdity of a political philosophy created out of bloodlines and nasolabial spaces. First Run Features offers a reasonably clean print of the film, marred here and there by some swishing noises on the soundtrack and some slightly out-of-sync dialog. In my distant memory of a 1977 theatrical screening of *Mr. Klein,* the film's visuals had a sharper, steelier feel to them, whereas one occasionally has the impression that First Run's video came from a 16mm print. It would also have been nice if First Run had used the proper aspect ratio. But First Run's reissue is infinitely preferable to an earlier video version, and its English subtitles are quite readable. No matter what, Losey's *Mr. Klein* remains essential viewing for anyone interested in politics, narrative structure, or the unique vision of one of the cinema's great *auteurs.*—**Royal S. Brown**

Amarcord

Directed by Federico Fellini; a digital video disk (DVD) from The Criterion Collection, Home Vision Cinema, and Janus Films; 1974, color, 127 mins. Distributed by Image Entertainment, 9333 Oso Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91811, phone (818) 407-9100.

It has now been twenty-five years since the release of the film most regard as Federico Fellini's last masterpiece. *Amarcord* is a funny and sentimental but ambivalent evocation of provincial Italy in the 1930s, with appeal, meaning, and importance which largely exist on two interrelated levels: one, an over-the-top mixture of the nostalgic (Amarcord means 'I remember' in a dialect from the director's native province), the fantastic (the appearance of a peacock after a snowstorm blankets the village being a notable example), and the scatalogical (there is easily enough bodily-function humor to put the makers of *South Park* to shame); the other, an attempt at explaining how Italy's national character (flaw) of arrested development, at least in the 1930s, was conducive to the flourishing of Mussolini and fascism.

As Peter Bondanella notes in his mostly cogent short essay accompanying this DVD release, it was Fellini himself who highlighted this latter level of importance, in an essay-interview entitled "The Fascism Within Us." Fellini wrote that "fascism and adolescence continue to be...permanent historical seasons of our lives...remaining children for eternity, leaving responsibilities for others, living with the comforting sensation that there is someone who thinks for you...and in the meanwhile, you have this limited, timewasting freedom which permits you only to cultivate absurd dreams..." Fellini is able to expose the townspeople, Bondanella writes, "as people dominated by false ideals and idiotic dreams of heroic feats and romantic love," ideals and dreams which made them ripe for fascist mythmaking and worship.

As compelling and persuasive as these rationales and interpretations are, however, it must be said that for the most part the romanticization of the past and the unrestrained silliness and low humor on display in *Amarcord*—both undeniably appealing—overwhelm this psychopolitical critique of the Italian character. It is clear that Fellini (and Bondanella) did not intend a particularly harsh dissection of this apparent character on the order of Daniel Goldhagen's indictment of Germans in *Hitler's Willing Executioners.* (Bondanella writes in his essay that *Amarcord* "never degenerates into dogmatic treatise.") But *Amarcord* shows much more ambivalence about the ostensibly awful perpetual adolescence of its characters than Fellini or Bondanella own up to, most poignantly in its basically sympathetic, if not celebratory, representation of the fun and stupid high jinks of Rimini's youngsters.

For the last several years, the most frequently available film prints and videocassettes of *Amarcord* have been variously marred by poor image quality, including the common picture cropping in the video version, and English-language dubbing. This beautiful digital video disk from The Criterion Collection represents a new digital transfer from the 35mm interpositive and 35mm magnetic audio masters (making it even easier to appreciate Nino Rota's affecting score), and presents the film in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1. In addition, a featurette on the disk demonstrates how numerous spots and scratches on the film were digitally processed and removed. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, given the importance of language in Fellini's evocation of time and place, there are three language options featured on the same disk, including—along with the inferior dubbed-into-English version—Italian with or without subtitles.

There are unfortunately a few (relatively minor) problems with this DVD release. The theatrical trailer mentioned on the box does not actually appear on the disk, while the English subtitling, although generally well done, features a few translation and spelling errors, and one instance where the subtitles remain stuck on the screen long after the corresponding words have been spoken. Those mistakes aside, however, this DVD release is an *Amarcord* for which we can be thankful.—**Marco Calavita**

Image of an Assassination

Directed by H.D. Motyl; VHS, color, 45 mins. Distributed by MPI Home Video, 16101 South 108th Ave., Orlando Park, IL 60467, phone (708) 460-0555.

The Zapruder film has been back in the news lately. When the original camera print was declared an official "assassination record" by the Assassination Records Re-