

Rage a successful mix of humour and violence

by Ira Nayman

Writer Chester Himes mixes humour and violence in equal measure, frequently in the same scenes. The last time Hollywood made a movie from one of his novels (1970's *Cotton Comes to Harlem*), it concentrated on the humour.

The latest Himes adaptation, *A Rage in Harlem*, tries to strike a balance between the disparate elements of his novels. Most of the time it works, making *A Rage in Harlem* an entertaining film.

Set in the 1950s, *A Rage in Harlem* follows the exploits of a group who become involved with a trunk full of gold.

Imabelle (Robin Givens) wants to sell it. She seduces Jackson (Forest Whitaker), convincing him to put her up while she looks for a buyer; she is unaware that her boyfriend, Slim (Badja Djola) and two members of his gang have survived a shoot-out with the police and are looking for her and the gold.

Whitaker is hilarious and touching as a religious, inexperienced young man who comes under



Forest Whitaker, holding his life's savings, and Robin Givens, holding Forest Whitaker, in Bill Duke's *A Rage in Harlem*. There isn't much rage, and the film, basically a crime story, didn't have to be set in Harlem, but it is entertaining nonetheless.

the duplicitous Imabelle's spell. Gregory Hines is surprisingly good in the non-dancing role of Goldy, Jackson's shifty but soft-hearted brother.

Himes fills the corners of his story with oddball details, demanding full attention from the viewer for maximum enjoyment. There are a number of delightful cameos, es-

pecially Zakes Mokae as the transvestite owner of a brothel and Danny Glover as a tough crime syndicate boss. A lot of other characters are involved (including Coffin Ed and Gravedigger Jones, the police heroes of *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, played here for laughs).

The only problem with the cast is Givens: where the other actors have the depth of oceans, she projects the strength of a puddle — a shallow puddle. The tough Imabelle softens over the course of

film
A Rage in Harlem
directed by Bill Duke
starring Forest Whitaker and Robin Givens
produced by Palace (Harlem) Pictures

the film, but unlike most of the other leads Givens doesn't allow us to see the transformation.

(The fact that she's the only major female character unfortunately gives her performance more prominence; it is also a failing of the film.)

Director Bill Duke manages to keep events moving at high speed: what doesn't work is replaced soon enough by something which does. This sometimes allows for startling mood changes: In the middle of a serious shoot-out Easy Money (Glover)'s dog is suddenly taken hostage, causing the tough guy to blubber hilariously.

A Rage in Harlem doesn't really have any rage (and needn't have been set in Harlem). Aside from one character (Claude X, who preaches black power on street corners), *Rage* does not have an explicit political agenda.

However, any mainstream film by a Black director with an all-Black cast has an implicit political message: Black people work hard, form friendships and fall in love like anybody else. Himes' grifters, con artists and tough guys may not be the best role models, but they are realistic, interesting and in control of their own destinies, which is unusual for Black characters in Hollywood films.

Trust me, babe, you'll love it

by Azed Majeed

What is it about slicked back hair?

Seems like anybody who is unfortunate enough to contract this condition immediately metamorphoses from a "normal guy" into a "great big corporate asshole." You think people would learn: less Brylcreem, more humanity.

This formula holds true for Mike Nichols' latest film, *Regarding Henry*. This is one of those "high concept" films where the production meeting probably went:

"Hey, I'm tellin' ya, this picture will be huge — huge! Harrison Ford playing an asshole who gets a coupla bullet holes in his head and then turns all sweet and considerate — wow! — and Ford says he'll take a cut in salary. We can get him for ten mil."

"Can you imagine Indiana Jones playing a guy as harmless as a puppy dog? Man, we're talking Oscars here!"

"Audiences will love it! It's slick! It's fast-paced! It's feel-good! It's easy to watch...and it has a great soundtrack! It's so Hollywood, audiences won't even know why they love it so much!"

"This humanitarian stuff is big business these days. I'd say we'll make triple turnaround on this one..."

