



T A P E PRESENTS: BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

Pinky

Please note: these articles contain language or other content that reflect views prevalent in its time, but that may cause offence today. The articles are included here for historical or cultural reasons.

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Contemporary reviews

Subtlety in presenting a problem picture is not one of Hollywood's virtues: the accusing finger pointed at the audience, the hammering home of arguments too often vitiate the effect of the message. *Pinky* is all the more welcome in that, although the controversial subject is never forgotten, situations are in no way contrived, and the problem grows out of the plot rather than vice versa.

Pinky is a negress, trained in the North as a nurse, and so fair that she has been able to pass as white. Her problem is whether to marry a white doctor, and so to live a lie, or to use her nurse's training to help her own people.

The ambiguity of her position, resented both by whites and negroes, allows for no easy decision, and the film never assumes that the colour question can be smoothed over with a few easy platitudes. For this, and for the absence of sensation – the undercurrent of feeling is more impressive than a lynching would have been – the film deserves great praise.

The Zanuck gloss on the production insures the picture's entertainment value; Kazan's slow, forceful direction gives it more moving and impressive qualities. Few directors get better performances out of a cast, or know so exactly how to bring a scene to an end at its logical conclusion, and how to keep a picture moving during long stretches of dialogue. The script is intelligent, with very few lapses into the soapbox or pulpit manner, and the photography, clear-cut figures, and misty shots of the decayed plantations, is excellent.

If *Pinky's* predicament remains slightly less moving than it might have been, this is perhaps the fault of Jeanne Crain, who looks convincing, but cannot quite suggest the interior force which the part demands. Smaller parts are beautifully played, notably Ethel Waters, the loyal and dignified embodiment of the slave tradition, and Evelyn Varden, a vulgar, snobbish object lesson in the evils of race prejudice.

P.H., *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1949

Hollywood's first three 'colour-bar' films have already grossed more than 7,000,000 dollars at the American box-office. Here is a gauge of the readiness of audiences to welcome any sign of freshness from an industry that has gone tired on them. And here too, is evidence of the quickness with which that industry can still recognise, exploit and control a trend. The trend emanates from the conscience which, to the advantage of the cinema, has always dogged Hollywood. The trail was laid with *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*, dramatically effective films that flirted with the 'Jewish problem'. Making them called for courage and discredited their producers at the time. To their box-office rehabilitation *Home of The Brave*, *Pinky*, *Lost Boundaries* and other 'racials' in progress can be credited. The flirtation has been

transferred to the safer areas of the 'negro problem' where a multifarious, multicoloured selection of special cases offer themselves for dramatisation.

Pinky (well, but not brilliantly played by Jeanne Crain) is a Negro girl of unblemished white pigmentation whose old darkie grandmother (beautifully played by Ethel Waters) has pinched and saved to send her to college. There she had fallen into the easy temptation of passing as white, and as such falling in love with a white doctor (William Lundigan). Returning as a graduate nurse to the Cabin in the South, the sensitive and civilised Pinky is subjected to the full litany of racial prejudice, from both sides of the bar. Both negroes and whites hate her white skin and city manners. The film valuably succeeds in showing the roots of that prejudice to be as deep on one side as the other.

Pinky's ordeal is brought home by the director, Elia Kazan, in vivid, compelling incidents – the instantaneous change from servility to savagery by the police when Pinky, involved (and out-acted) in a brawl with Nina Mae McKinney, tells them she is coloured; the scene in the store; her pursuit at night by two drunken white men.

But Pinky's dilemma – shall she forsake her race and become 'white' or proclaim it and lose her lover? – is side-tracked into never-never-land. There is a dying, wise old *patronne* (Ethel Barrymore) to restore her to proper Negro pride, and leave her the family mansion. There is an upstanding Southern judge to uphold the will and flout a court seething with lynching fever. And a final celibate solace for Pinky – since the world's most polyglot Democracy cannot abide a hint of miscegenation – is running her mansion as a super clinic for Negro children, manned by a Negro staff.

All this apart, the cardinal crippling evasion of *Pinky* lies in the selection of an established white film actress to play the heroine. Thus is the audience insulated against the shock of seeing white and Negro embrace, against any effect of realism. I do not doubt that *Pinky* will leave Negro baiters comfortably purged and as rabid as ever, and I have even less doubts as to its effects on Negroes. As for average audiences: they will come from *Pinky* touched, entertained and unperturbed by a well-made and well-acted film drama.

I praised these films at the time for its courage in approaching an evil any civilised man wants to see ironed out flat. But the unease that was there has crystallised with second thoughts. Films that raise such issues and bulk them are not merely negative but dangerous. And it's necessary to say so firmly, since they are trading heavily on their 'progressiveness'. When a racial film is ruthlessly honest in its issues, or when it unambiguously implies equal rights and status for the American Negro (including the assumption that intermarriage with whites is no less unobjectionable and irrelevant than between Jew and Gentile, Catholic or Protestant), or when it just so much as documents a plain, typical story, without recourse to a fake solution; then will be the occasion, I think, to bring out the word courage.

