

Programming with *School Daze*

We heard four things about *School Daze* during the spring of 1987 when 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks was still on location in Atlanta: that it was a musical, that it was tackling the subject of color caste in the Black community, that it had an anti-apartheid theme, and that it was in trouble. The description was interesting; the bad news, of serious concern. In cases of studio-backed independent projects in trouble, Hollywood executives usually make the panicky decision to cut the elements that originally made the work compelling. Examples of films gutted of social relevance, formal innovations, or both are legion. That *School Daze* is not one of them is fortunate. Alert to the film's potential for countering the positive-images school's assertions that color bias played out decades ago and that "dirty laundry" is best kept in a lidded hamper anyway, community workers who use film in our practice were relieved by the late-summer communiqué that *School Daze* was out of the woods. Programmers of independent film and video began planning how to use the new film to facilitate analyses of intra-community dynamics.

One of the many valuable things shared in the multiple-voiced casebook *Uplift the Race: The Construction of School Daze* (New York: Fireside/Simon and Schuster, 1988) by Spike Lee and Lisa Jones is how to hang tough when

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beset by problems—the loss of critical location sites, the persistence of bad-mouthing rumors, severe plunges in morale, and competition with a production paying better rates for student extras. A Columbia Pictures executive dropped in for a mere minute, then went home satisfied. And the production team brought the film in for a February 12, 1988, release. To the screen came a good-looking, ambitiously mounted, imaginatively designed production characterized by a bold mix of both dance and musical idioms and performatory and acting styles.

Set at a Southern Black college during homecoming weekend, *School Daze* takes a serio-comic look at caste, class, and gender contradictions among four rival groups of students: Da Naturals, the Gamma Rays, Da Fellas, and the frat members and pledgees of Gamma Phi Gamma. "West Side Story with an apartheid twist," quipped a student DJ on WCLK radio in Atlanta. Whether the remark was facetiously or reverentially intended, *School Daze* is a house-divided pageant. It is a pageant in the sense that the spectacle inherent in traditional ceremonies and rites of homecoming (parades, floats, coronation balls, inductions into secret orders) provides the rationale for the overall style of the film.

It is a pageant, too, in the sense that confrontations between the groups are theatrically staged moments rather than realistic debates about the issues. The disturbances are broken up, either by an intervening character or by a scene shift, leaving the parties unreconciled and the contradictions unresolved. The function of the four groups of students is to enact the divisive behaviors that impede unification of the Black community. The film's agenda is to make a series of wake-up calls that the punnish title suggests is necessary for African folk asleep in the West.

The film begins as the Columbia Pictures logo is still on screen. On the soundtrack is the Middle Passage: the wheeze and creak of the ship plowing through water, the dip of the oars, the sounding of the ship's bell. As the prologue's first visual appears, the familiar black-and-white graphic of the slave ship, the old spiritual "I'm Building Me a Home" begins. Using archival materials, Lee presents a chronicle of a diasporized people's effort to make a home in the "new world." Several things are accomplished during the historical unfolding. A faux history is created for Mission College, the fictitious setting that functions as a microcosm. The viewer is reminded that much of our struggle in this land has been about the rights to literacy and autonomy and further that the educational institutions we have built are repositories for much of that history. The film also claims a position for itself in that history. Mission College becomes one of the "homes" alluded to in the spiritual "I'm Building Me a Home." The emancipatory enterprise, the Black nationalist quest for a collective "home," is presented from the time of Frederick Douglass

to the era of the Black Panther Party. The prologue then segues to an anti-apartheid rally, the movie's opening scene, in which a "Free Mandela" banner waves. As *School Daze* unfolds, its depiction of contemporary tribal rites is informed by the Fanonian observation that when we internalize the enemy doctrine of supremacy, we jeopardize the liberation project.

Colorist, elitist, sexist, and heterosexist behaviors are presented—sometimes with a degree of hyperbole to signal satiric intent—through the four groups that constitute a hierarchy. The Gamma Phi Gamma forces command the most prestige and the most space on campus; also, they receive the most attention in the production (wardrobe, props, variety of settings, musical themes, spacious framing). Their agenda is to defend tradition at Mission and to perpetuate the prestige of their fraternity.

