



**EARL CAMERON**

# **A Fear of Strangers + The Chocolate Tree**

Written by Leon Griffiths, whose later credits include *Minder*, **A Fear of Strangers** was written in 1958 but banned for six years by the Independent Television Authority, over concerns about Chief Inspector Tom Dyke's (Stanley Baker) racial abuse of black musician Ramsey (Earl Cameron).

The ban is curious, because it's difficult to be certain whether it reflected concern about compromising the integrity of police methods, or concern about the offence the racial abuse might cause to black viewers. One doesn't have to be a cynic to suspect that the former rationale carried the day. At the time Griffiths made his position clear: 'A *Fear of Strangers* was against bad policemen, not policemen in general.'

It's possible that to some, Dyke may have seemed a fairly reasonable sort. Therefore it was probably incumbent on Griffiths in his characterisation to put the question beyond doubt. One simple and obvious way would be to allow Ramsey to articulate a defence effective enough to counter Dyke's racism, so that even the most ardent censor might think the characterisations fair in the context. But Ramsey's defence of himself is feeble.

The interrogation itself is tightly structured. This is partly due to technical restrictions of the time and partly to the way the two central characters are portrayed. The camera roams around the room in long takes and the lighting is stark and harsh. Baker is excellent in the way he dominates the space in the scene; he doesn't so much speak his lines as bark them. He stands and walks around for much of the play and is able to strike more dynamic and telling postures, while Ramsey sits throughout, imprisoned in the small space of his chair. Cameron, cast against type, has to subvert his usually dignified air to portray a crooked and downbeat wastrel.

In an interview Cameron described the play as 'a very good, strong two-hander,' but described the earlier live television transmission as '...a nightmare. Nerve-racking.'

**Carl Daniels, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

**The Chocolate Tree** was written by the late Andrew Sinclair, whose resumé includes the satirical novel *The Breaking of Bumbo* (1959) and directing the 1970 film version of that as well as the Burton-Taylor *Under Milk Wood* (1971). The Strangs have grown wealthy from centuries of trading with one of Britain's African possessions, but the winds of change are blowing across the continent, independence is near, and the Strangs are welcoming the new head of state to their London home to discuss the future relationship. Proceedings are dominated on the one hand by Paul Rogers, as the ailing, half-mad head of the family, contemptuous of his offspring and patronising to the Africans; on the other by Earl Cameron as the president-to-be, who has his own understanding of the relationship and his own grudges. Their rocklike characters contrast with the mercurial tempers of Peter McEnery as Strang's grandson, an ex-soldier traumatised by the Mau Mau, and Yemi Ajibade as

the president’s proud, militant son. At times, the dialogue puts on display a frank, vehement racial hatred – even in 1963, viewers must have been taken aback by the liberal use of the N-word. And beneath the hatred lies, on the British side, an assumption of privilege that generates both complacency and rage.

Robert Hanks, *Sight & Sound*, October 2019

**DRAMA '64: A FEAR OF STRANGERS**

*Directed by:* Herbert Wise  
*Production Company:* ATV  
*Script Consultant:* Lewis Greifer  
*Screenplay:* Leon Griffiths  
*Designer:* Peter Roden  
*Music Composed by:* Jack Parnell  
*Cast:*  
Stanley Baker (*Chief Inspector Dyke*)  
Earl Cameron (*Ramsey*)  
Garfield Morgan (*Detective Sergeant Miller*)  
Peter Williams (*Superintendent Willis*)  
Neil Wilson (*Station Sergeant Joyce*)  
Ray Austin (*Detective Constable Turnbull*)

ITV tx 10.5.1964  
UK 1964  
52 mins

**ARMCHAIR THEATRE: THE CHOCOLATE TREE**

*Director:* Alan Cooke  
*Production Company:* ABC Television  
*Producer:* Leonard White  
*Screenplay:* Andrew Sinclair  
*Settings by:* Assheton Gorton  
*Cast:*  
Paul Rogers (*Israel Strang*)  
Zena Walker (*Rachel Strang*)  
Arthur Pentelow (*Peter Strang*)  
Peter McEnery (*Stephen Strang*)  
Earl Cameron (*William Jones*)  
Yemi Ajibade (*Jacob Jones*)  
Willie Payne (*waiter*)

ITV tx 27.10.1963  
UK 1963  
54 mins

**EARL CAMERON  
BRITAIN'S FIRST BLACK SCREEN STAR**

**A Fear of Strangers** (+ intro) + **The Chocolate Tree**  
Sat 14 July 14:10  
**Thunder on Sycamore Street** + discussion with Actor Ashley Walters  
(schedule permitting) and playwright Stephen S Thompson)  
Sat 14 Aug 17:30  
**African Odysseys present: A Warm December**  
Wed 18 Aug 20:40  
**Two Gentlemen Sharing**  
Mon 23 Aug 20:30  
**Pool of London**  
Wed 25 Aug 20:50  
**Sapphire**  
Sat 28 Aug 13:00  
**Flame in the Streets**  
Sat 28 Aug 17:10

**Promotional partners**



Season co-curated by actor-director Burt Caesar and the BFI’s Marcus Prince and David Somerset.

**Please note:** many of these films contain language, images or other content that reflect views prevalent in its time, but that may cause offence today.  
The titles are included here for historical, cultural or aesthetic reasons and these views are in no way endorsed by the BFI or its partners.

**BFI SOUTHBANK**

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.  
We’re also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

**Join the BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

**BECOME A BFI MEMBER**

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

**BFI PLAYER**

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)