

Two Sidney Poitier Films: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER FOR LOVE OF IVY

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Source: *Film Comment*, WINTER 1969, Vol. 5, No. 4 (WINTER 1969), pp. 26-33

Published by: Film Society of Lincoln Center

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43754275>

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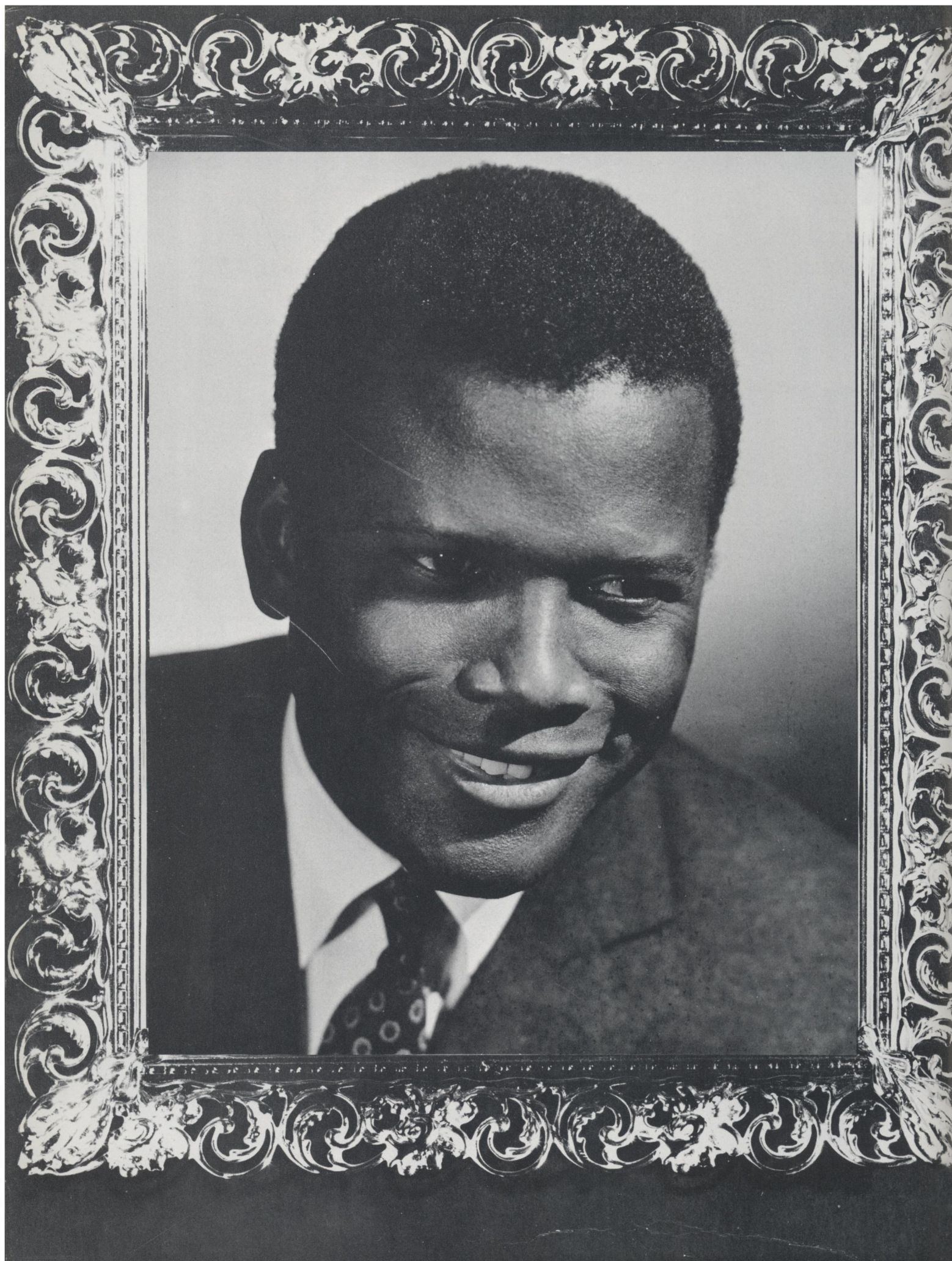
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# Two Sidney Poitier Films

## GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER FOR LOVE OF IVY

reviewed by  
**Maxine Hall Elliston,**  
Film Critic of Organization  
of Black American Culture