Committed to some degree to transforming tradition are members of the anti-apartheid forces, Da Fellas. Their homes on campus are the shantytown construction, a dorm room, and a second-hand car. Members of this group open and close the film and are the subjects of the longest sequence in the film.

The prestige of the Gamma Rays is derived from two sources: their "preferred" looks (light complexions, weave jobs, tinted contact lenses) and their position as the sister order of G Phi G. Their agenda is the maintenance of the frat: The Rays clean the frat house, assist the pledges in their initiation tasks, throw parties for the brothers, and make themselves available for sex. Although their labor is indispensable to the maintenance of the frat, they are not; they are replaceable by other female recruits. For the most part, the Rays speak an odd form of ventriloquy and are treated by the film as well as by the frat as groupies.

Called Da Naturals in the casebook, Jigaboos on screen, and "Rachel and them" in spectator parlance is the group we come to know the least. Unorganized and with no discernible agenda, these brown-skinned, working-class sisters frequently utter non sequiturs and a variation of the ventriloquy scripted for the Rays. Their "home" is the dorm. Their members loll on a bed saying, "All men are dogs"; they shout from dorm windows saying, "All men are dogs."

In the intervals between group confrontations are several sketchy stories that function as the narrative outline: the seduction and corruption of a fugitive Jigaboo, Half-Pint (Spike Lee); the punishment of an ambitious Wannabee, Jane (Tisha Campbell); and the blown opportunity of a campus organizer, Dap (Larry Fishburne), to develop political coherence. The stories make useful points about intracommunity contradictions. Unfortunately, the film's agenda to make a wake-up call is undermined by its misogynistic and gay-hating sensibility.

Independent filmmaker Marlon Riggs responds to the homophobic bigotry in *School Daze* in his 1989 film *Tongues Untied*. A scripted performance-art work about tribal rights and the tribal rights of Black gay men, *Untied* uses a clip from *Daze* in a section of the film that catalogues examples of heterosexist aggression by Black film- and video makers. The clip is from the Greek show. Da Fellas launch into a call-and-response: "When I say Gamma, you say fag. Gamma (fag), Gamma (fag), Gamma, Gamma, Gamma, Gamma. . . ." Da Fellas continue their disruption of the step contest by issuing threats to the fraternities they've labeled "fags"—"Get back or we'll kick your ass."

Lee's *School Daze*, Riggs's *Tongues Untied*, and Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (a film frequently programmed with *Untied*)—each makes a claim on history while taking a position on the "dirty laundry" issue. *Daze* positions its statements on colorphobia and divisiveness as a counterpoise to the history of struggle chronicled in the prologue. *Untied*, through an innovative mix of idioms (autobiography, lyrical poetry, dramatic monologue, cinéma vérité-like scenarios, archival footage), challenges the attempt by the Black community to exclude its gay sector from Black radical history. Footage of gay-rights marches is superimposed on footage of civil-rights marches during the culmination of Riggs's assertive argument.

Looking is a meditation on Langston Hughes that uses the Harlem Renaissance as a cultural reference point for Black gay artists in Britain. Julien sets up a wished-for call-and-response between Harlem of the 1920s and southeast London of the 1980s. He uses archival materials, clothing, literary utterances, and period music to script the yearned-for dialogue. The quest by contemporary Black gay poets for an ancestor, a forefather, a tradition, a past has to override a double silence: Langston Hughes disclosed little about his sexual identity, and the executors of the Hughes estate demanded, in addition to various cuts, that Hughes's voice be lowered on the soundtrack.

Tradition—Mission College's and the G Phi G fraternity's—is what Julian/Big Brother Almighty (Giancarlo Esposito) continually uses as his source of authority, especially in his war with Da Fellas. The radical tradition that Dap could invoke to strengthen his position is not honored at Mission. The three films together—*Daze*, *Untied*, and *Looking*—make for an excellent program on the issue of negotiating identity, individual and collective, in spite of invisibilized histories.