"And there's lots of room for product placement — Ted, call Coke...er, by the way...speaking of Coke...does anybody have any...?"

Why am I being so cynical? Because there is something paradoxical about a film coming out of the Holly-

film
Regarding Henry
directed by Mike Nichols
starring Harrison Ford and Annette Bening
produced by Paramount Pictures

wood system that espouses a 'moral' position.

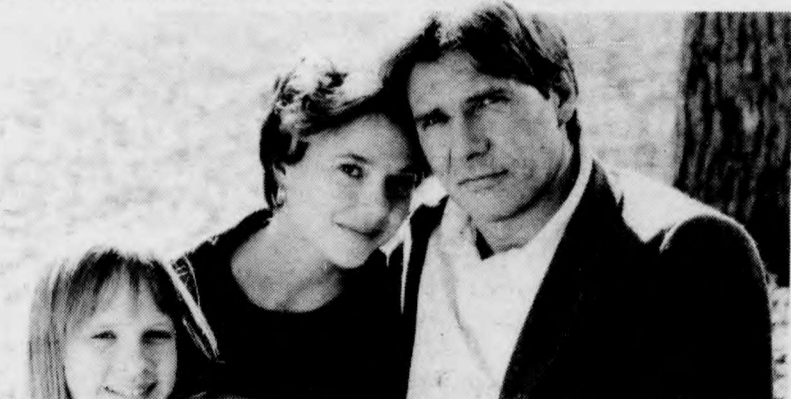
Furthermore, the moral lesson of *Regarding Henry* is simple and cliched, and the film dips into the syrup fairly often to manipulate the viewer.

Ford's portrayal of Henry is alternately brutal and sweet. This is where my previous theory about hairstyle and ethical demeanour comes in. Initially Henry Turner is a big, wealthy, corrupt lawyer, a bad husband, a terrible father and most importantly, has slicked-back hair.

When Henry is shot (in the head, by the way, which is very close to the hair) he becomes an innocent, morally superior, ethical lawyer, a good husband and a terrific father. This radical change in Henry's perspective is mirrored by his changing hairstyle. In other words, once his hair gets dry he literally becomes a new man.

As Henry's wife, Annette Bening does a good job in a thankless role. C'mon Hollywood, let's put a stop to those 'strong wife' roles and get some real parts for women. Bening is a good actress who shouldn't have to play second fiddle to a male actor's hair.

Bill Nunn (of *Do the Right Thing* fame) does an excellent job as Bradley, Henry's physiotherapist. Nunn's Bradley is even sweeter than Ford's Henry, and without the benefit of holes in his head.



You can tell that Harrison Ford is hurtin' just from the publicity still, can't ya? I tell ya, a still with a family in it is worth its weight in Paramount stock. It's gold, pure go — hey! Where's the dog?

Regarding Henry is a film which exploits and manipulates the audience with a trite and cliched moral message. It leaves me with only one question: why do I love it so much?

Offensive comedian has feet of Clay

by Stephen Bergson

Once again Andrew Dice Clay, the self-proclaimed "number one comedian" is trying to make money from a film he dares to call entertainment. And once again he may fail.

The Diceman Cometh may have done well on the video scene, but *Ford Fairlane* proved movie audiences won't shell out eight bucks to watch Clay for an hour and a half. When one looks at the images he presents and how he presents them it's not hard to see why.

Clay begins *Dice Rules* by boring us with 30 minutes of inaccurate fantasy about his life before he became "cool." In this stereotyped world Clay is a clutzy, childish, polite guy who shares the chores with his husband-beating wife.

He lives in an angry town where every citizen needlessly blames all their troubles on him. He is constantly yelled at.

Clay wants us to feel sorry for him because he's the "innocent victim" of the very minorities he verbally lashes out at. For example, an old angry man with a thick European accent gets into a fight with him over money; a lazy Black gas station attendant vandalizes his car.

Sorry, Clay. No Dice. You may find such portrayals accurate, funny and/or entertaining but I see them as hateful bigotry thinly disguised as art.

