

***Hurry Sundown:* Otto Preminger, Baton Rouge, and Race, 1966–1967**

Thomas Aiello

On 31 March 1966, more than 5,000 screaming Baton Rouge fans watched as Elvis Presley's gold limousine made its way down Third Street, moving slowly so that everyone could have a glimpse. There were another thousand in front of the Gordon Theater as the parade ended, the limo arrived, and the stars of Presley's *Frankie and Johnny* (1966) disembarked. Over a crowd that was so loud that it could barely hear what was transpiring on the platform above, Donna Douglas, a Baton Rouge native, thanked the crowd for its warm hospitality. It was so good to be back in Louisiana. She was so glad that her new movie was premiering in her hometown. Douglas was named an honorary mayor. Her costars Sue Ann Langdon and Nancy Kovak were named honorary citizens. It was a crowd and a city hungry for the bright lights of Hollywood, an economy ready to please.¹

In two months, however, Baton Rouge would have a new movie coming to town. Otto Preminger's *Hurry Sundown* (1967) revolved around a speculator's attempt to buy up as much land as possible in a small Georgia farm town in the months following World War II. Two families won't sell – one white, one black. While the story centers on the travails of the black family's resistance to sales pressure, bigotry, and violence, the denouement comes when the poor white family joins forces with its black neighbors against the adamant speculator. The film itself was a critical flop, and its production served as one in a long line of examples of white Hollywood's clumsy, ham-handed, stereotypical treatment of race before the final fall of the Production Code. But it also demonstrated the South's continued racial intransigence, even as the sixties moved into their twilight and there was real money to be made from location

filming. The Louisiana capital seemed to corroborate most of Preminger's heavy-handed racial messages. Though the director's clumsy attempt at race activism and Baton Rouge's clumsy handling of the location shoot had different intents, the consequences of both looked strikingly similar.

But as the Hollywood beauties waved from a gold limousine, everything was optimism. And as summer approached, that optimism seemed inordinately justified. A Louisiana State University comparative study of May's fiscal numbers in 1965 and 1966 demonstrated marked progress. Building permits were up almost 30 percent. Department store sales up more than seven percent. Grocery store sales, electric power use, bank deposits, registered telephone users – everything was up. Baton Rouge and its surrounds were showing progress in every economic category.²

Baton Rouge wasn't alone. "As warm to the heart of Dixie as the old browned Confederate daggerreotype in the parlor is its defiant battlecry: 'The South will rise again'", wrote the Associated Press. "Now, at long last, it is." Industry had finally, slowly, moved south. New businesses and their accompanying new jobs flooded the region in the 1960s, lured by states desperate for industry and eager to provide incentives to willing companies. Most began offering significant tax breaks. Some states (Louisiana not among them) allowed municipalities to buy land and build plants for corporations using the sale of bonds. Many southern states sponsored vocational training

Thomas Aiello is Visiting Professor of History, University of Louisiana, Lafayette. Correspondence: txa9663@louisiana.edu

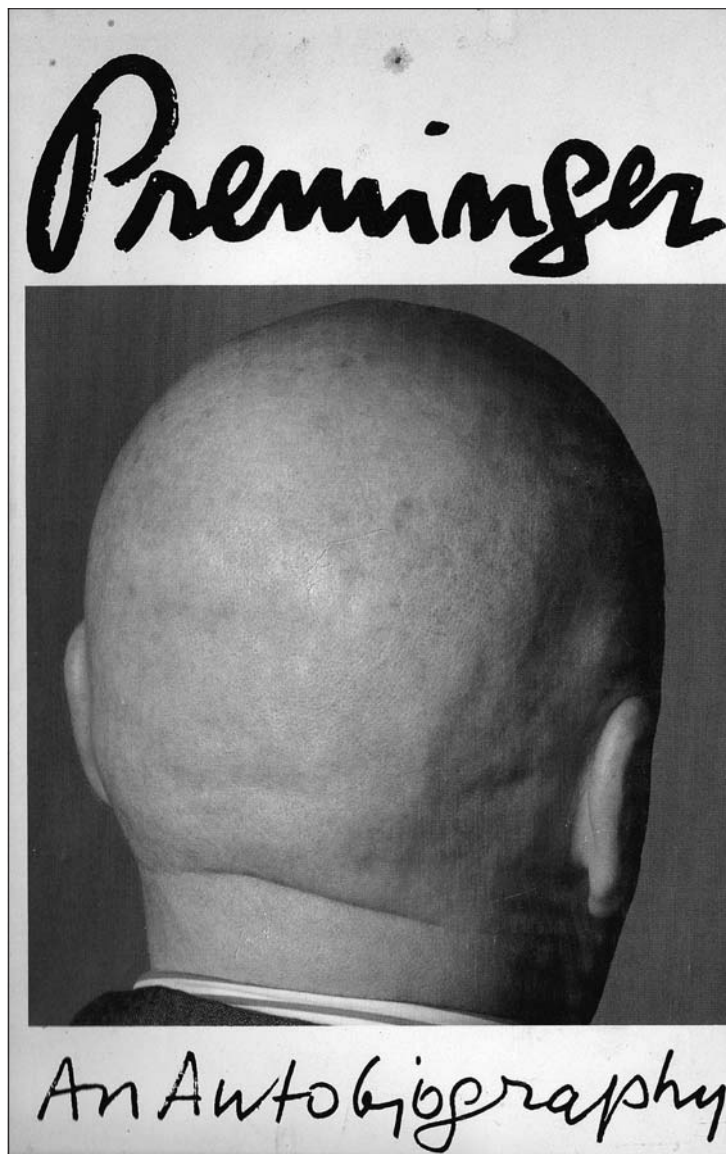
schools to prepare workers for new jobs. In the summer of 1966 alone, Baton Rouge opened eight “neighborhood service centers” to help facilitate employment and education opportunities for area residents at or below the poverty level. “Dixie today is a land of boosters, and the voice of the Chamber of Commerce is heard throughout the land”, the report continued. “By any standards the growth has been remarkable.”

But race was still a problem, ever threatening to counteract the more attractive aspects of the South. “The social revolution which has occurred here in recent years”, said Roger Blough, president of US Steel, “has tended, perhaps, to counteract the attractiveness of other advantages which the South affords to new capital investment”. Baton Rouge, its civic leaders, and its press knew the benefit of keeping racial threats and attacks against visiting industry (no matter how temporary those visits might be) off the front pages.³

To address some of those problems, Governor John McKeithen created the Louisiana Commission on Human Relations in January, intending that the advisory board would work to salve the region’s racial tension. In late June, the legislature passed a bill to replace the slogan “Sportsman’s Paradise” on Louisiana license plates with “Right-to Profit State”, in hopes of bringing new business to the region. McKeithen designated July “Tourist Appreciation Month” to draw in more visitors.⁴ By July, however, a group of visitors had arrived who didn’t feel quite so appreciated.

It was 17 November 1964 when director Otto Preminger announced the purchase of Bert and Katya Gilden’s novel, *Hurry Sundown*, a sprawling account of race in postwar Georgia that took the couple (writing as K.B. Gilden) more than a decade to complete. “It was very long”, Preminger later said of the original draft of the novel, “longer even than the published version, which is also very long, and I was fascinated by the people, and by the whole implication of the South in 1946 after World War II which, in my opinion, was the starting point of the Civil Rights Movement”. By early 1965, the book had found its way onto most bestseller lists.⁵

Horton Foote began the screenplay soon after the purchase, creating a draft that ultimately set the plot of the film. Foote had written the screenplay of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and had experience with Southern subjects. But after a disagreement about the script (a disagreement that Preminger’s manic



personality made almost inevitable), Thomas C. Ryan arrived to finish the project. Foote never liked the Gildens’ novel, and saw their story as overwrought and “far-fetched”. Still, it was style, not racial substance that ultimately led to his dismissal. Preminger “wanted more melodrama and ultratheatricality than I gave him”, said Foote. Ryan had worked with the director before, and would share a writing credit with Foote, but “I ask now”, noted Foote, “not to have it on my résumé”.⁶

Foote, however, would not be the production’s only casualty. Ryan himself was released after talking to Rex Reed, in conjunction with a *New York Times*