Richard Winnington, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1950

Two

Two women discuss the complexities of defining their racial identities.

PINKY

Director: Elia Kazan

Production Company: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Producer: Darryl F. Zanuck

Script: Philip Dunne, Dudley Nichols

Based on the novel/Quality by: Cid Ricketts Sumner

Photography: Joseph MacDonald

Editor: Harmon Jones

Art Directors: Lyle Wheeler, J. Russell Spencer

Music: Alfred Newman

TWO

Director: Daisy Ifama

UK 2017

3 mins

Cast

Jeanne Crain (*Pinky*)

Ethel Barrymore (*Miss Em*)

Ethel Waters (*Dacey*)

William Lundigan (*Dr Thomas Adams*)

Frederick O'Neal (*Jake Walters*)

Evelyn Varden (*Melba Wooley*)

Basil Ruysdael (*Judge Walker*)

USA 1949

102 mins

T A P E PRESENTS: BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?**Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)**

Thu 1 Jul 20:30; Fri 9 Jul 17:40

Black Girl (La noire de...)

Sat 3 Jul 11:40; Mon 12 Jul 18:20

Burning an Illusion

Sat 3 Jul 14:20; Thu 8 Jul 17:45

While We Live (Medan vi lever)

Sat 3 Jul 17:30; Tue 20 Jul 20:30

Binti

Sun 4 Jul 18:20; Mon 19 Jul 20:40

Pinky

Sat 10 Jul 20:50; Sat 24 Jul 11:40

Head-On (Gegen die Wand)

Sun 11 Jul 18:30; Tue 27 Jul 20:40

The Namesake

Wed 14 Jul 17:40 (+ live spoken-word performance);

Wed 21 Jul 20:40

What Will People Say (Hva vil folk si)

Fri 16 Jul 20:30; Sat 31 Jul 17:30

In Conversation with Nikesh Shukla

Fri 23 Jul 18:20

Lilting

Sat 24 Jul 17:20; Fri 30 Jul 20:40

Shoot the Messenger + Q&A with director Ngozi Onwurah, hosted by T A P E's Angela Moneke

Thu 29 Jul 17:45

Culture Shock: Short Film Programme + Q&A with UNDR LNDN

Fri 30 Jul 17:40

T A P E was founded in 2015 as a response to the lack of representation on screen. Find out more about this curatorial collective at tapecollective.co.uk

CHINESE VISUAL FESTIVAL**Opening Night: UK Premiere: Drifting + intro**

Thu 15 Jul 17:50

UK Premiere: Love Poem + intro

Sat 17 Jul 12:00

Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue + intro

Sat 24 Jul 14:00

Closing Night: UK Premiere: Shadows + intro

Sun 25 Jul 15:10

WORLD OF WONG KAR WAI**As Tears Go By (Wong Gok ka moon)**

Wed 7 Jul 14:30; Sat 17 Jul 20:30; Mon 19 Jul 20:45

Days of Being Wild (Ah Fei jing juen)

Thu 8 Jul 20:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);

Mon 12 Jul 14:30; Mon 19 Jul 18:00

Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)

Fri 9 Jul 20:50; Wed 14 Jul 14:30; Sun 25 Jul 18:30

Ashes of Time Redux (Dung che sai duk)

Sat 10 Jul 11:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Ann Lee);

Wed 21 Jul 20:45; Fri 30 Jul 20:45

Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)

Sat 10 Jul 18:15; Mon 12 Jul 20:50;

Tue 20 Jul 20:45; Thu 29 Jul 14:30

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

Sun 11 Jul 15:40; Fri 16 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:10

In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)

Wed 14 Jul 20:45; Sat 17 Jul 13:30;

Wed 21 Jul 14:30; Thu 29 Jul 20:45

2046

Thu 15 Jul 20:20; Sat 17 Jul 16:10; Sat 31 Jul 14:30

The Grandmaster (Yi dai zong shi)

Tue 20 Jul 18:00; Thu 22 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 20:50

The Hand (Extended Cut)

Thu 22 Jul 18:30; Fri 30 Jul 18:20

My Blueberry Nights

Fri 23 Jul 20:50; Wed 28 Jul 20:40

REGULAR PROGRAMME**Silent Cinema: Nell Gwyn + intro by BFI Curator Bryony Dixon**

Sun 18 Jul 15:30

Seniors' Free Archive Matinee: Cabin in the Sky

+ intro by writer Marcus Powell

Mon 19 Jul 14:00

Experimenta: Born in Flames + discussion

Thu 22 Jul 18:00

Relaxed Screening: The Horse Boy

Tue 27 Jul 18:00

Terror Vision: Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things

Thu 29 Jul 21:00

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