

African american cinema

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Black Cinema The subject of African-Americans in Motion Pictures provides some of the most interesting studies along with the many controversial interpretations of the roles as actors they played on screen. As far back as the silent films era, African-Americans have been featured in motion pictures playing roles depicting some aspect of acting and being purveyors of a black image. The messages or themes of these movies have over the years presented a mixture of images based upon what was thought to please the viewers of each particular film. Unfortunately, many of those films showed black characters in negative stereotypical roles, which the average African-Americans would never truly identify as being like themselves. Since many of our American icons and heroes have come from our motion picture stars, we need to understand what this narrow view presented and compare it with what we presently see at our local cinema today. The movies *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* (1967), *Shaft* (1971), *Do The Right Thing* (1989), *Boys n the Hood* (1991), and *Menace to Society* (1993) show a thematic style and stereotypes in the way that black films have progressed over the years. The motion picture industry was never too quick to change their approach in presenting African-Americans in realistic roles depicting social or civil conditions in an integrated context. Many of these roles required scenes showing African-Americans in positions of authority or relating to white Americans in a positive way. This Integration Period therefore brought together African-American actors with scenes along side white actors in roles showing both players dealing with racial conflict and resolution. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* was truly a unique film for its time in that Sidney Poitier's character breaks all the stereotypical views of blacks in American Cinema. In

the early 1930's blacks were portrayed as lower class, slow-witted figures of entertainment, often showed in menstural shows. Poitier's character broke all these stereotypes. 1971 brought to the big screen a successive series of superhero black or " blaxploitation" films. Shaft was released in 1971, and Richard Roundtree was the superman black hero detective. He was compared by many to the white James Bond. Related to Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Shaft took it up a notch in showing a black man as a hero. Poitier's role was one to equalize whites and blacks in their roles in American cinema, but Shaft showed a black man who was an authoritative figure. Different themes can be mixed in between the two movies. They both show an intelligent black man that has a grip on reality. Both movies showed themes of how integration has struck America. They differ though on a level in that Shaft was a black dominant cast and Guess Who's Coming to Dinner was predominantly white. Do the Right Thing, Boyz n the Hood, and Menace to Society were all produced in a more modern era, hence the fact that they all have similar racial themes. The films all paint a picture of urban Black America in their time period. All three films are thought to be racially reactionary films aimed at the psyche of both black and white viewers. The movies were all a success due to the touched topics of racial situations, ethnic tensions, and human encounters of anger. The superb casts of both black and white actors made the motion picture industry aware of a newer avenue for films and race relations. African-Americans in motion pictures in today's expanding world of visual imagery can be seen on many expanding fronts. We see the making of motion pictures on subjects or themes which can be taken from history, life experiences, music, and unexplored events.

Today's markets are open, and African-Americans are taking advantage of these open door opportunities. Actors and actresses are expanding their roles from stage acting to movies to TV miniseries to video cassettes or discs, and roles taken from books, plus movie soundtracks. In our world today African-American actors and actresses will always have a place in American Cinema and their future looks bright and promising.