When this is finally over we are "treated" to his concert footage filmed at Madison Square Gardens, during which he not only proves he can't tell jokes but demonstrates he can't sing either. Some of the material, such as the impersonations of John Travolta, Eric Roberts, Sylvester Stallone and Al Pacino (all of whom sound exactly like Clay) and his "Nursery Rhymes for

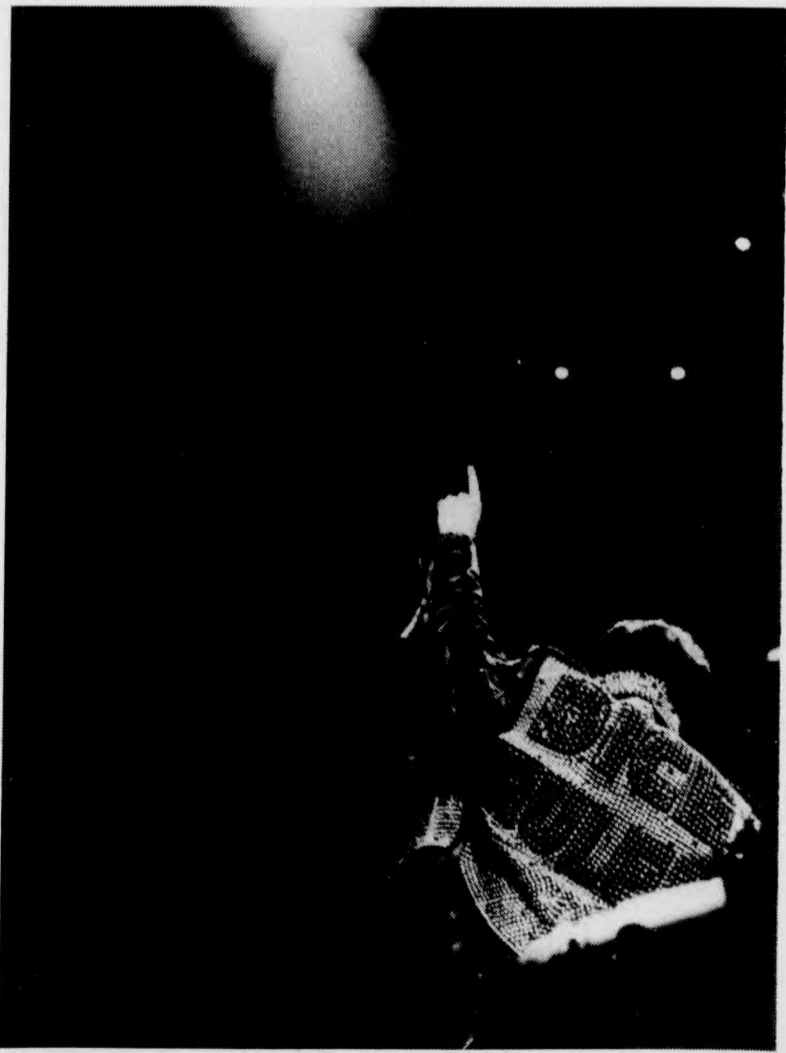
film
Dice Rules
directed by Jay Dubin
starring Andrew Dice Clay
produced by Seven Arts

Immature Adults" is regurgitated from his previous video.

The rest of the concert contains Clay's typically offensive opinions

on animals, Japanese, and women (his favourite target).

The only good thing to be said about dreck such as "Eeny meeny miny mo / Suck my dick and swallow slow" is that at least it rhymes. I've got a better one: "Dice has a movie / It ain't very funny / So don't waste your time / And don't waste your money."



Forget what you've heard about comedian Andrew Dice Clay. He's a nice guy. No, really. He's sensitive. Caring. Kind to children and dogs. Look at his picture; this is clearly a man who has seen the light. It hurts him when people say nasty things about him. He may be an offensive sleazeball without an ounce of wit, but he's a sensitive kind of offensive sleazeball without an ounce of genuine wit.