School Daze is a musical. It does not operate like an old MGM down-on-your-heels/up-on-your-toes sis-boom-bah on a mock set of Claremont College. It is not "good news" on campus that *Daze* is singing and dancing about. More is at stake at Mission than whether Grady (Bill Nunn) makes a touchdown. The college is being held hostage by the "old money" robber barons. A wake-up call occurs in a scene in which the chairperson of the board of

trustees (Art Evans) advises the president of the college (Joe Seneca) to squash the student-led divest-now campaign because the venerable personages who finance the college will not tolerate being told where they may or may not invest their money. Actor Evans laments, "Why won't our people support our institutions?" At the time of *Daze's* filming, Cheney and Fisk were being bailed out of serious financial difficulty.

Lee, to make a wake-up call about intracommunity self-ambush, chooses an enshrined genre of the dominant cinema, musical comedy, whose conventions were not designed to address an embattled community's concerns. Much of the tension on screen derives from his effort to link two opposing discourses: Will the ideological imperatives of Lee's agenda subvert the genre, or will the ideological imperatives of the genre derail his agenda? The linchpin is the cinematic rhetoric (framing, choreographed moves, delivery of choral ensemble, costuming) surrounding the fraternity that links the generic conventions (say, spectacle) to the critique of community divisiveness. The story is grounded in Afrocentric modes and idioms (homecoming events, Da Butt, all-up-in-your-face-isms), as are the devices Lee habitually draws from French bedroom farce, nouvelle vague, and Scorsese, as well as from independents who work outside of the industry. "Face," which has become a Lee signature, for example, is the visual equivalent of the oral tradition that resonates in the opening phrase of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*: "Quiet as it's kept. . . ."

The rival groups at the college are repeatedly in each other's face. In the scene at the women's dorm when Half-Pint attempts to get a date, Lee goes beyond using mainstream film devices—talk, shot-response, shot—so that a series of women appear who say, without having to actually articulate it, "Get out of my face." When Dap figuratively gets in Da Fellas' face because Da Fellas prefer to go to the dance rather than keep a vigil in the shanty town, they in turn get in our face: "Lighten up, Marcus Garvey," "Preach, Jesse," "Chill, Farrakhan," "Teach, Malcolm." The close-ups in this scene reconnect us to the history in the prologue, reminding us of what is at stake. The "face" device is responsible, in part, for the intimacy Lee establishes between filmmaker, film, and spectator.

Lee's decision to link old conventions with new ones allows him to deliver pleasure in some of the forms by which dominant cinema keeps audiences addicted to voyeurism, fetishism, spectacle, mystifying notions of social relations, and freakish notions of intimate relations. The mix also allows Lee to present characters in their milieu and to address socially relevant issues, both of which the dominant cinema rules out. What is lost in the mix is the opportunity to articulate a radical Black discourse. What is gained is the opportunity to position several types of spectators.

Since the test case of television's *All in the Family*, commercial success has depended on the ability of an entertainment industry product to address a polarized audience. White reactionaries seeing themselves on prime time were affirmed in their bigotry, White liberals, reading the show as an exposé, congratulated the inventors of Archie Bunker on their "progress." Many Black people desperately needing to see any sign of U.S. Bunkerism defanged tuned in each week to crack up and to reassure each other.

Sexist/gynophobes, heterosexist/homophobes, and other witting and unwitting defenders of patriarchy champion Spike Lee films. So do nonreactionaries. So do many progressives. Not because the texts are so malleable that they can be maneuvered into any given ideological space, but because many extratextual elements figure into the response. Hunger for images is one element; pride in Lee's accomplishment is another. That the range of spectators is wide speaks to the power of the films and the brilliance of the filmmaker.

Many spectators are willing to provide the interrogation missing in the representations on screen because of progressive features: ensemble (collective) playing, the mutually supportive affection of Dap and Rachel (Kyme), the themes of color and apartheid, the pro-Afro aesthetic of Da Butt, and the cast mix of veterans, newcomers, and performers known in other media. Many spectators do not view the film as separate from the figure, Spike Lee, behind it or the emerging movement that figure is a part of.

The message of *Daze* for large numbers of spectators is entrepreneurial, cultural, political, and emblematic of the resurgence of African American expression by the generation that came of age in the post-1960s era. The mixed-strategy approach in the Lee films has released a voice the dominant industry would prefer silenced—the B boys. Lee's composite push (T-shirts, books, and soundtrack CDs) has helped to create a breakthrough for various forms of cultural expression in the marketplace. His commercial success has helped to create a climate of receptivity for Black filmmakers in Hollywood. His preparation of audiences for more active spectatorship is a boon to hundreds of independent Black filmmakers and videographers working in the independent sector.