Fig. 1. Otto Preminger on the cover of his 1977 autobiography.

piece the critic was writing about the filming. Preminger would also fire a secretary, a script girl, and Gene Callahan, the Baton Rouge native who found and negotiated the movie's locations. "Learning that Preminger is a champion of civil rights may surprise some", wrote Thomas Meehan, "for he has frequently been called a Nazi, especially by actors who have worked under him".⁷

But Preminger had proved before that he could be both. In 1954, the director completed *Carmen Jones*, Oscar Hammerstein's adaptation of the 1875 Bizet opera *Carmen*, with a World War II setting and an all-black cast. He rode the actors as he always did, but horror stories of his tyranny never emanated from the production, probably because an affair with Dorothy Dandridge, the film's star, somewhat mellowed him. When he directed *Porgy and Bess* four years later he again proved fearless in making movies with a black cast. But this time his relationship with Dandridge had soured. Preminger engaged in screaming matches with Sammy Davis, Jr. Sidney Poitier walked off the set, refusing to return until the director apologized and agreed to take a softer tone. By 1967, Preminger's reputation for both black advocacy and oppressive filmmaking were well established.⁸

The story is set in Georgia, and originally the plan was to film there, all the better for authenticity. But there was trouble. Preminger biographer Willi Frischauer framed this struggle – like so many of the *Hurry Sundown* struggles – as a racial one. "Georgia would have nothing, nothing at all to do with a movie showing 'niggers gettin' the better of whites' or 'noble blacks scoring off white trash'. [Preminger] next tried Atlanta but the answer was as dusty: 'Not here!'"⁹ But Frischauer's staging of events is problematic. It assumes first that no other factors but race were included in Georgia's decision, and it thereby makes Louisiana look gracious by default. But Georgia's role in the potential staging of *Hurry Sundown* was far more sympathetic, and Louisiana's far less so. New studies of the film by Chris Fujiwara and Foster Hirsch argue that it was, above anything else, a union dispute that led Preminger to Louisiana. In the incestuous world of film crew unions, Georgia was considered territory controlled by New York. The union there refused to renegotiate the shooting schedule to accommodate the heat, and made salary demands beyond what Preminger was able to pay. Louisiana, on the other hand, was in the grip of the Chicago union, which proved far more accommodating. So

the Georgia story moved west, facilitated by production manager Gene Callahan, a Baton Rouge native with connections in the region. Callahan wasn't chosen for his Louisiana roots, but used them to help sway Preminger west. "Otto trusted Gene on this", said production manager Eva Monley, "because Gene was from the Deep South". Callahan and Monley scouted the locations in an around Baton Rouge, all to the approval of Preminger.¹⁰

In late April, Preminger prepped for the production by pressing the flesh in Louisiana and meeting with local and state leaders to ensure their support. "I am especially grateful to Governor McKeithen and Mayor-President [Woody] Dumas for their complete cooperation and helpful attitude", Preminger told reporters. He met with the governor, with the Baton Rouge mayor. He met with a group of civic leaders from nearby St. Francisville, where much of the shoot would take place. He met with the West Feliciana Parish police jury to negotiate the use of the parish courthouse in St. Francisville. He met with the Louisiana Division of Employment Security about the casting of extras. "We found only one other employment service in the nation that keeps any kind of file we may use", said the director, "and it was not as thorough as the Baton Rouge one".¹¹

The state employment office began accumulating files of locals with acting experience in 1960, when William F. Claxton's *Desire in the Dust* (1960) filmed in the region, and the office went out of its way to prove its preparedness to Preminger's crew. Louisiana, it seemed, was desperate to please.¹²

Baton Rouge and its surrounds had a long history as a film location, and actively courted the motion picture industry. In 1917, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) filmed in nearby Morgan City. In 1929, the silent cinema returned with Dolores Del Rio for *Evangeline* (1929). More recently, director Robert Aldrich had filmed the 1964 horror film *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964) in St. Francisville and Ascension Parish. Bette Davis's portrayal of a rapidly deteriorating spinster, however, had little in the way of political polemic. The following year, the cast of *Alvarez Kelly* (1966), starring William Holden and Richard Widmark, arrived near the Amite River to film a Civil War western in which a Confederate and Unionist join forces to steal a Union cattle herd to feed a group of desperate, hungry Rebels. *Hurry Sundown* came with the same kinds of stars, the same large budget, but it was fundamentally different from its predecessors.¹³

When Preminger arrived in late May, the Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* announced the integrated cast, but assured its readers that Preminger promised that the film would not be “political propaganda.” The company would “be here to make a movie and not to be active in politics”.¹⁴

The *Morning Advocate* was clearly a Southern paper. In early July, when the House Judiciary Committee voted to exempt homeowners from an open-housing provision of proposed civil rights legislation, the paper applauded the move as “a significant revolt against political opportunism in the administration and aggressive extremism in the civil rights movement.” Editorials called for “common sense and fair play in civil rights legislation”. It wasn’t a fire-eating paper in 1966, but it still kept a guarded defense of the white South.¹⁵

Its readers did, too.

The 125-member crew stayed in the massive Bellemont, a hotel and convention center built in 1946 as a sprawling mock-antebellum plantation. Amongst the banners paraded over the entrance was the Confederate battle flag. It would, perhaps inevitably, become the theater for one of the cast’s most notorious incidents. “It was evident from the first day of shooting that many of the local people didn’t want us there because we had a mixed cast”, said Eva Monley, in an interview with Foster Hirsch. The campus had three pools, “and I’ll never forget the first day one of the Negro actors jumped into [one]”, remembered Jane Fonda. “People just stood and stared like they expected the water to turn black!” But they did more than that. After a bomb exploded in the pool, hotel management informed Preminger that integrated swimming would not be permitted. The Bellemont was already taking a calculated publicity risk by allowing the mixed cast to stay in the hotel. Though John Philip Law claimed that Preminger solved the problem by renting a motel, other accounts argue that his solution was far more calculating and far less expensive. The director threatened to remove the cast and crew and default on the bill if the pool did not remain open to all its guests. The Bellemont’s reputation was already suffering. It couldn’t afford now to lose payment for the endeavor. The pool remained open and the production stayed, but the continued threats to the cast and its hotel kept armed state troopers to guard the *Hurry Sundown* wing of the complex.¹⁶

Preminger responded to the threats and violence by contacting the governor’s office. When he

discovered that an aide was an aspiring playwright, the director suggested that he might be interested in producing a play on Broadway. He used a charm not often seen on the set to woo the governor’s help. McKeithen made Preminger an honorary colonel on his staff. The legislature invited him to speak, then gave him a standing ovation upon the conclusion of his talk. McKeithen assigned a patrol of Louisiana state troopers to guard the cast and crew.¹⁷

The armed protection, however, not only made the cast feel as though they were on lockdown, it also failed to ease the fear that beset them. ‘The place was guarded by soldiers as though it were an armed camp,’ wrote Gerald Pratley, a journalist on location with the production. One police officer expressed his displeasure to Michael Caine, informing the actor that he “bettah get his nigga-lovin’ ass the hell outah heah”.¹⁸

Still, the negotiation demonstrates the disconnect between the state and its people. Louisiana, and Baton Rouge in particular, understood the money it stood to make from such endeavors, and therefore willingly placed its law enforcement resources at the production’s disposal. At the same time, the understanding that such protection would be necessary indicated that all would not be well. Average civilians, Ku Kluxers, and even racist police officers expressed their displeasure at the intrusion, even as their tax dollars funded its protection. Significantly, none of the anger engendered by those in and around Baton Rouge focused on the government’s willing cooperation. The complicity of the police, the legislature, or the governor never became a prominent part of the dialogue. The unpowerful were raging while the powerful were protecting, covering up, and profiting, but it was only the outsiders that became targets.

The Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* acknowledged the presence of state police, but argued that they were there to make sure “no passersby or visitors inadvertently wandered into camera range during outdoor filming at the site.” It assured its readers that shooting was progressing according to schedule. There were no disturbing incidents to report.¹⁹

The incidents, however, were just beginning.

