

Film

Menace II Society Directed by Allen and Albert Hughes

A morality, or should I say mortality tale with a predictable conclusion, *Menace II Society* combines violence galore, cliché-ridden writing and so-so acting with an overused theme and comes up with a film that still manages to make the audience leave the theatre with a lump in its collective throat.

First, the acting; Tyrin Turner plays 'Caine, a confused young black man, bred to the tough street life of Compton, but with an inner voice that narrates throughout the movie and fills him with doubt. Turner plays the role straight to the point of discomfort. Perhaps he is new to the nuances of film acting, not a bad presumption considering that the creators of this film are all in their early twenties. Larenz Tate plays Turner's ruthless

sidekick, Dog. Nothing happens with this character at all, although he is not as uncomfortable to watch as 'Caine. Jada Pinkett plays a young black single mother struggling to get out of the cruel cycle of Compton life. Of the three main characters, she alone combines natural grace and a seemingly real emotional conflict, which allows the audience to be moved and to enjoy themselves at the same time; however, it would have been even

easier for Pinkett to move us had the writers provided her with a chic little bungalow to raise her child in. Nobody can convince me that housing prices are so low in L.A. that her convict lover can set her up on the outside in such style- or else the film leaves something to be explained.

The writing threw me for a loop a few other times as well. For example, we are shown 'Caine being interrogated with deadly intensity in a dungeon-like room presumably in the police station. Presumably they have caught him for car theft and are about to pin a murder on him. But before you know it, he's out buying a flashy car which he drives with barely a com-

ment from either his strictly religious grandparents or his friends; however, he is presumably so overcome with disgust from his week-long stay in jail that he must spew up into the toilet, though he can still fire off a one-liner for his friends outside the door, satirizing the now-stale Black Power movement without a trace of intended irony on the part of the film. Clichéd black respectability slogans like "You're man enough to take a life but you ain't man enough to take care of one" delivered by a pregnant teen to the child's gangster father, and "I brought you into this life, I'm the only one whose gonna take you out of it," delivered by the school teacher/male black authority figure dotted the film. At times it reminded me of the serious part of an episode of "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air", set in Compton.

The black "gangsta" movie style has been used at least a dozen times, and brings with it a host of problems that are usually left untreated. Two of the most obvious are violence and misogyny. Women in this movie, with the exception of the above mentioned single mother, are treated with the same glibness as a *Playboy* centrefold stuck on a garage wall. They seem to be willing participants in a game in which their role is to service the



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men with sex and otherwise remain mute and pretty in the background. Also, the violence in *Menace II Society* is truly gratuitous and palpably numbing. Perhaps this is the director's intention considering the realities of a community like Compton. I doubt most native Islanders like myself can truly relate to a society where murder is as common as a parking ticket.

As a whole, *Menace II Society* remains a stirring account of the black experience in the "Comptons" of North America. With all its flaws, there is an appealing earnesty in the opening footage of the infamous Watt's riots, which remind us of the more recent L.A. riots. Perhaps the key to our understanding of this movie is that the only character to end the movie no worse off than he was when it began is the ruthless Dog, a young black man with no warmth, no faith and no conscience, but who nevertheless knows how to survive.

(*Menace II Society*, playing at City Cinema, will be seen Thurs. Nov. 4 at 9pm, Fri. Nov. 5 at 7pm, Sat. Nov. 6 at 9pm and Sun. Nov. 7 at 7pm.)

ED FOBES

Books

The Puppeteer by Robert Kroetch

The *Puppeteer*, a novel by Robert Kroetch, is the most bizarre mix of characters you will ever come across. The plot focuses on Maggie- a confused newcomer to Vancouver- and a monk/ pizza man/ murderer. Add in a cursed wedding dress, and a handful of murderers-to-be. Jump back and forth between Canada and Greece and toss in some art theft for good measure. Are you confused yet? I certainly was when I read "The *Puppeteer*" by Canadian author Robert Kroetch. But for some odd reason the story and characters pull you in and make this a truly funny and insightful read.

ALDERA CHISHOLM

X-PRESS MEETINGS!!!

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