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*She has sent FILM COMMENT the following statement of the purposes of OBAC:*

**OBAC** means Organization of Black American Culture. OBAC was started in 1967 in Chicago. It was a coalition that grew out of the combined efforts that created Chicago's now world-famous "Wall," on 43rd and Langley, depicting great Black heroes. The OBAC organization contains a drama workshop, music workshop, artists' workshop, and a writers' workshop, of which I am a member. Don Lee, poet-in-residence at Cornell University, is also a member and founder. Our mentor, tutor, and just about everything else, is Hoyt Fuller, editor of *Negro Digest* magazine. We also work very closely with Pulitzer Prize winner, and Illinois Poet Laureate, Gwendolyn Brooks. We have a speakers bureau and are available for speaking dates, readings, etc. We publish a quarterly magazine, *Nommo*.

**As for myself**, I am an addicted movie-goer and a Black writer. Prose writing is my favorite (movie reviews, essays, critical analyses), but I also write a great deal of poetry. I am married, age 23, no children, and grew up (I still live in the area) on Chicago's South Side. I attended and/or graduated from Howard University, Roosevelt University, Central Junior College, and Chicago City Junior College

(Wilson Branch). I have been writing since I was very young and would like to do more. I am a social worker for a private agency in Chicago. My preferences are for foreign movies. Hollywood is the favorite target of my reviews, as I believe they deserve them. I am not as learned as I would like to be, but I am continually studying film directors, actors, producers, and film technique.

**My position is** merely the position of all Blacks involved in the Black Consciousness Movement. OBAC is dedicated to defining a Black Aesthetic. If we (Black and white) are to ever straighten out this mess, we must admit to the issues. Some of those issues are (1) that whites cannot define a Black Aesthetic for Black people (2) that Blacks cannot define a Black Aesthetic using white standards, and (3) the Black Aesthetic will have to be rejected or accepted, based on standards set forth by Black people. If you can understand this, then you can understand my position. We are not advocating burning, looting or overthrow of the government. We are merely saying that Black people exist, write, paint, compose music, and everything else, are able to do this based upon their own heritage and experiences. We are also not saying that we (OBAC or any other Black group) are the ones to articulate or exhibit this position. However, there are Black people capable of doing this, and they deserve to be recognized for that. We believe we can do this without using white-oriented standards or judges. It is a very simple dilemma to solve, and the same holds true for wearing natural hair and African garb. White America has denied that we have a heritage worth mentioning, and at the same time has said we do not belong to theirs. We are in the process of defining and educating—consequently, I believe Blacks are more adept at criticizing films books, art, etc., that claim to portray or reflect Blackness. In films, it is attempted with

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actors, directors, plots, etc. The same is true for whites. However, I am not discounting the need for Blacks to review purely white films, or for whites to do the same for Black films. My contention is only that the right criteria be used.

## GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER has been proclaimed by *Supernation*\* as one of the most brilliant films of our time. Needless to say, this is not a brilliant film, not a good film, and can even be described as a bad film. Notably, some of the greater films have been ignored this year and in past years, and will be in years to come.

Sidney Poitier plays his usual saccharine role of the good "nigger." And for anyone who missed this memorable portrayal, do not fear—you can see this same, intelligent, upstanding, God-like character in *LILIES OF THE FIELD*, *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT*, *TO SIR WITH LOVE*, *A PATCH OF BLUE*, and *THE SLENDER THREAD*. It is an easy role that Poitier has developed over the years with the help of the Fat White Cats in Hollywood.

Sidney has proved over the years that he is a good actor—and he has an Oscar to prove it. After all, just looking at Sidney, I would have sworn he was a Black man. It is well to note that Sidney in *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER* is a Professor from the World Health Organization—he has a medical degree and graduate degrees and professorships at some of the most prominent colleges in the country. So it takes a sort of Supernigger to be invited into *Supernation*. But alas, he still wasn't good enough.

Sidney in this movie showed signs of being a bit bored. He handles his scenes with the naturalness of a veteran performer—given a bucket of slop to work with. The expressions on his face seem to be saying: he was as sick of Miss Houghton's putridness as I was. But as I said before, Sidney's a good actor—he has to be, to plow his way through all that.

And Stanley Kramer—we all remember him for such great, lavish productions as *IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD*, and let us not forget the early Kramer picture that Sidney starred in, *THE DEFIANT ONES*: we can put this picture in that same category.