The color issue is introduced early in *Daze* in a robust production number called "Good and Bad Hair" ("Straight and Nappy" in the casebook). The two groups of sisters encounter each other in the dormitory hallway; neither will give way. Jane, a blonde with green contact lenses, accuses Rachel, a brown-skinned sister with a short 'fro, of having eyes for her boyfriend, Julian. The others, meanwhile, are cracking on one another's weave jobs, kinks, and attitudes. The close-up is held on the two actresses, Kyme and Campbell, in each other's face. Their cohorts call one another Jigaboos and Wannabees.



School Daze (1988). The Gamma Rays (as Jigaboos).

The face-off triggers a production number in a beauty parlor called Madame Re Res. There the women sing and dance a *femme de guerre* to a 1940s-style big-band swing composition with fall-out lyrics.

The Rays and Da Naturals encounter each other several times. The behavior never varies; they sling color-hair insults, but nothing develops. With the exception of a pained remark Rachel makes to Dap after she has a run-in with Jane, no attempt is made in the film to explore, say, the cost of this pro-racist pathology. Such an exploration could have occurred in three scenes involving Rachel and her roommates (Alva Rogers and Joie Lee), but instead they discuss "men are dogs." And it could have also occurred in one scene involving Jane and the other Rays, but instead they plan a party for the frat brothers.

Colorism is reintroduced as a subject in scenes between Rachel and Dap. Dap does not support Rachel's plan to pledge Delta. "They do good work in the community," she argues. Dap, a campus organizer, is opposed. Sororities are as bad as fraternities, he maintains, although he's helped his cousin Half-Pint pledge. Dap's denunciations include charges of color prejudice. She accuses Dap of being equally color-struck, belligerent as he is about

light-skinned folks. She teases him, too, about his claims of being pure African. When he won't relent, it occurs to her that his attraction to her may be PR-motivated. "Having one of the darker sisters on campus as your girlfriend is good for your all-the-way Black nationalist image," she says and exits. Although Dap and Rachel get together again, no further mention is made of her charge.

Not verbally stated but visually presented, color caste combined with gender and class operate in the story of Daryl/Half-Pint. He has working-class origins and middle-class ambitions. The viewer's attention is frequently called to the fact that he is brown-skinned; short, and spare by his placement among light-skinned and husky fellow pledges and among light-skinned and "healthy" sisters. To "graduate" from a less-privileged caste to a more-privileged caste as a member of the reigning fraternity, Half-Pint perseveres in a grueling regimen. The pledges wear dog collars and chains; they get down on all fours and bark like dogs; they gobble Alpo on command from pet bowls; they drop their pants to be whacked with a mammoth paddle. Half-Pint is singled out by the president of the campus chapter, Julian/Big Brother Almighty, for taunts about his "manhood." To enter G Phi G, the pledges will be branded. We see Julian's huge, ugly scar of a "G" during one of his scenes with Jane.

The seduction and corruption of Half-Pint culminate in his participation in sexual treachery engineered by Julian. It is gender coercion—"You're a pussy," "Only a Gamma man is a real man and a real man ain't no virgin"—that drives Half-Pint into the men-as-predators/women-as-prey brotherhood. His supremacist-warped agenda to flee his social origins led him to G Phi G. The extravagant attention that the movie gives the frat forces in terms of production and design makes the seduction and corruption of Half-Pint plausible.

The depiction of the fraternity's abusive order and of Half-Pint's ordeal makes a good argument for men engaging in the feminist enterprise of dismantling patriarchy. But what is made more visible in the film is the vested interest men (and women) have in an order characterized by male power, prestige, and prerogative.

The topic predictably raised in post-screening discussions by spectators who identify with Half-Pint is society's standard of male attractiveness. Art Nomura in his video *Wok Like a Man* tackles the implications of the Euro-American standard of height, weight, and aggression for Asian men. On screen and off, one way to become attractive is to have social power or prestige through male bonding, most usually in terms of a shared sexist socialization to despise and exploit women.

