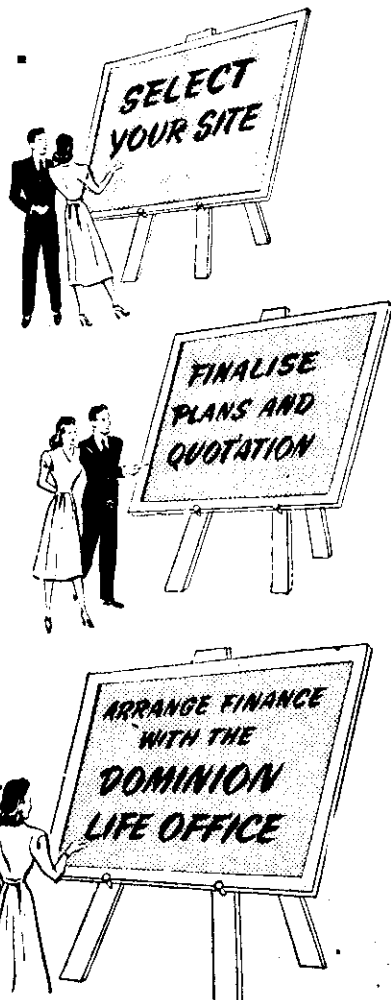




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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

A Study in Black and White

HOME OF THE BRAVE

(Screen Plays—United Artists)

WHEN will Hollywood producers have the courage to give a true-to-life version of Negro characters intimately associated with white characters? asked a prominent American publication in 1945. *Home of the Brave* is the first complete answer to that question. Taut, outspoken, and loaded with scenes of explosive violence, it presents the audience with a moral question disguised as high-quality drama. Why should we despise Negroes, or allow others to despise and abuse them? The problem is faced squarely, and a solution, not entirely satisfactory, is arrived at. Curiously enough, the play from which the film was adapted dealt with the crack-up of a Jewish G.I. who was the victim of race prejudice. By putting a Negro in the Jew's place, producer Stanley Kramer has sent up the dramatic temperature at least 50 per cent, and when to this is added the crisp, well-pruned direction (Mark Robson), fresh and uninhibited acting by a bunch of almost unknown actors and some very blunt dialogue, the result is a picture of striking power.

Five soldiers are sent to reconnoitre an island held by 15,000 Japanese. In charge is a 26-year-old Major who knows nothing much about anything except his wartime job. The others are a Negro named Mossy (James Edwards), Mossy's old school friend, Finch (Lloyd Bridges), a corporal called T.J. (Steve Brodie) who is just a mass of racial prejudice, and a disillusioned sergeant named Mingo (Frank Lovejoy). No Japs disturb them for the first three days, which leaves plenty of time for tensions to develop over the presence of a "dirty yellow-bellied nigger" as T.J. calls Mossy. Against a background of sinister jungle and screaming tropical birds the main conflict develops between these two.

Why? T.J. was a highly paid executive in civilian life, and none of his army pals can let him forget it, especially since he is now a lowly corporal. So he vents his spite against the world, by sneering at Mossy and making tactless remarks about Negroes in his presence. The others, partly because they dislike T.J. and partly because they respect Mossy as a man, eventually take the Negro's side. A fight between Finch and T.J. (he calls Finch a "nigger-lover") is followed by shots from Jap snipers, who wound Mingo and hit, capture and finally kill Finch. When Finch dies in Mossy's arms, the Negro becomes paralysed from the waist down with severe traumatic shock.

Mossy's neurosis (the result of a guilt complex) was apparently caused by his momentary gladness that it was Finch and not himself who was killed. But how does this tie up with his feeling of racial inferiority? That is the question the army doctor must solve as he tries to cure Mossy back at base. He probes into his past life, and through flashbacks the audience (and Mossy) see how his sickness derives from a whole lifetime of Negro-baiting and humiliation. Mossy is superficially cured—"You dirty nigger, get up and walk!" says the doctor in the dramatic high-spot of the

BAROMETER

FINE: "Home of the Brave."
OVERCAST, WITH BRIGHT INTERVALS: "Three Godfathers."

film, and he does—but the cure isn't complete until Mingo casually mentions later on that he too has felt glad for a moment when others and not himself have been killed.

Mossy is overjoyed that he isn't "different" from white men, but there is a slight evasion here of what seemed to me a central issue. The real cause of Mossy's trouble was the fact that Finch, in a moment of emotional stress, just before being shot, started to call him a "yellow nigger" too. How deep did Finch's friendship for him really go? With this doubt lingering in his mind his cure can never be really complete.

The ending is the least convincing part of the film, but within the limitations of the situation it is about the only one that could satisfy box-office requirements. Other weak points are a tendency to be over-dramatic, e.g., the full camera shot of Finch's mutilated, dying face, which is shockingly effective but dramatically unnecessary and an occasional staginess of set and stilted movement on the Negro's part. These are more than counter-balanced by the intensity and punch of the acting as a whole, and the compactness of form and terse handling of the film's thematic material.

THREE GODFATHERS

(Argosy—M.G.M.)

THE name John Ford attracted me to this picture, largely to see what has happened these days to the director of *Stagecoach*, and I came away feeling that a lot of brilliant technique had been wasted on a confused and lachrymose story. Three bank robbers—John Wayne, Pedro Armendariz, and Harry Carey, Jr.—while trying to escape from a sheriff's posse in the burning sands of the Arizona desert, come upon a woman in childbirth at a dried-up water-hole. They save the child and stagger on, dying of thirst, and only Wayne and the child get through to the nearest settlement, where he becomes a hero. After a grim beginning, the end is pure burlesque, but the picture is given some interest by the magnificent photography, in colour, of the desert scenes, and its realistic characterisation of cowboy types, which reveal a touch of the master. Seldom have I got such a fine impression of the wide open spaces of the Old West, but it was all spoilt by the mawkish sentimentality of the plot.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

A RESIDENTIAL club for old people, the first of its kind in New Zealand, has been opened by the Wellington City Mission and the residents, the oldest of whom is 90 years old, are introduced in their new environment in "Comfort in Old Age," the National Film Unit's Weekly Review, which will be released on November 25. Other items are "Making the Medals," showing Empire Games medals being made in Wellington, "Transport Cavalcade" at the Diamond Jubilee of the Paraparaumu School, and "Royal Show," in which Palmerston North stages its most successful show to date.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 25, 1949.