Cast member Madeleine Sherwood received a variety of death threats, she suspected, because she had been actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Frightened – and seemingly isolated from the rest because of her activism – Sherwood called Preminger, who met her outside at the pool after a particularly harrowing round of threatening



Fig. 2. Michael Caine and Jane Fonda on location in Louisiana for *Hurry Sundown*.

phone calls. He raised their hands into the air and screamed, "Shoot!" into the dark night beyond the fence. Nothing happened. Her fear abated. The death threats slowed to an eventual stop.²⁰

The cast received dozens of threatening letters from garden-variety racists and more violent Ku Klux Klan members. Locals shot cast trailers, leaving bullet holes strewn along their sides. At one point, someone chased a crew member from a local washateria because he was washing the bed sheets of a black cast member. Even when there weren't any overt acts

of threats or violence, cars would slowly drive around cast locations. It was a reminder to all involved that they were unwelcome guests, that the locals were watching, ever watching. "You can cut the hostility with a knife", said Diahann Carroll. "Down here, the terror has killed my taste for going anywhere".²¹

But going anywhere was part of the job. And the incidents only escalated when the cast moved from the city to its rural location shoots in outlying areas.

"Located in Feliciana Parish", said critic Rex

Reed of the St. Francisville location, "it is the kind of place where ladies still wear gardenia corsages in the drugstore, where men in ice-cream suits still sip bourbon toddies on their porches at sundown, and where you are nobody unless your family has lived there at least 100 years". It was "a fading remnant of old-world decadence, it is white Protestant, old-guard and crumbling. It is also the center of Ku Klux Klan activity in Louisiana." That it was. In St. Francisville, the Klan warned the crew to be gone by eight o'clock p.m. They were. "It's like going to the Vatican to make a movie about Martin Luther", said one resident, "or going to a synagogue to make a film about putting down the Jews".²²

The Klan's presence was palpable in the summer of 1966. The House Un-American Activities Committee was investigating the group. In addition, the federal government began the second of two trials against a group of Georgia Klansmen accused of killing Lemuel Penn, a public school teacher and Army Reservist returning from Fort Benning to his home in Washington, DC. Penn was a decorated World War II veteran, and the murder happened just days after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensuring that the case would receive national attention. After an all-white jury acquitted his murderers, the federal government stepped in. The trial continued throughout the *Hurry Sundown* production.

But public Klan problems were far closer to home than that. A July meeting of the seventeen chapters of the New Orleans area Ku Klux Klan was broken up by police, leading the ACLU to come to the Klan's aid. "In this instance", said an ACLU spokesman, "the Klan was fully within its rights". In April, two disgruntled Klansmen bombed the truck of Lynn Rivere, the exalted cyclops of Baton Rouge's Klavern of the United Klans of America. Motions in the trial continued throughout the summer. In August, as the movie shoot was coming to a close, a local congressional race became heated when incumbent Jimmy Morrison accused his challenger John Rarick of being associated with the KKK. Rarick never denied that the Klan supported his candidacy, but continued his refrain that he had been slandered. Still, statements such as, "If the congressman will repudiate his CORE votes and NAACP bloc votes, yes, I'll repudiate what he calls extremists", certainly didn't do much to warn off such charges. In fact, they made Rarick more popular than ever – the race candidate in a population still divided by race, even if the official line was something else.²³

Returning from a location shoot one evening, the group's caravan of vehicles suffered a hail of gunfire from the thick trees lining the street. No one was hurt, but as Robert Hooks noted to Foster Hirsch, "The shooters had made their point. All of us were convinced that we were surrounded by some of the dumbest and meanest people on the face of the earth, to say nothing of being the most cowardly."²⁴

Film critic Gerald Pratley was on location with the cast and crew at St. Gabriel. He noted the heat and Preminger's notorious temper. He noted the Gildens, also on location to watch their book brought to life. Pratley flew in to New Orleans, where a policeman picked him up and drove him to the set. "Hollywood's so-called stereotypes", he reported, "are disturbingly true to life". The officer blamed "niggers" for the poor traffic, and did his best to explain to Pratley the way of life in which he found himself. The signs designating "white" and "colored" were long gone, victims of an extensive freedom movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but "don't worry about that. Nothing's changed", he said. "Do you think we are going to let the niggers use our toilets? Would you want to sit on a toilet used by a black? We've got ways of taking care of this. We ain't got nothing against the niggers. They know their place down here, we keep them in it and there ain't no trouble. To them, I'm king. I patrol around the town and I take care of them." But then there were those rare disturbances to the order of things. It was those, not the virtual apartheid system, which caused so many problems. "When these outside folks come here to make trash like this movie, then there's always trouble. The fine people of Louisiana are real upset by this film." The policeman noted that Jane Fonda was seen kissing Robert Hooks. "The townspeople won't stand for such things."²⁵

In another instance, Jane Fonda was posing for photographs for French journalists. While standing with a young black child in the cast, Fonda leaned down and kissed him. A photographer snapped a picture. "You can't do that", Preminger reported a local policeman as saying. "You can't kiss that nigger!" Only a subterfuge between the director and photographer – switching the film before he turned the roll over to the officer – saved the picture. It was later published in *Paris-Match*.²⁶

The racial tension surrounding both the set and story also infiltrated the production. During a particularly tense scene, staging the death of Beah

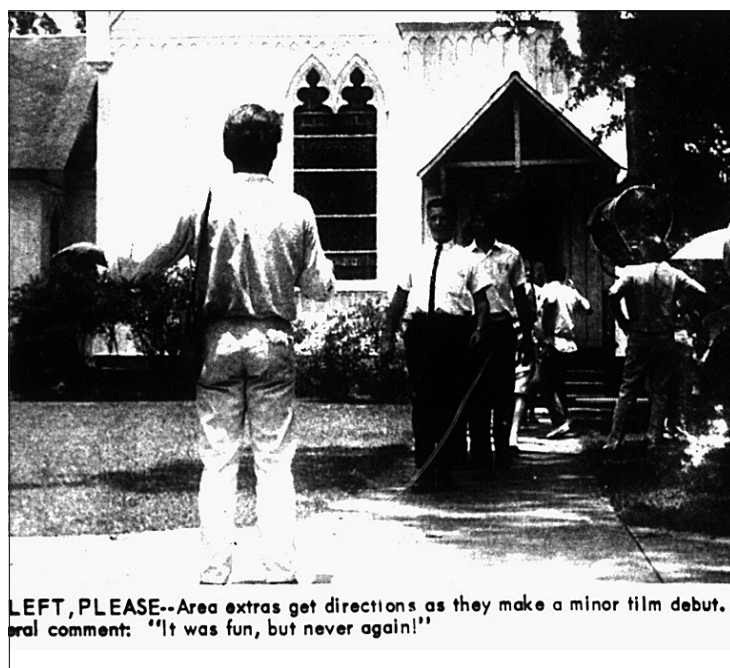


Fig. 3. The local press emphasized Preminger's employment of "area extras" in *Hurry Sundown*. [Courtesy of *The Hammond Star*.]

Richards's character, Preminger continued calling for take after take after take. Richards, satisfied with her work and wanting to stop, questioned her director's motives. "How do you know what a black woman in this situation would feel and act? What do you know about it, white man?" There are two distinct accounts of what happened next, but both demonstrate Preminger's desire to keep such tensions from the set. The director was notorious for multiple, seemingly unnecessary takes. According to Richards's costar Robert Hooks, the outburst prompted a prolonged uncomfortable silence before Preminger ordered another take. After that final performance, he was satisfied. According to another version recounted by Chris Fujiwara, Preminger responded by asking, "How do you know I've never been black?" The shoot then continued successfully. Either way, the temporary racial crisis abated, felled by nothing more than the pace and demand of work.²⁷

Such pressures ultimately translated into at least some measure of missionary zeal amongst the cast, which translated into more typical instances of Southern racial intransigence. When an integrated collection of stars tried to dine at Brennan's restaurant in New Orleans, for example, they were refused entrance, the establishment noting that it did not serve blacks. The actors only compounded the problem by trading on their star power, asking the man-

ager if he knew who they were. He did, and it didn't matter.²⁸ This incident, however, must be considered fundamentally different than the violent reaction to the company's presence in Baton Rouge. While it was reasonable to expect that the infusion of cash into the local economy was a fair trade for allowing an integrated cast and crew to film in the area – even to film a story that condemned Southern race standards – trying to force a new standard by entering a segregated restaurant was fundamentally unreasonable. Such rules may have been unstated, but they weren't unknown. If the racial status quo allowed for public integrated dining, then the political thrust of the movie would have been largely unnecessary.