Alien standards of beauty internalized at great psychic cost by African Americans are taken up in Ayoka Chenzira's provocative short *Hairpiece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*. The politics of color links such works as Julie

Dash's *Illusions*, Denise Oliver and Warrington Hudlin's *Color*, Henry Miller's *Death of a Dunbar Girl*, Maureen Blackwood's *A Perfect Image*, Shu Lea Cheang's *Color Schemes*, and Ana Maria Garcia's *Cocolos y Roqueras*. The politics of female representation is treated in Sharon Alile Larkin's *A Different Drummer*. And the complexity and subjectivity of women's experiences is the forte of Zeinabu irene Davis, Camille Billops, Michelle Parkerson, and Barbara McCullough. These issues are central to discussions about the presentation of Jane (Tisha Campbell). The bases of her characterization are classic features in the construction of the feminine: narcissism, masochism, and hysteria. Her seductive display at the ball singing "I Don't Want to Be Alone Tonight," her ambition, and her voluntary sacrifice ("I did what you told me, Julian") are classic she-was-asking-for-it features of femocidal texts.

Uplift the Race informs us that in the original script the frat members entered the Boning Room and ran a train on Jane. Apparently, the thinking behind this particular wake-up call went like this: Isn't it a drag the way men get over on women and how women allow themselves to be ripped off, so let's sock it to this character Jane to protest the unfair situation. Yeah, right. But the appearance of intended meaning (protest) fails to mask the constructed meaning (punishment).

When the Lee films are programmed together, a disturbing pattern emerges. Posters of naked women nailed to the wall in Joe's place of business in *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barber Shop: We Cut Heads* reappear in *Mo' Better Blues* as pictures the musicians pass around while telling one of the guys he should dump his white lover and get himself "an African queen." They hand him pictures of naked Black women. In *Daze*, a male character says "pussy" in one scene, and in the next the Gamma Rays say, "Meow." A more frightening continuity exists between the gratuitous attack of the woman on the stairs in *Joe's*; the rough-off of Nola in *She's Gotta Have It*, an act assuaged by her term "near rape"; and the scapegoating of Jane in *Daze* after she appears in a porno-referenced sex scene with Julian.

Jane is drawn in the conventional pattern of sexual iconography that hallmarks the industry. Gender issues receive no better treatment in *Daze* than in usual commercial fare. But the possibility, and perhaps the intent, was present. The repetitive and exaggerated attention that Lee gives to statements like "a real man," for example, beginning with the first entrance of the frat and the pledgees, sets us up for an exploration that is merely sketched by the comparison-contrast between Julian and Dap—their styles of leadership and how they maintain intimate relationships. What a "real woman" might be is never raised, and little attention is given to the characterizations of female characters.

It was not necessary, of course, to have the frat brothers run a train on Jane. Their presence outside the door and their readiness to go in and "check

out how Half-Pint's doing" are suggestive enough of gang rape, particularly after the earlier command was given to Half-Pint to bring "a freak" back to the dorm. It will take another kind of filmmaker, perhaps, to move to the next step and illuminate the homoeroticism-homophobia nexus at play in gang rape and in the kind of surveillance engaged in by the frat brothers, and in the kind of obsessing Mars, Jamie, and Childs engage in about each other through Nola in *Gotta*. Dap's character doesn't articulate the simple wisdom that gay-hate and dominance aren't really crucial to male development. Dap jams his cousin, but he welcomes Julian into the inner circle of the final wake-up call in the film. Would that there had been as much attention paid to human values as to production values.

The anti-apartheid theme is introduced in *Daze*'s opening scene. It is the first wake-up call. "We're late," Dap informs the student body assembled around the administration building. Other universities have been pressured to divest, but Mission hasn't. Dap urges the students to take action: to march, to disrupt classes, to stage a sit-down, and, if necessary, to close the school down. He is drowned out by off-screen chanting—"It takes a real man to be a Gamma man and only a Gamma man is a real man." The frat marches the pledgees onto the turf; they disrupt the rally, seize the space, and disperse the crowd. Within seconds Dap and Julian are in each other's face; in the background, visible between the close-up of the two actors, is a "Free Mandela" banner. Virgil (Gregg Burge), the student council president, steps in between Dap and Julian and breaks them up. A similar scene occurs during the homecoming parade when Julian takes exception to the introduction of a political banner by Da Fellas at traditional festivities. Virgil steps in again and breaks them up. In pay back, Dap and Da Fellas disrupt the Greek Show and bogart the step contest. We assume that their performance will reintroduce the anti-apartheid theme. It does not. Instead, it reasserts an aggressive machismo ("Daddy Lonnngstroke . . ." "Get back or we'll kick your Gamma ass . . ." "When I say Alpha, you say punk").