Kramer has brought the screen some of its most memorable classics—*DEATH OF A SALESMAN*, *HIGH NOON*, *JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG*, *SHIP OF FOOLS*, *THE FOUR-POSTER*. But Kramer has also produced and directed other films that failed as miserably as *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER*. Kramer has attempted to handle controversial and racial issues prior to this film, which is about as conspicuous as a tank in a ricefield in Vietnam.

\**Supernation* is a term I borrow from the white press. In the March, 1968 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Dan Wakefield wrote a 35-page article about the United States, which he refers to as *Supernation*. I believe this aptly describes this racist country's general attitude, reflective of the same concepts in their literature—*Superboy*, *Superman*, *Wonder Woman*, *The Fantastic Four*, etc.

I don't mean to propagate the myth of a Black mystique, but perhaps someone must admit what the issues are. The real issue here is the widespread acclaim that *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER*, and other Poitier films have received. *TO SIR WITH LOVE*, *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT* and *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER* have grossed over 20 million dollars, and the money is still rolling in. Sidney, while Tom-ing his way toward a million dollars of his own, has succeeded in selling to the public a Black prince. He's so famous now, he's even been the Sunday center-fold of national dailies, so you know he's really something.

I know there are Black and white pseudo-intellectuals who will ignore my criticism, but I insist that the *ad hominem* argument has to be used with *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER*, because Sidney is what sells the picture—although Spencer Tracy's performance is good, as is Miss Hepburn's. The best scene to me was between the maid and the delivery-boy, boogaloo-ing out the door into the truck. But without Sidney, this would have been just another movie.

Whites will love to see this Black nigger try to crawl his way into white society, and at the same time hating him for kissing a white girl. And non-thinking Blacks will wallow in the glory of their Black movie star. *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER* completely ignores the real issues, however. The film coats, covers up, disguises and even hides the real problems of the racist *Supernation*. What this movie boils down to is—warmed over white shit.

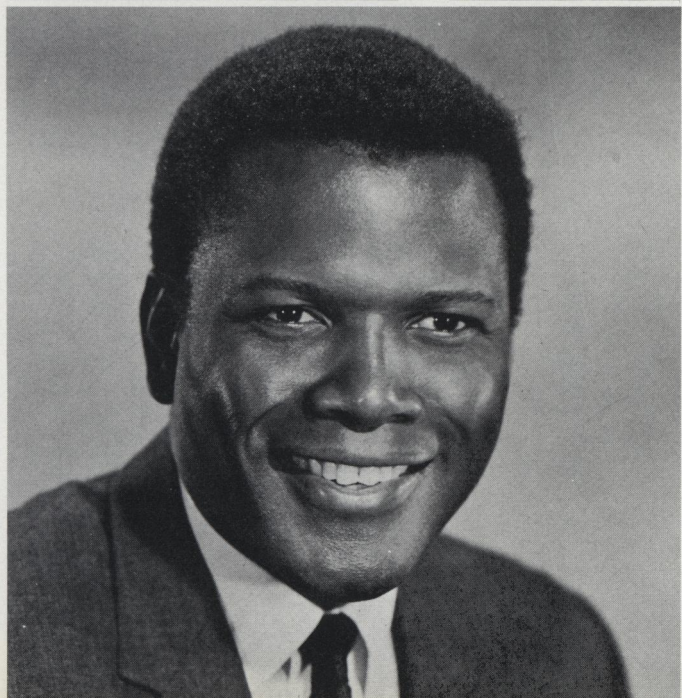
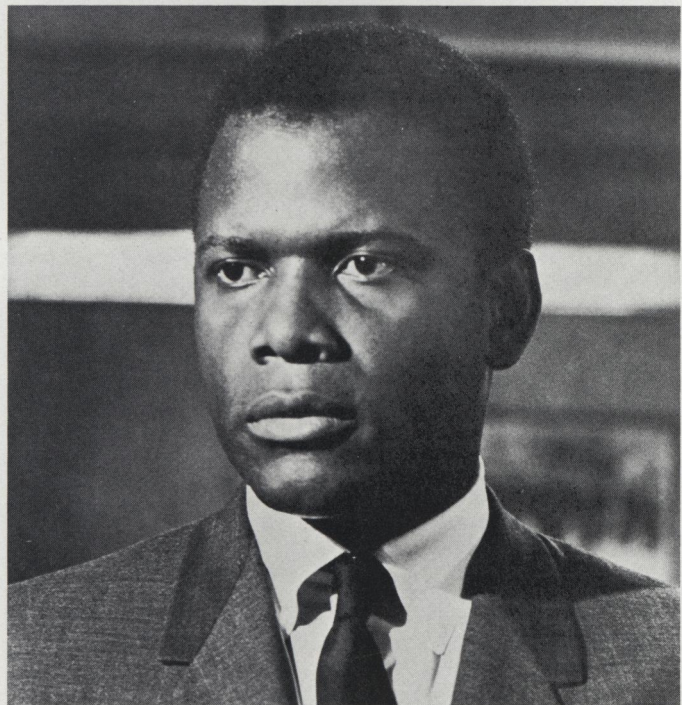
## GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