Of course, confrontations with the locals were one thing. Negotiating with the state's power structure was another. A starstruck John McKeithen continually sought the company of Preminger and the movie's white stars for a dinner at the governor's mansion. The director refused, reasoning that if the full, integrated cast wasn't welcome, none would attend. Instead, he invited the governor to a dinner for a coterie of French journalists covering the filming. McKeithen eagerly attended, only to find that none of the movie's actors were present. This was soft rebellion on Preminger's part, but it was rebellion nonetheless. "Otto behaved beautifully through it all", said Eva Monley. "He refused to negotiate and continued to demand equal treatment for everyone in his cast and crew".²⁹

Preminger noted similarly in his autobiography that Lester Maddox, who would later become the virulent segregationist governor of Georgia, owned a restaurant in the area and invited members of the production to dinner. But when he discovered that among the guests would be Diahann Carroll and Robert Hooks, he cancelled.³⁰

Still, Baton Rouge did make an official effort at welcome hospitality. In late June, the Baton Rouge Community Chorus and Playhouse staged Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. An integrated group of actors from *Hurry Sundown* attended the 25 June performance. The locals received permission to premiere music for the movie at the event. (There was no incident.) The Baton Rouge Community Chorus sang three songs from the production to an approving audience. Additionally, John Phillip Law's *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming* was in Baton Rouge theaters during the shoot, and the actor made a personal appearance at Baton Rouge's Broadmoor Theatre in early July to promote the film

and salve relations between the *Hurry Sundown* production and the locals.³¹

Then, on 22 June, Preminger addressed the Louisiana legislature – a guest of East Baton Rouge Parish representative Luther Cole – sharing the stage with Alabama governor George Wallace. George Weltner, head of Paramount, flew to the capital city for the event, watching as Preminger and Wallace stood behind the dais. The director went first. “I am a naturalized American citizen, and only in America could such two diametrically opposed speakers share the same podium.” He lauded the American tradition of peaceful disagreement. Of course, “we don’t say all of our films are good any more than you say all of your speeches are good”. Preminger nodded to the state’s push to bring new business to Louisiana, claiming to be proud to “join other great industries which have come here and made this state a very prosperous place Wherever I go I see prosperity and hope we contribute a little”. Significantly, while Preminger expressed a hope that his films demonstrated all the best of the democratic spirit and freedom of expression, he tempered his call by assuring his audience of “the restraint of responsibility.” We are different, he seemed to be telling the legislature, but even though I’m making a race movie, I will not betray you. He closed with a paean to the state itself. “We hope you in Louisiana will like us as much as we like you.” The assembled politicians gave him a standing ovation. Preminger acknowledged the applause, moved slowly back to his seat.³²

George Wallace followed the director, part of a wide-ranging press junket in the region, and he gave the assembled legislature a version of the speech he was giving elsewhere. “Since 1954”, he told them, in a not-so-veiled reference to *Brown v. Board of Education*, “the precedent and the law have been repeatedly broken.” At an honorary dinner that night, he reassured the more than 2,000 in attendance that “there are millions of people throughout the country who possess the spirit and hold the philosophy of the South.” He railed against the Supreme Court and Communism. It was the opening salvo in what would become a 1968 presidential bid. “This is not a sectional fight in which we are engaged”, he announced, somewhat paradoxically, “it is a national fight”.³³

That national fight seemed palpably close to home as the shoot continued. In June, as filming was well underway, James Meredith, who had integrated

Ole Miss in 1962, began a protest march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi. His “March Against Fear”, however, came to an abrupt end when he was shot by a white Mississippi segregationist and hospitalized. In response, the SCLC, CORE, and SNCC all volunteered to continue the march for him. It was a hot night in the replacement marchers’ camp when young Stokely Carmichael, leader of SNCC, gave a powerful speech with a new message: “Black Power”, he screamed. “Black Power!” The crowd called back to him, echoing a new mantra that would fundamentally change the dominant strategy of Civil Rights activism. But just as that activism was becoming more militant, progressing to a new stage in its evolution, Preminger’s film seemed a study in regress, harkening back to the days of patronizing white liberalism.³⁴

In early July, as filming continued, the NAACP publicly decried what it interpreted as a deliberate attempt by Hollywood to exclude black actors and crew members from movies and television shows. The studios defended themselves on the “deliberate” count, but really had no defense for the exclusion. The NAACP was right, but it certainly wasn’t the first time such criticisms appeared.³⁵

Hollywood was historically slow in its response to race progress. In 1961, Los Angeles NAACP president Edward Warren publicly asked ‘that movies show the truthful American image. Any time they have a crap game they show plenty of Negroes. But when do you see a Negro doctor or lawyer?’ he asked. ‘They will show you a scene with a baseball crowd and you don’t see a single Negro. You will see city street scenes and not a single Negro. This is ridiculous.’ After the NAACP campaign, Hollywood began taking notice. In 1963, Wendell Franklin was hired as an assistant director on *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), the first black man to hold such a position for a studio film.³⁶

Then, in April 1964, seven months before Preminger’s announcement, Anne Bancroft presented the Academy Award for Best Actor to Sidney Poitier, the first black man to receive such an honor. His movie, *Lilies of the Field* (1963), told the story of a journeyman who works with a group of German nuns to build a new chapel, everyone finding a baseline mutual respect along the way. It wasn’t a political movie, but politics pulsed through the hall as the award was being announced. A violent summer in Birmingham had passed. A violent Freedom Summer in Mississippi was still to come. But though

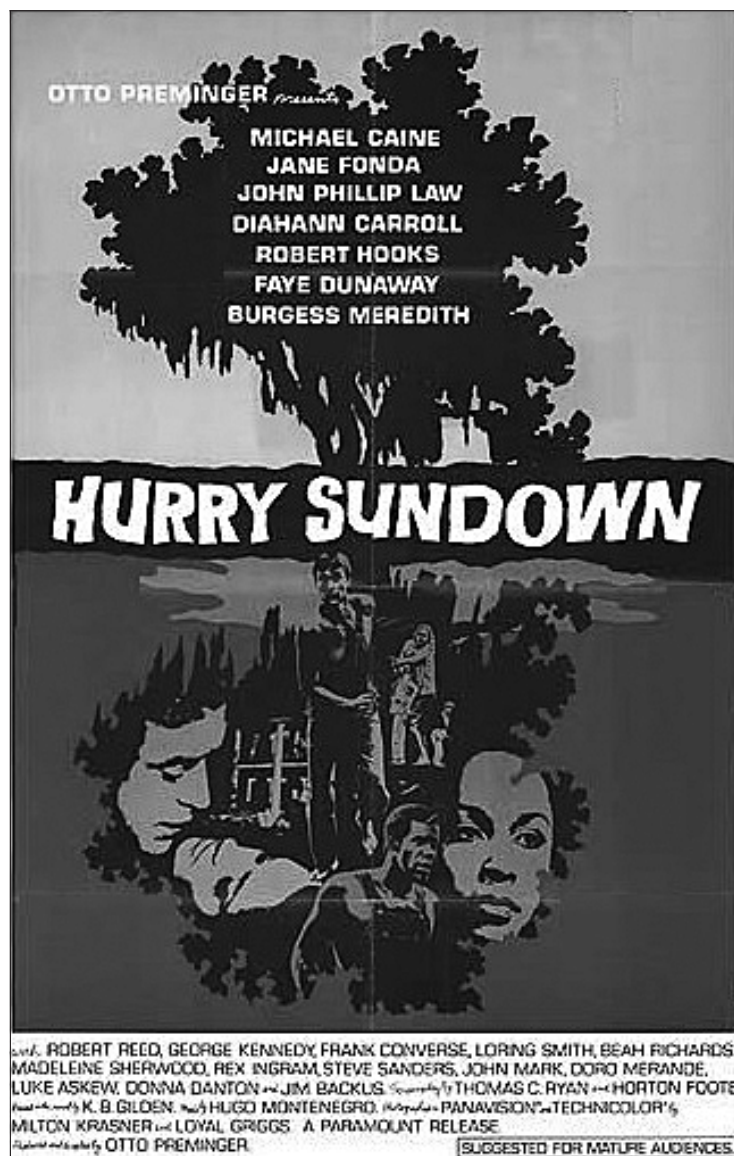


Fig. 4. One-sheet poster for Otto Preminger's *Hurry Sundown* (1967).