A link, though, is made between South African apartheid and the U.S. sharecropping system. It occurs at the top of the longest, most emotionally varied sequence in the film. This sequence is an audience favorite. Dap insists Da Fellas help him defy the ban issued by the administration. Booker T. (Eric A. Payne) 'lows as how he's not risking being expelled by continuing in the divest-now campaign. He's the first in his family ever to go to college; his family "slaved" to get him there. Dap tries to get him to see that the situations are related, that apartheid is international. Da Fellas walk, fed up with Dap, who speaks of the campaign as a personal mission and of their participation as proof of their loyalty and friendship to him (shades of Julian's "Do you love me, Jane? Well, you're going to have to prove it"). He murdermouths them as

they exit. Sulking, he hurls a dart at the board. There's a knock on the door. Dap opens it. Piled in cartoon fashion against the doorjamb are Da Fellas. "Do revolutionaries eat Kentucky Fried Chicken?" Grady wants to know.

At Kentucky Fried Chicken Jordan (Branford Marsalis) leaves the table in search of the salt. A shaker is on a table occupied by local working-class brothers. A local in a cap (Samuel Jackson) is relating some off-the-wall anecdote about how he had to get some "bitch" straight. (A few sisters in the audience suck our teeth. We've been assaulted thus far by "freak," "pussy," "tits and bootays," "meow," "bitch"—and the night is still relatively young.) Jordan asks for the salt. The locals look him up and down and continue to talk. Dap calls Jordan back to the table. The local in the cap calls over in falsetto, "Is it true what they say about Mission [limp wrist] 'men'?" This is the umpteenth anti-gay remark. Dap suggests they leave; Da Fellas grumble but get up. (Members of the audience holler because Da Fellas are leaving behind all that chicken!)

In the parking lot, Dap leads Da Fellas to the car. Edge (Kadeem Hardison) does not want to retreat; he's ready to throw down. In seconds, the two groups are lined up in a face-off. The guy in the cap lets it be known that the locals are sick and tired of college boys coming on their turf every year and treating them like dirt. On-campus distinctions between Jigaboos and Wannabees are of no importance to the locals; all college types are Wannabees and ought to stay on campus where they belong. "On account of you college boys, we can't get jobs, and we were born here," the actor Jackson says, cutting through the artifice of the staging. The actors strain to stay on their marks, adding to the electrical charge of the scene. Stuck, Da Fellas go for the short hairs. Dap cracks on the "Bama country ass" locals' shower caps and jerri curls and casts aspersions on their manhood. Jordan chimes in with "bitch" here and "bitch" there. The local in red pleather (Al Cooper) endures it all with a stony gaze. His partner (Jackson) resumes his assault—"You're all niggers, just like us." He and Dap are face to face. No student council president is present to intervene. Dap steps in closer and says, "You're not niggers." There's a helpless quality to the delivery; there's a vulnerability to the moment. What is at stake for the entire community that refuses to wake up is sounded here. The scene shifts.

Da Fellas are quiet and reflective in the car. So are spectators in the movie seats. Monroe (James Bond III) breaks the silence: "Do we really act like that?" Dap swears it's a case of mistaken identity. Jordan launches into an "I'm Bennett and I ain't in it" routine. Grady has no sympathy for "losers." He is challenged on the class issue. Things are about to disrupt, but Monroe makes a cornball remark that gives them an out. Da Fellas, relieved, pound on Monroe while Booker T. maintains a grip on the steering wheel. Spotting

Julian and Jane, Dap jumps out and jumps right in Julian's chest, saying Julian better make sure that Half-Pint gets into the frat. We've now seen Dap blow the opportunity to develop political clarity three times: with Rachel, when she challenges him on the color question; with Da Fellas, when they suggest that one of the reasons they won't back him is his personality; with the locals, when they let it be known that the debate between the Greeks and campus revolutionaries has no explanatory power in the lives of most Black folks.