A Stanley Kramer Production for Columbia Pictures; produced and directed by Stanley Kramer; screenplay: William Rose; photography: Sam Leavitt; process photography: Larry Butler; music: Devol; song *Glory of Love* by Billy Hill, sung by Jacqueline Fontaine; production designer: Robert Clatworthy; set decorations: Frank Tuttle; editor: Robert C. Jones; sound: Charles J. Rice and Robert Martin; associate producer: George Glass; production supervisor: Ivan Volkman; assistant director: Ray Gosnell; Technicolor; 108 minutes. Cast:

Matt Drayton  
John Prentice  
Christina Drayton  
Joey Drayton  
Monsignor Ryan  
Mrs. Prentice  
Mr. Prentice  
Tillie  
Hilary St. George  
Carhop  
Dorothy  
Frankie  
Peter  
Judith  
Delivery boy  
Cab driver

Spencer Tracy  
Sidney Poitier  
Katharine Hepburn  
Katharine Houghton  
Cecil Kellaway  
Beah Richards  
Roy E. Glenn, Sr.  
Isabell Sanford  
Virginia Christine  
Alexandra Hay  
Barbara Randolph  
Durville Martin  
Tom Heaton  
Grace Gaynor  
Skip Martin  
John Hudkins





## *Star Billing for Poitier*

The complete arrival and authentication of a new Hollywood star is graphically illustrated in how he is billed and advertised. Below, in part, is Poitier's contractual agreement with Columbia Pictures in regard to advertising:

Corporation agrees to announce in all paid advertising the name of the Artist as a co-star. (No other member of the cast, except SPENCER TRACY, may be announced above or before Artist's name. Artist shall receive billing on the same line with SPENCER TRACY and in the same color as SPENCER TRACY. If the name of the member of the cast whose name is announced above or before all other members of the cast shall be announced above or before the title of the picture in paid advertising issued by or under the control of the Corporation. Artist's name shall be similarly announced above or before the title of the picture.) Artist's name shall be announced in lettering equal in all respects, except as to position, as the lettering used to announce the member of the cast whose name is announced above or before all other members of the cast.

## FOR LOVE OF IVY

I know Sidney will be grateful that my ax has grown a little dull as far as he is concerned. I was pleased with this movie, his story and the acting. Let me say now that I know and am quite sure that Sidney is a human being, a man capable of emotion and feeling. I am so accustomed to Sidney and his white-on-white stoicism that it was refreshing to see this new side of him. It was not a feeling of pride, but it did my heart good. Nevertheless—I guess the world is shocked—it did take a little getting used to, to see him kissing all over that woman in the bed. I love to review Sidney's movies, because Sidney is so popular, and when the film is popular, people pay attention to the reviewer.

The screenplay, which was written from a story by Sidney, was half and half: half white, half Black; half funny and half insulting; half good and half bad. I can't be sure if it was Sidney's whiteness or Robert Alan Aurthur's.

The story is very cute and uncomplicated: Ivy, whom Abbey Lincoln aptly portrays, wants to give up her job as a domestic with a prominent white suburban family and move to the city. She has decided to enroll in secretarial school and find out what's happening in the world. Naturally, the family doesn't want Ivy to leave—except for the father, the only one exhibiting any intelligence in the matter, who says "It's no problem that Ivy's leaving, we'll just call the agency." The children of the family take it upon themselves to find Ivy a boyfriend so that she will stay. After all, what else could she want but a boyfriend!