Poitier was visibly moved by the honor, he had no illusions. "Did I say to myself, 'This country is waking up and beginning to recognize that certain changes are inevitable?' No, I did not. I knew that we hadn't 'overcome,' because I was still the only one".³⁷

Nor was this the first time that the industry made such an attempt down South. In 1961 Roger Corman had filmed *The Intruder* (1962) – the story of a white supremacist who travels throughout the south organizing resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* in the mid-1950s. Corman brought his cast and crew to Charleston, Missouri, in the southeast corner of the state. Police warned the group to

develop an escape plan, arguing that if the town became angry enough, there would be nothing they could do to stop them from attacking. Paranoia gripped the set. Death threats arrived frequently. The police and National Guard had to guard the group's motel. The movie, however, finished on schedule, and everyone escaped without harm.³⁸

Everyone would escape from Baton Rouge without harm, as well. But the film that shoot produced seemed to miss the point of Louisiana's intransigence, to miss the point of all the race progress swirling around it. Donald Bogle has argued that the movie is a repository of every filmed racial stereotype: "the Southern Belle, the Simon-Legree massa, the white idiot child, the faithful mammy, the white Liberal, the New Educated Black Woman . . . , the New Good Sensitive Negro, the Corrupt Old White bigot, the Po' White Trash".³⁹

Time acknowledged Preminger's intent, but felt the director "chooses strange ways to display his big brotherhood. One sequence shows Negro sharecroppers singing a white-eyed hallelujah number reminiscent of those '40s films that pretended to liberalize but patently patronized. Two hours of such cinematic clichés make the viewer intolerant of everyone in the film, regardless of race, creed or color". For Bosley Crowther, the film was "a massive mish-mash of stereotyped Southern characters and hackneyed melodramatic incidents".⁴⁰

Stephen Farber also criticized the film's stereotypes, frustrated by the use of tropes to make its point. But then, the point itself was part of the problem.

Though it takes an apparently unequivocal stand on the race question, it does not have a new or interesting point to make on the plight of the Southern Negro, and its offensively sweet, industrious Negroes have nothing in common with today's Black Panthers, who might challenge a complacent audience. Art forces us to consider things we'd rather squirm away from, but *Hurry Sundown* congratulates us on the liberalism we picked up in the sixth grade, and never forces us to test that liberalism in any unsettling, radical ways.⁴¹

The film's frustrated reviewers were right. The movie didn't fit the time. The tropes used in the film existed in the South. There were lots of mean, ignorant white people. There were lots of poor blacks who

were either compliant or rebellious. And there were even associations between poor whites and blacks. But in the age of Black Power, such stories entered a climate that had seen such characters all too many times before. Those who would respond to such messages had already reached a new stage in their thinking about race relations. Meanwhile, Southern whites would only find that teaching pedantic.

But in other ways, contemporary reviews exaggerated Preminger's misfire. There was no 'white-eyed hallelujah number.' The brief group song by the black sharecroppers only lasted seconds, a plot device allowing the sheriff and his makeshift deputies to sneak onto the property to arrest Reeve Scott, the rebellious black farmer played by Robert Hooks. And while Beah Richards's mammy character is certainly stereotypical, Michael Caine's character, the villain Henry Warren, mentions at the beginning of the film that the land belongs to his wife's old mammy. So, to be fair to Preminger, he wasn't using that stereotype as a stand-in for something more complex. He wasn't trying to hide anything. He admits it at the front of the movie, trying to provide an understandable code to the nation for the only plausible relationship between a rich white Southern man and a poor black woman. In addition, the lawyer who represents Reeve at trial admits to having a black half-brother, demonstrating the incestuous nature of some of these relationships. He is problematic for the court because he is a white man representing a black defendant, because he denigrates the proceedings as illegal, and because he is from nearby Bay City. Bay City is where the judge had to move his daughter's wedding, where Rad McDowell, John Philip Law's character, threatened to purchase dynamite when the local store wouldn't sell, and then where the new slick lawyer came from. Bay City represents the town's competition. It's better just down the road. The attempts at subtlety are there, they simply remain overshadowed by the clumsy racial messages and the film's broader problems.

And the film had broader problems. While the critics harped on the film's racial content, they didn't fail to note that the movie was bad without it. The film drags on for two hours and twenty minutes as the stories of the lives of three families slowly unfold. The meandering progression also leaves Preminger less room for the film's central plot. There is no great crisis moment, for example, to bring Law's character to decide to unify with his neighbor. A decision that unfolds agonizingly over several pages in the Gliden

novel is made with a few stern looks away from the camera in the film. The film spends its time developing side stories that don't further the plot, but leave massive plot points aside. It is, along with its race problems, a bad movie.

Later commentators Anne and Hart Nelsen cite the movie as subtly prejudicial. The reversed hierarchy of black heroes, poor white aides, and rich white villains, according to the Nelsens, establishes a state of cognitive dissonance, forcing the viewer to either reject the formulation for a more common understanding of order – and thus ridiculing the actions of the stereotyped black characters – or disconnecting from the plot progression entirely. The false choice is aided by the fact that the black characters never move outside the white power structure to achieve their ends. They "completely lack the emotions of fear, anger, and lust, while the whites, if overdone, do display numerous human frailties".⁴²

Even as actress Beah Richards was suffering at the hands of her notoriously cruel director, and at the hands of a racist community that didn't want her in Louisiana, she remained, in a sense, part of the problem. Richards was from Vicksburg, educated at Dillard University in New Orleans. This was an area and a people she knew well. Donald Bogle sees Richards's role as a late permutation of a film stereotype present since the medium's inception. The "de-sexed, overweight, dowdy *dark* black woman" began as a formal type in 1914 with the short feature *Coon Town Suffragettes* (1914) and dominated available roles for black female actresses through the 1930s and 1940s.⁴³

Her costar Robert Hooks plays a returning World War II veteran and is intended to be a representation of the new black militancy. Instead, argues Bogle, Hooks is "pliable and decent", a "tom's tom." Diahann Carroll was a black woman cast to fit a white ideal, "one more dehydrated and lifeless accretion of a decadent capitalist society." Playing the role of a black schoolteacher in *Hurry Sundown*, Carroll was supposed to demonstrate the horror and indignity perhaps typical of a racist, segregated situation. But to Bogle, Carroll "seemed more bored by the racism in the picture – or amused – than irritated." Ultimately, for Bogle, the movie "presented archetypal scenes and characters that audiences associated with the South, with bigots, with liberals, and with touchy racial situations. Although it was cluttered with clichés and misrepresentations, *Hurry Sundown* was directed as one big glorious comic strip with pop

scene after pop scene, and thus it succeeded on a primal level as a popularization of current events."⁴⁴

But for southerners – for those Louisianans so upset about the location shoot – archetypal scenes were the farthest thing from their minds. Critics of the film emphasized its offenses to white liberalism and contemporary black equality claims. But there was plenty in *Hurry Sundown* for southern whites to abhor. Of course, what white liberals saw as stereotypical was still infuriating to those who would think to terrorize the movie's filming. But there was more than just the story to offend.