The film's finale begins moments after Half-Pint beats on Dap and Grady's door to announce that he is now a "real man." The next scene takes place in hazy yellow light. Images are stretched. Movement is slowed down. In a wide-angle close-up, Dap shouts, "Waaake Uuuupp." Fishburne here displays his vocal register in the exact way that Esposito has done in previous scenes. Does this signal concord between the two male groups? The college bell is ringing. The entire school rises and goes to the quad. Julian gets out of bed, where he's been sleeping with one of Jane's sorors (Jasmine Guy). He is the last to arrive. The camera adopts Julian's point of view as he moves through the crowd toward Dap. Actor Esposito has a particular expression; it may imply that the character has become aware of his ability to change. As the camera ascends, Dap and Julian turn to us, and Dap says, "Please, wake up."

Within weeks of its release, *Daze* became the subject of extravagant claims by folks who'd seen it and loved it, who'd seen it and not liked it, and who hadn't checked it out yet but had their ear cocked to Communitysay: *School Daze* is going to do more to increase enrollment at Black colleges than an army of recruiters could; *School Daze* is going to outshine "The Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste" campaigns for gift giving to Black institutions; *School Daze* is going to revitalize our fraternities, and brothers are going to be stepping all over Harvard Yard. By summer—without recourse to stats or surveys and frequently without recourse to a screening of the film—Peoplesay dropped its prophesizing tone, and the statements rang with conviction.

Conversations in neighborhood movie houses focused briefly on the apartheid theme and the range of contradictions treated in *Daze*. Most of the excitement had to do with Lee's original impulse to make use of his experiences as a Morehouse College undergraduate. Aysha Simmons, a former Swarthmore student, recalls that despite passionate dissatisfaction with the film's sexism and heterosexism, the overwhelming feeling within her circle was envy: "We envied the social life of a Black campus." Elvin Rogers, formerly of the University of Pennsylvania, echoes Simmons: "The hazing practices were horrifying, but after seeing the movie we wanted to enroll in a Black college."

Communitysay's claims weren't far-fetched. Many Black colleges and organizations actually did raise funds in a direct way with screenings of *Daze*. And Black Greeks did commence to step all over the quads at Princeton, Harvard, and Yale. And although the various federal agencies and foundations that commission studies of Black colleges and universities can't support a causality theory, preliminary reports from the U.S. Office of Education, the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, and the Carnegie Foundation do show an unprecedented spurt in Black college enrollment, in Black student enrollment, and in gift giving in the past two-year period [1988-90]. And according to television newscasts during the Thanksgiving holiday of 1990, the Atlanta University complex has been overwhelmed by applications from transfer students and first-year enrollees. In all probability, the 1990 report from the Research Department of the United Negro College Fund will tell the tale more precisely.

The rest of the story is for the audience to report. The Lee films insist on an active spectatorship by the kinds of questions they pose. *School Daze* asks, so what are we going to do about this color/class thaang? Or as the student council president demanded to know at the homecoming parade confrontation, "What do you want to do—kill each other?"

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3

MICHELE WALLACE

Spike Lee and Black Women

In *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse defined and described the impossibility for Afro-Americans of ever isolating a pure separatist or integrationist agenda. Yet in his rush to supply prescriptions, Cruse missed the implications of his own scholarship: "Integration," he warned, "is . . . leading to cultural negation." As Cruse saw it, integration-minded intellectuals like James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry were infected with a lethal dose of false consciousness—a severe case of neither knowing nor caring what was really black. Thus Cruse called for profound changes in black self-perception: Black intellectuals needed to toughen up, think more collectively, and, above all, black up their political, economic, and cultural projects, which they promptly did in the context of Black Power.

Almost twenty years after Cruse's initial call, black critic Greg Tate surveyed the results for high and low culture in a list-heavy celebration titled "The Return of the Black Aesthetic: Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke" (*Village Voice Literary Supplement*, December 1986). Tate proposed postmodernism as a way to heal the apparent schism between assimilation and cultural nationalism. "Black artists," he wrote, "have opened up the entire 'text of blackness' for fun and games," which meant that it was no longer necessary to insist on African origins or the absence of European influences as the basis of black identity.

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