Sidney Poitier, a half super-Black man, is the guy elected for the job. He is coerced into the project by the son, because of Sidney's clandestine gambling operation that is housed in a transport truck. As the plot thickens, we learn that Ivy has been with the family since she was 18 years old, that Poitier is a respected businessman by day, a popular house-man by night, that the son is a hippy, the daughter a party-girl, the mother a moron, and that Quincy Jones (who did the music) is cooking. Nothing much needs to be said about the producers: they did a very neat, polished, slick job. And they did it without too many mistakes.

Daniel Mann, the director, was very fortunate—or should I say that the actors were very fortunate. The film moved very smoothly and at a very entertaining pace. *BUTTERFIELD 8* and some of Mann's films were likewise very well done.

Abbey Lincoln is an excellent Black actress. I kept thinking—it's a damned shame this girl does not have dozens of movies to her credit and loads of money. Let me digress a moment to say that her husband, Max Roach, could be a movie star in my book any day. Abbey was absolutely marvelous in her role—from the flat accents to those big beautiful, expressive eyes. Beau Bridges, son of Lloyd Bridges, was really funny.

And now Sidney. Need I comment? I believe he is very capable. Sidney can act, and he can add a comic touch that has now become known as his

trademark. This was very vividly illustrated throughout the entire film, but the following scenes were pure delight: Sidney's meeting with the son and the initial proposition; his scene with the son and daughter and the white pills; his meeting with Ivy and the subsequent date. His nuances of speech and facial expressions are a movie in themselves. And this was scene after scene. Poitier gives a freer, much more liberated type of performance in this movie, and I thought that was good in itself.

The movie was cute, funny and thoroughly entertaining. The obvious references to Blackness were not enough to call this a Black movie. It was heavy-handed at times, and the white liberalism showed through. A few particular things stick out in my mind, as they stuck out very plainly, to me, in the film. There was B.B. King's record of "You Put It On Me," the Japanese restaurant that was Sidney's favorite, and an obvious attempt at making Ivy the most innocent, sheltered maid you've seen—and worse yet, Sidney's lines about not taking from our own, in a reference to the gambling.

But the movie was funny, and should be seen. Keep in mind, however, this is nothing more than another attempt of white America at soul-soothing, and nothing more.

## FOR LOVE OF IVY

**Presented by Palomar Pictures International and released by Cinerama Releasing Corporation; produced by Edgar J. Sherick and Jay Weston; director: Daniel Mann; screenplay: Robert Alan Aurthur from an original story by Poitier; camera (color by Perfect): Joseph Coffey; music: Quincy Jones; editor: Patricia Jaffe; production design: Peter Dohantos; assistant director: Steve Barnett; 101 minutes. Cast:**

Jack  
Ivy Moore  
Tim Austin  
Doris Austin  
Gena Austin  
Frank Austin  
Billy Talbot  
Jerry  
Harry  
Eddie

Sidney Poitier  
Abbey Lincoln  
Beau Bridges  
Nan Martin  
Laurie Peters  
Carroll O'Connor  
Leon Bibb  
Henry Hurd  
Lon Satton  
Stanley Greene

## STAR STUDDED FILM GLAMORIZES INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES

*The following article about the Stanley Kramer film, GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER, is reprinted from The Thunderbolt, The White Man's Viewpoint, official organ of the National States Rights Party, December 1967, Issue 96, PO Box 6263, Savannah, Georgia, 31405. The same issue of The Thunderbolt carries articles about two other films—THE INCIDENT and COOL HAND LUKE. Both films are attacked as part of a Jewish conspiracy in Hollywood to undermine Christianity and subvert Americanism:*

Polls have proven that by far the largest number of people attending movies are between the ages







## Biography of Sidney Poitier

of 16 and 26. These are the marrying years, of course. A new movie which comes up glamorizing inter-racial marriages is GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER. You have already guessed that a Jew wrote it.

His name is William Rose, who authored the pro-communist movie, THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING. To make sure this movie is a real box office success, the producer Stanley Kramer (a Jew, what else) has picked out three Academy Award winners, the late Spencer Tracy, 67, Katharine Hepburn, 58 and Sidney Poitier. The question asked by the movie is "Would you want your daughter to marry a Negro?" Then the story sets out to prove what a wonderful idea this can actually be.

