1 The Negro Actor and the American Movies

The Negro actor and the part he has played in the development of the American movie is one of the most interesting phases of what is now one of America's greatest industries. Because no true picture of American life can be drawn without the Negro, his advent into the movies was inevitable; but also because of the prejudices that have hampered and retarded him since his coming to America, his debut was delayed. To be perfectly frank, the Negro entered the movies through a back door, labelled "servants' entrance." However, beggars cannot be choosers, and it is to his credit that he accepted the parts assigned to him, made good, and opened the door for bigger things.

In order better to appreciate the attitude of the white producer toward Negro talent, we must keep in mind the change in the social status of the group. To put it briefly, at the time of the Civil War, the Northern white man considered the Negro a black angel without wings, about whom he must busy himself in spirit and deed. On the other hand, the Southern white man detested Negroes in general and liked his particular blacks. After the Negro had been given his freedom, there soon arose the feeling that he was an economic and social menace and we find him depicted everywhere as a rapist. Then the white dilettante, exhausted with trying to find new thrills, stumbled over the Negro and exclaimed, "See what we have overlooked! These beloved vagabonds! Our own Negroes, right here at home!" And voila! Black became the fad.
The Negro actor and the American movies
ing sequences. The ensemble singing and the voice of Clarence Muse were decided contributions and well worth the price of admission. The Melancholy Dame, a short comedy with little music or dancing, depended principally upon its comic dialogue, which is given in the best Octavius Roy Cohen dialect, for its interest. Incidentally, Mr. Cohen himself directed the picture.

Of course, it is generally believed that the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production, Hallelujah, will be the ace of the all-Negro talking pictures. King Vidor is directing; Daniel Haynes, formerly of Show Boat, has the principal role and is supported by Nina May McKeeney of the Blackbirds of 1929; Victoria Spivey, a blues recording artist; Fannie DeKnight, who played in Lula Belle; Langdon Grey, a nonprofessional, and 375 extras. There are forty singing sequences, including folk songs, spirituals, work songs, and blues. Eva Jessye, a Negro, who has compiled a book of spirituals and trained the original "Dixie Jubilee Choir," is directing the music. The story, which is devoid of propaganda, is that of a country boy who temporarily succumbs to the wiles of a woman, is beset with tragedy, and ultimately finds peace. It is a known fact that several studios are holding up all-Negro productions until the fete of Hallelujah has been pronounced.

In the meantime, Show Boat, a talkie using the present American Show Boat company of both blacks and whites, has been made by Universal and had its premiere at Miami and Palm Beach, March 17; Ethel Waters, greatest comedienne of her race, and Mamee Smith, blues singer of note, have been signed up by Warner Brothers for Vitaphone comedies; Sissle and Blake, internationally famous kings of syncopation, have been released by Warner Brothers; Christie Studio is preparing another Negro film; Eric Von Stroheim is working on the Negro sequence of The Swamp, and John Ford's Strong Boy is using a large number of Negroes.

Three by-products have resulted from this slow recognition of the Negro as movie material—Negro film corporations, Negro and white film corporations, and white corporations, all for the production of Negro pictures. They have the same motives; namely, to present Negro films about and for Negroes, showing them not as fools and servants, but as human beings with the same emotions, desires, and weaknesses as other people's; and to share in the profits of this great industry. Of this group, perhaps the three best known companies are The Micheaux Pictures Company of New York City, an all-colored concern whose latest releases are The Wages of Sin and The Broken Violin; The Colored Players Film Corporation of Philadelphia, a white concern, which produced three favorites—A Prince of His People, Ten Nights in a Barroom, starring Charles Gilpin, and Children of Fate; and The Liberty Photoplay, Inc., of Boston, a mixed company, no picture of which I have seen. There is rumor of the formation in New York City of The Tono-Film, an all-Negro corporation, for exclusive Negro talking pictures, and that its officers and directors will include Paul Robeson, Noble Sissle, Maceo Pinkard, Earl and Maurice Dancer, J. C. Johnson, F. E. Miller, and Will Vodery, all of whom are known in America and abroad. So far, the pictures released by this group have been second rate in subject matter, direction, and photography, but they do keep before the public the great possibilities of the Negro in movies.

In conclusion, it must be conceded by the most skeptical that the Negro has at last become an integral part of the motion picture industry. And his benefits will be more than monetary. Because of the Negro movie, many a prejudiced white who would not accept a Negro unless as a servant, will be compelled to admit that at least he can be something else; many an indifferent white will be beguiled into a positive attitude of friendliness; many a Negro will have his race consciousness and self-respect stimulated. In short, the Negro movie actor is a means of getting acquainted with Negroes and under proper direction and sympathetic treatment can easily become a potent factor in our great struggle for better race relations. And the talkie, which is being despised in certain artistic circles, is giving him the great opportunity to prove his right to a place on the screen.
In 1929, when the situation was critical, the motion-picture industry began to experience a crisis. The studios, particularly the major studios, were faced with the problem of blacklisting. The studios had begun to use the term "Negro" exclusively to refer to African Americans. The term "Negro" was considered to be more acceptable than "black" or "African American." The studios believed that using the term "Negro" would help to maintain the status quo and prevent the integration of white and black performers. However, the term "Negro" was considered to be offensive and discriminatory by many African Americans. The use of the term "Negro" was also seen as a way to maintain the racial hierarchy and reinforce the notion of black inferiority.

In 1930, the term "Negro" was replaced by "African American." The change in terminology was seen as a way to move away from the negative connotations associated with the term "Negro." The term "African American" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the term "Negro" was still used occasionally, but it was becoming less common. The term "African American" was becoming more widely accepted. The use of the term "Negro" was seen as a relic of the past and was gradually phased out of usage.

In the 1960s, the term "Negro" was almost completely replaced by "African American." The change in terminology was seen as a way to acknowledge the contributions of African Americans and to move away from the negative connotations associated with the term "Negro." The term "African American" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the term "Negro" was almost completely replaced by "Black." The term "Black" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans and to move away from the negative connotations associated with the term "Negro." The term "Black" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the term "Black" was almost completely replaced by "African American." The term "African American" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans and to move away from the negative connotations associated with the term "Negro." The term "African American" was seen as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans.

In the 2010s, the term "African American" is the most commonly used term to refer to African Americans. The term "African American" is used in all contexts, from the entertainment industry to academia, and is generally accepted as a way to acknowledge the cultural and historical contributions of African Americans.

In summary, the term "Negro" was used to refer to African Americans in the early 20th century, but it was gradually phased out of usage in the 1940s and 1950s. The term "Negro" was replaced by "African American" in the 1960s, and then by "Black" in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, the term "African American" is now the most commonly used term to refer to African Americans.