"You know I was ten years old before I learned that 'damn' and 'Yankee' were two separate words?" said Julie Ann Warren, played by Jane Fonda, in one of the opening scenes. The white stereotypes, too, could make Louisianans just as mad as friendly talk about blacks. There was also stunted dialogue and forced, inaccurate accents that always drove Southerners crazy. Burgess Meredith's character, an educated judge, uses phrases like "me and my womenfolk." The educated are racist, which is understandable, but they are also stupid. They don't just speak with accents, they speak improperly. Vivian's great subtle insult to the judge, once she strokes his ego and outwits him into allowing her to look in the city records is, "You're such a perfect example of everything Southern". Whites are easily duped. The sheriff is placated with food and kind gestures in similar ways as the judge. When he goes to arrest Reeve, his black guests mollify the sheriff with food and drink. He doesn't make the arrest.⁴⁵

Michael Caine's character, Henry Warren, was even more problematic to the white southern mind. Warren is, at base, the character most 1960s Southern white men wanted to be. He is the rich family man with the nice house and beautiful wife who was important to the town and its development. But he is melodramatically evil. He bilks people out of their land, leaves his small child tethered to a crib, then locks him in a room defenseless against dynamiting in the area. He tricks his wife into selling out those she cares about, carries on an extramarital affair, and rapes his wife. Then, after two hours of Preminger's pillaging the postwar South, Warren launches into a considered disquisition on the saving power of California. "There ain't a dream been dreamed, can't come true out there". The message was clear. The South needed saving, and California – Hollywood – could do it.

The Nelsens see these caricatures as funda-

mental usurpations of the Gildens's original novel. The complexities of the black characters have been eliminated. The plight of the poor whites has been distorted, the group celebrated as the moral superiors of everyone else. When the black and white poor unite in the movie, they do so in a personal, superficial way, whereas the novel describes a broader organizational movement. This is true, of course, but in this regard Preminger is doing what almost every Hollywood adaptation does. The Gildens's novel is over one thousand pages long. Even with an overly long production like *Hurry Sundown*, shorthand for such relationships is, if not justified, at least forgivable. It isn't a blatantly racist movie, but in its use of stereotypes, both white and black, it depicts a false reality of the southern condition.⁴⁶

Such is in contradistinction to the one positive historical treatment of the film. Historian Foster Hirsch is far more sympathetic. The movie was overly long and far from his best artistic work, but 'it is another example of Preminger tackling previously off-limits subject matter'. He disagrees with Chris Fujiwara's assessment that 1960s values have been imposed on the narrative. For Hirsch, the characters "transcend stereotype"; they are neither simplistic nor contrived. The black characters aren't filled with retributive rage, haven't yet developed a Civil Rights mind. While the older white characters are racially intransigent, the younger characters slowly develop a race consciousness through the plodding story.⁴⁷

The Gildens, for their part, were upset with the changes the movie made to their manuscript, too, but made little noise about their displeasure, as the Paramount Pictures payment more than salved their wounds. The movie is relatively faithful to the book's plot. And though the film version of *Hurry Sundown* was a critical failure, it did make money. With a budget of \$3.8 million, the film topped \$4 million in rentals. It was certainly no economic watershed, but it did finish its run in the black.⁴⁸

The film was condemned by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, but that event was far from rare. The group had condemned four other major studio productions during the year, as well. It condemned a total of seventeen in 1967, more than any other year in its history. Still, it was the first film condemned that was approved by the industry's new Production Code. The group saw the movie as "superficial and patronizing in its treatment of racial attitudes and tensions." Preminger gave the response little thought. "This powerful group is not



Fig. 5. Local press coverage of Michael Caine, Jane Fonda and George Kennedy filming at Grace Memorial Episcopal Church (see also Fig. 2). Courtesy of *The Hammond Star*.

powerful”, said the director. “It is like other pressure groups, only as powerful as the power we give them”, He was right. The flurry of 1967 condemnations was one of the last gasps of a dying beast. The director actually screened the film at Creighton University, a Catholic school in Omaha, Nebraska which completely ignored the condemnation. In the culturally permissive climate of the 1960s, such a rebuke could only have helped the film’s box office cause.⁴⁹

For Baton Rouge, however, such condemnations were angels dancing on the heads of so many pins. It would be tempting to characterize local anger as a reaction to militants in the cast like Richards, Hooks, and Jane Fonda. That seemed to be the case with Madeline Sherwood. But Richards and Hooks were problematic for white Baton Rouge not because

of their political affiliations, but rather for the perceived reason behind those affiliations: they were black, and that was reason enough. Furthermore, Jane Fonda had yet to become the radical activist she would later become. Louisiana’s anger wasn’t over any specific political baggage Fonda brought to the set.⁵⁰

In fact, Fonda credited her move toward militancy, at least in part, to her experience in Baton Rouge, where she suffered at the hands of an angry racist populace and first learned from her costars about “black militants.” Fonda was struck by a cross burning on the lawn of the Bellemont, by the anger over a picture of her kissing a young black extra, by the gunshots and the repeated refrains of “nigger lover” coming from the natives. She heard Robert

Hooks and Beah Richards talk about black nationalism and black power. It would not be long before she became active in civil rights and other protest movements.⁵¹

Regardless, it was integration that gave locals their cause, both in the cast and on the screen, even as Louisiana was trying to downplay its race problems and gild its corporate image. When Diahann Carroll went on the Tonight Show in 1967, part of the normal press junket for the film, she told Johnny Carson about the cast's experience. Locals felt betrayed. For all of the clandestine threats and violence, it was a minority of area residents who threatened the cast and crew. The police and the press worked to keep such violence out of the newspapers. Now their secret was out. For a city hoping to develop a thriving film industry, this was the nightmare scenario.⁵²

Even during the shoot, such cover-ups were in evidence. It is significant in-and-of itself that the *Baton Rouge News Leader*, a local black weekly edited by Doris Gale and particularly dedicated to exposing such abuses, did not provide any kind of exposé on the violence. Neither did the *Louisiana Weekly*, the state's largest and most influential black weekly. The paper reported in early April on Diahann Carroll's appearance on NBC's *Sammy Davis, Jr. Show*. Later in the month it profiled Wendell Franklin, the first black assistant director for major studio movies. But nothing on the filming in Baton Rouge. It was in the best interest of everyone involved, it seemed, to keep such incidents quiet.⁵³

The St. Francisville paper was far more willing to voice complaints about the production than was the *Morning Advocate* or the black weeklies, but it, too, steered completely clear of race. An old café was converted to a hardware store, the courthouse was temporarily overrun. Traffic was interrupted. Parking spaces were unavailable. These were the typical headaches of a Hollywood location shoot. The integrated cast was never mentioned. Neither were the threats, the violence, or the intimidation.⁵⁴

When the crew returned for a second shoot weeks later, officials were ready. The new filming permit required the production to allow cars through. It specified certain hours for filming. Violation would lead to cancellation of the permit. By this point, St. Francisville residents had seen the integrated cast and had fumed for weeks about the fundamental indecency of the event. Traffic problems provided just the excuse they needed. Still, Preminger was ready. The cast and crew kept to the strict guidelines,

ensuring that the town couldn't revoke their privileges.⁵⁵

But the headaches had yet to end. In late July, a meeting of the Board of Aldermen devolved into a heated back-and-forth, as a contractor hired to do work on a block being used by the production was unable to complete the job until the movie was complete. The Teamsters, however, sided with Preminger, and the production's strict adherence to the town's traffic provisions gave it no reason to revoke the movie's permit. With the resolution unresolved, the Teamsters announced that they had struck a separate project by the same contractor. When the contractor attempted to work, pickets forced him to compromise. The production continued.⁵⁶ Significantly, however, though race permeated the shoot and clearly angered the St. Francisville population – was, in fact, the reason behind this minutia of conflict – it was never the focus of any official complaint. Such were saved for the cover of anonymity.