The movie begins in beautiful and romantic Honolulu, Sidney Poitier plays a well-educated, internationally renowned physician, a specialist on tropical diseases, and an eligible bachelor, age 35. (Have any of our readers ever heard of a nigger with these qualifications?) He meets Katharine Houghton, in real life the niece of Katharine Hepburn. After she dates Poitier for only 10 days in Hawaii, she is swept off her feet and wants to marry the nigger. They fly back to San Francisco to announce their engagement. After some days of thought, Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn think this is just a marvelous idea.

Miss Hepburn, who has been a member of a number of Red fronts says, "I would not have made this picture if I thought there was anything wrong with interracial marriages." Stanley Kramer said, "I believe that in a free society people are entitled to marry whomever they like. Otherwise I wouldn't be making this film." Kramer is also a member of numerous Red fronts, and produced the Anti-German film, JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG.

Their aim is at the youth of this nation. Interracial marriage is greatly increasing. It is mostly young, impressionable white girls who are marrying negro men. The number of White men marrying Black women is all but nil. The offspring of such unions are Black children, due to the fact that the negroes genes are dominant over a White person's genes, at a 4 to 1 ratio. The Jew propagandists are out to make your and my descendants into Black African savages. The destruction of the White race means the end to Civilization and Christianity. The Jew believes a weakening of the White race with negro blood would make his hold on this nation stronger. Actually the Jew is a parasite who must have the White Christian worker as the host for him to feed upon. If the equality crazed Jews succeeded in mongrelizing us, they would in turn destroy the producer of all the wealth they now own.

Sidney Poitier was born in Miami, Florida, on February 20, 1927. He was the only one of six brothers and two sisters to be born outside the Caribbean area. His father was from Nassau, in the Bahamas—a tomato farmer who regularly traveled with his wife to Miami to sell his produce. It was during one of those trips that Sidney was born.

Poitier was raised in Nassau, where circumstances prevented him from starting school until he was 11. Two years later his father's business collapsed, and Sidney at 13 had to leave school to help support the family. He tried many jobs before coming to New York where, before he was 16, he was employed as a drug-store clerk, parking-lot attendant, ditch-digger, construction worker, pin-boy, trucker and longshoreman.

At 18, Poitier joined the U.S. Army and was trained as a physiotherapist in a mental hospital. When he got his discharge he decided to stay on in New York. Spotting a newspaper story that the American Negro Theater was looking for actors, Poitier made application. His audition was bad. He flunked a second reading, but the theater needed backstage workers. He worked as janitor in exchange for acting lessons. As his theatrical education progressed, he advanced to bit parts in weekly productions, and New York director James Light noted the young actor's talent. Through Light, Poitier won a Broadway bit that attracted favorable critical attention and he went on to prominent roles in *Lysistrata*, *Freight* and *Anna Lucasta*.

In 1949 Poitier made his film bow in NO WAY OUT. His performance led to the long and difficult role of Rev. Msinangu in CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY. Then came the part that brought him critical praise and an international reputation—Miller in THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE. Later, he won festival awards at Venice and Berlin, an Oscar nomination for THE DEFIANT ONES, and the Giorgi Cini Cultural Foundation Award, a special citation given to him "because of human values—achieving the summit in the realm of both art and civilization." At the Academy Award presentations in 1964, Poitier received an Oscar as Best Actor for his performance in LILIES OF THE FIELD. "It's been a long road to this moment," he said after accepting the award.

Poitier is six feet, two inches tall, weighs 185 pounds, and apart from acting, his chief pleasures are reading, music and golf. He has four daughters; born between 1952 and 1961.

The following are the titles of films in which Poitier has appeared: NO WAY OUT; CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY!; RED BALL EXPRESS; GO MAN GO; THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE; A MAN IS TEN FEET TALL [EDGE OF THE CITY]; GOODBYE MY LADY; PARIS BLUES; PRESSURE POINT; THE LONG SHIPS; THE BEDFORD INCIDENT; DUEL AT DIABLO; SOMETHING OF VALUE; MARK OF THE HAWK; THE DEFIANT ONES; PORGY AND BESS; ALL THE YOUNG MEN; A RAISIN IN THE SUN; LILIES OF THE FIELD; THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD; A PATCH OF BLUE; THE SLENDER THREAD; TO SIR WITH LOVE; IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT; FOR LOVE OF IVY; GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER; THE LOST MAN. ■■■■