Hammond, another of the film's locations, belied no such trouble. Crowds gawked at movie stars Burgess Meredith and Michael Caine. The college men ogled Jane Fonda. As the tedious drone of shooting and reshooting continued, the crowd dissipated, bored with the tedium of the reality of such work. The most dramatic moment of the day, according to Hammond journalism, came when Preminger's wife fainted, a victim of the 100-degree heat.⁵⁷

"Hammond will it ever be the same? In reality it probably will be, but for those playing roles in segments of scenes from the movie production", reported the *Hammond Daily Leader's* Edna Campbell, "it will stand out for many years to come as a red-letter day in their lives. This was a very 'first' for Hammond, and a thrill for the local participants and spectators." The paper included features on Burgess Meredith and Jane Fonda, fawning at every turn, and pictures of the white cast, the locations, and the spectators watching their every move. Never was race mentioned. Never was anger.⁵⁸

As the *Hurry Sundown* crew was packing up and leaving town, John Martzell, the Louisiana Commission on Human Relations' executive director, trumpeted its success. "The fact is that Louisiana stands out in the nation", he said. "There has been no serious racial strife in Louisiana since the commission was established". The production had proven that not to be the case, but the press conference demonstrated Louisiana's determination to control the message about its own racial sensitivity.⁵⁹

When filming closed on 13 August, the cast and crew fled hurriedly back to Hollywood, leaving Baton Rouge to handle spin control. “Having a major movie produced entirely in the Baton Rouge area has been quite an experience for the community”, reported the *Advocate’s* Anne Price, “and a financial boon in the bargain.” Locals were employed, money was spent. “Preminger and the rest of the company have been generally highly pleased with the results of their Baton Rouge stay.” Generally, Price reported that the production had “been well received.” It “had good community cooperation So the whole operation has been quite satisfactory for everybody involved.” While Price’s report was patently untrue, there was plenty of reason for her and others to believe it. Baton Rouge was a boom town, Hollywood had come and gone, and the racial threats that permeated the set were quieted from the beginning. “Baton Rouge hasn’t seen the last of *Hurry Sundown*”, concluded Price, “for Preminger has prom-

ised to stage the world premiere of the production here”.⁶⁰

But that was not to be. Though Preminger and his employees said all the right things to all the right people, no one had any intention of coming back to Louisiana. When the movie premiered in February 1967, it didn’t do so in Baton Rouge. It didn’t appear there the next week. Or the next. The movie that caused so much of a stir throughout the hot Louisiana summer of 1966 never played in the place where it shot. The Paramount, the Dalton, the Regina, the Broadmoor, the Robert E. Lee – none chose to show *Hurry Sundown*.⁶¹

True, the movie was a critical flop. That, however, was not why it never appeared. Preminger’s film was a local product, using locals as cast and crew. But to those who fumed over the integrated cast, berated the blasphemy of “nigger-lovers” in their midst, it was as foreign as foreign could be.

Notes

1. Ann Price, “Home Town Girl Gets Top Billing at Premiere: Fans Give Stars Rousing Welcome”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (1 April 1966): 1A, 16A.
2. “Baton Rouge Area Participates In Economic Growth, Study Says”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (8 July 1966): 7B.
3. Sid Moody, “‘The South Will Rise Again’ Takes On New Truth as Industry Moves In”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (24 July 1966): 3F; Ann Pierce, “Community Advancement Opens Neighborhood Centers”, (29 July 1966): 16A.
4. “House Passes Tag Slogan Change”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (24 June 1966): 12A; “July Designated Tourist Month In Louisiana”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (29 June 1966): 9A; “Governor Names Month of July As Tourist Month”, *St. Francisville Democrat* (30 June 1966): 1.
5. The amount of the purchase was undisclosed, but the payment reportedly exceeded \$200,000. The novel itself eventually sold around 300,000 copies. Chris Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2008), 343; Foster Hirsch, *Otto Preminger: The Man Who Would Be King* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 410; Thomas Meehan, “Otto the Terrible”, *Saturday Evening Post* (8 April 1967): 27. Preminger quote reproduced from Gerald Pratley, *The Cinema of Otto Preminger* (New York: Barnes, 1971), 154.
6. Foote quote reproduced from Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 411–412.
7. “Reed”, said the director, “is a frustrated little man who wanted to become an actor but couldn’t make it.” Preminger welcomed the young critic, only to feel betrayed by Reed’s portrayal of a tyrannical director. Preminger quote reproduced from Otto Preminger, *Preminger: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 174; Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 343–344; Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 423; Meehan, “Otto the Terrible”, 28.
8. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 219–224, 292–294.
9. Willi Frischauer, *Behind the Scenes of Otto Preminger: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1974), 223.
10. The movie was filmed in Baton Rouge, St. Francisville, Liverpool, Bains, and Hammond, as well as on land owned by St. Gabriel prison. Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 345; Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 414; “Preminger Picks Area Film Locale”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (16 April 1966): 14A.
11. Anne Price, “Filming of Preminger Movie In BR Area Starts June 8”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (22 April 1966): 1A, 9A; “Part of Movie To Be Shot Here”, *St. Francisville Democrat* (28 April 1966): 1. Preminger quote reproduced from “State Employment Service Simplifies Movie Casting Job Here”, *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (12 June 1966): 1E.
12. Created by Jerry Leggio, the file was maintained by

- Charles Denstorf, director of field services for the employment office. Both worked closely with Preminger and casting director Bill Barnes to choose the extras. "State Employment Service Simplifies Movie Casting Job Here", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (12 June 1966): 1E.
13. Chere Coen, "On Location: Movie Makers Have Given the Baton Rouge Area Its Fair Share of Screen Time", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (1 May 1998): A20; Louisiana Film Commission, "Motion Pictures Filmed in Louisiana", *Southern Quarterly* 23 (Fall 1984): 85-86. For more on film and the representation of Louisiana, see H. Wayne Schuth, "The Images of Louisiana in Film and Television", *Southern Quarterly* 23 (Fall 1984): 5-17.
 14. "Otto Preminger Ready to Begin Work on Movie", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (31 May 1966): 10A.
 15. "Common Sense (Just a Little) in Civil Rights", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (5 July 1966): 8A.
 16. Fonda and Law claims in Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 346; Eva Monley quote reproduced from Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 415; Meehan, "Otto the Terrible", 27; Colleen Kane, "The Bellemont", *Abandoned Baton Rouge*, http://abandonedbatonrouge.typepad.com/abandoned_baton_rouge/2008/05/the-bellemont.html, accessed 8 February 2009; Preminger, *Preminger*, 183-184.
 17. Eva Monley was made an honorary sheriff to protect her. She changed cars every day to be safe. Preminger, too, was made honorary sheriff. Meehan, "Otto the Terrible", 29; Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 415; Frischauer, *Behind the Scenes of Otto Preminger*, 228.
 18. Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 415; Gerald Pratley, *The Cinema of Otto Preminger* (New York: Castle Books, 1971), 14.
 19. "Filming Crew Now Working In Baton Rouge", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (1 July 1966): 12C.
 20. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 417.
 21. Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 225, 346; Carroll quote reprinted from Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 180; Pratley, *The Cinema of Otto Preminger*, 14; Meehan, "Otto the Terrible", 29; Preminger, *Preminger*, 184-185.
 22. Rex Reed, "Like They Could Cut Your Heart Out", *New York Times* (21 August 1966): 105; Frischauer, *Behind the Scenes of Otto Preminger*, 226.
 23. See Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*: "Jury Being Picked for Trial of Klansmen", (3 July 1966): 12A; "Ex-Klansman Testifies at Trial in Ga.", (7 July 1966): 4B; "Motions Are Filed in BR Klansman Case", (9 July 1966): 13A; "Klan Leaflet Claims 17 Units In New Orleans", (9 July 1966): 6B; "ACLU Comes To Aid of KKK In Controversy", (12 July 1966): 7C; "Separate Trial Is Granted In Klan Bombing Case Here", (14 July 1966): 14E; "KKK Membership Down During Probe, But Climbing Again", (22 July 1966): 3D; "Rarick Says He'll Sue Morrison For Slander-Libel in KKK Link", (9 August 1966): 8B; "Klansman Gets 20-Year Term In Shooting", (14 August 1966): 2A.
 24. As the tension built on the set, the cast moved to nearby Plaquemine, but on their first and only day there, the heat from the lights set off the local hospital's sprinkler system, flooding the building and causing \$1,200 in damages. The cast moved back to St. Francisville. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 416-417; Reed, "Like They Could Cut Your Heart Out", 105.
 25. Pratley, *The Cinema of Otto Preminger*, 9, 12-14.
 26. Preminger, *Preminger*, 184.
 27. Hooks kept a diary of the production. The quote comes from Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 422-423; see also Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 348.
 28. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 416.
 29. Quote reproduced from Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 417; see also Frischauer, *Behind the Scenes of Otto Preminger*, 226.
 30. Preminger, *Preminger*, 185.
 31. The chorus sang Hugo Montenegro's "Hurry Sundown" and "I Got the Spirit", and Fred Caruso's "Don't Bother Me." See Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*: "Movie Actors To Attend Play By Local Group", (24 June 1966): 11D; "Hurry Sundown", (2 July 1966): 8E; "John Phillip Law Sets Appearance At Broadmoor", (10 July 1966): 8E. See also "BR Community Chorus and Playhouse Stages Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In the Sun*", Baton Rouge *News Leader* (5 June 1966): 1, 6.
 32. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 424; Preminger quotes reproduced from Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate*: "Preminger Gives Solons Short, Unprepared Talk", (23 June 1966): 6B; "People and Events", (26 June 1966): 8E.
 33. Edgar Perez, "Wallace Addresses Testimonial Dinner", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (23 June 1966): 1A, 10A; "Wallace Tells Solons Law Is Disappearing: Citizens Urged To Join Fight", (22 June 1966): 1; "Wallace", *Hammond Daily Leader* (23 June 1966): 1.
 34. "Ambushed Meredith Vows 'I Shall Return': Civil Rights Groups Plan To Continue March Against Fear", *Louisiana Weekly* (11 June 1966): 1; James K. Cazalas, "Shotgun Blasts Wound Meredith", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (7 June 1966): 1A, 8A.
 35. "Hollywood Hiring Practices Hit by NAACP", Baton Rouge *Morning Advocate* (8 July 1966): 15A.
 36. Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 112-116; Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*, 56-57.

37. Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*, 53.
38. William Shatner, *Up Till Now: The Autobiography of William Shatner* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 68–74.
39. In a similar vein, Chris Fujiwara has highlighted the incongruity of the film's music. Though the film is set in the 1940s, the score maintains a 1960s sound, subtly making the point that such racial problems had yet to dissipate. The message, therefore, and its contemporary relevance, was central to the narrative, even if it meant sacrificing authenticity. It is simple and bold by design. Its lack of subtlety is intentional. But not only do such sacrifices harm the function of the narrative, they misinterpret the Southern racial situation in both the 1940s and 1960s. The plodding evolutionary cycle that ultimately eroded Jim Crow was not simple, and while its arc was plotted at monumental bold points, it was defined far more by its subtle motion than its expository denouements. Fujiwara, *The World and Its Double*, 350; Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 208–209.
40. For the *New Yorker's* Brendan Gill, *Hurry Sundown* was "a terrible movie, and it is terrible in a way that Mr. Preminger has made his very own." It was "meretricious nonsense from start to finish." *Esquire's* Wilfred Sheed felt much the same. Brendan Gill, "The Current Cinema", *New Yorker* (8 April 1967): 145; *Time* (31 March 1967): 95; *New York Times* (24 March 1967): 22; Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 425.
41. Or, as Judith Crist wrote, far less subtly, "Gather roun', chillun, while dem banjos is strummin' out 'Hurry Sundown' an' ole Marse Preminger gwine tell us all about de South." Historian Mark Harris, in a common reaction to the film, deemed it "a disaster; no trace of comprehension of the very real contemporary racism that the cast and crew had experienced in making the film under the shadow of the Klan in Louisiana had rubbed off on the movie itself." Crist quote reprinted from Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*, 288. See also Stephen Farber, review of *Hurry Sundown* in *Film Quarterly* 20 (Summer 1967): 78–79.
42. Anne K. Nelsen and Hart M. Nelsen, "The Prejudicial Film: Progress and Stalemate, 1915–1967", *Phylon* 31 (2nd Qtr. 1970): 145–147.
43. The italics are Bogle's, in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks*, 9, 15. See also Thomas Cripps, review of *Beah: A Black Woman Speaks*, in *Journal of American History* 91 (December 2004): 1141–1142 and Stephanine Greco Larson, *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 26–27.
44. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks*, 210–212, 213.
45. Of course, those who heard the messages of Black Power and the new arguments of second wave Civil Rights knew that whites weren't so easily persuaded.
46. Nelsen, "The Prejudicial Film", 145–147.
47. Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 425.
48. For the Gildens's reaction, see Helen Yglesias, "Chronicle of the Class Wars", *The Women's Review of Books* 7 (July 1990): 16–17; for film finances, Hirsch, *Otto Preminger*, 427.
49. Preminger had been in trouble with the Office before, earning condemnations for *Forever Amber* and *The Moon Is Blue*. The group's bevy of condemnations in 1967 was a testament to its newfound irrelevance, ultimately proven when it condemned *Rosemary's Baby* the following year, to no avail. *New York Times* (8 March 1967): 52; Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*, 361. Catholic Office quote reproduced from Nelsen, "The Prejudicial Film", 143. See also James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933–1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 82–86, 165–166; Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56–65, 119–128; Vincent Camby, "Filmmakers Show Less Fear of Catholic Office", *New York Times* (13 October 1967): 35. Preminger quote reproduced from Preminger, *Preminger*, 180–181.
50. In mid-June, Fonda's brother Peter was charged with marijuana possession in California, but the controversy never touched his sister. Preminger, *Preminger*, 162; Bill Davidson, *Jane Fonda: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1990), 118–119; "Peter Fonda Is Charged in Marijuana Case", *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (22 June 1966): 6C.
51. Jane Fonda, *My Life So Far* (New York: Random House, 2005), 170–172, 211–213.
52. Chere Coen, "On Location: Movie Makers Have Given the Baton Rouge Area Its Fair Share of Screen Time", *Baton Rouge Advocate* (1 May 1998): A20.
53. *Baton Rouge News Leader*, John B. Cade Library Archives, Southern University at Baton Rouge; see also *Louisiana Weekly*: "Diahann Carroll On Sammy Davis Show Friday Night", (2 April 1966): 2–11, "W. Franklin, Hollywood's First Negro Ass't Director", (30 April 1966): 2–11.
54. "Movie Crew Begins Filming Here This Week", *St. Francisville Democrat* (9 June 1966): 1.
55. "Movie Shooting Continues In St. Francisville", *St. Francisville Democrat* (14 July 1966): 1.
56. See *St. Francisville Democrat*: "Town Council Hears Movie Problem At Meeting Tue.", (28 July 1966): 1; "Movie Crew Now Shooting Scenes At Parish Court-house", (4 August 1966): 1.
57. Marg Eastman, "Hurry Sundown Film 2 Scenes at

- Grace Church", *Hammond Daily Leader* (11 July 1966): 1, 8; "Movie Shoots Scenes in Hammond", *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate* (12 July 1966): 6C.
58. Edna Campbell, "Sundown Causes Sensation In Church Neighborhood", *Hammond Daily Leader* (11 July 1966): 2; Marg Eastman, "Burgess Meredith: From 'Hamlet' to 'Batman' – Then 'Hurry Sundown' Here", (12 July 1966): 8.
59. Bill Neikirk, "Louisiana Racial Climate Changed, Martzell Believes", *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, (11 August 1966): 7A.
60. Ann Price, "Success All Round", *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*, (14 August 1966): 10E.
61. See *Baton Rouge Morning Advocate*: "Movie Listings", (5 February 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (12 February 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (19 February 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (26 February 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (5 March 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (12 March 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (19 March 1967): 9E; "Movie Listings", (26 March 1967): 9E.

**Abstract: *Hurry Sundown: Otto Preminger, Baton Rouge, and Race, 1966–1967*,
by Thomas Aiello**

By the time he began filming *Hurry Sundown* in 1966, independent producer-director Otto Preminger was already well-known for a series of controversial films that had successfully challenged existing censorship conventions. Working largely with local newspaper archives, this essay documents the difficulties Preminger faced while filming this racially-charged best seller on location in Louisiana. The negative critical reaction which greeted the film at the time of its release is analyzed within the context of the ongoing American Civil Rights movement.

Key words: *Hurry Sundown*, Otto Preminger, U.S. civil rights movement, Louisiana, location filming.