



Slow Fade to Black (Galaxy Books)

By Thomas Cripps

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Slow Fade to Black (Galaxy Books) By Thomas Cripps

Set against the backdrop of the black struggle in society, *Slow Fade to Black* is the definitive history of African-American accomplishment in film--both before and behind the camera--from the earliest movies through World War II. As he records the changing attitudes toward African-Americans both in Hollywood and the nation at large, Cripps explores the growth of discrimination as filmmakers became more and more intrigued with myths of the Old South: the "lost cause" aspect of the Civil War, the stately mansions and gracious ladies of the antebellum South, the "happy" slaves singing in the fields. Cripps shows how these characterizations culminated in the blatantly racist attitudes of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, and how this film inspired the N.A.A.C.P. to campaign vigorously--and successfully--for change. While the period of the 1920s to 1940s was one replete with Hollywood stereotypes (blacks most often appeared as domestics or "natives," or were portrayed in shiftless, cowardly "Stepin Fetchit" roles), there was also an attempt at independent black production--on the whole unsuccessful. But with the coming of World War II, increasing pressures for a wider use of blacks in films, and calls for more equitable treatment, African-Americans did begin to receive more sympathetic roles, such as that of Sam, the piano player in the 1942 classic *Casablanca*.

A lively, thorough history of African-Americans in the movies, *Slow Fade to Black* is also a perceptive social commentary on evolving racial attitudes in this country during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Brilliant book, well researched, good read."--Micheal Pounds, *California State University at Long Beach*

From the Back Cover

Set against the backdrop of the black struggle in society, *Slow Fade to Black* is the definitive history of African-American accomplishment in film - both before and behind the camera - from the earliest movies through World War II. Cripps explores the growth of discrimination as filmmakers became more and more intrigued with myths of the Old South - the "lost cause" aspect of the Civil War, the "happy" slaves singing in the fields - showing how these characterizations culminated in the blatantly racist attitudes of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and how this film led the N.A.A.C.P. to campaign vigorously, and successfully, for change. Cripps goes on to examine the period of the 1920s to 1940s, a time replete with stereotypical casting for African-Americans and largely unsuccessful attempts at independent black production. But with the coming of World War II also came increasing pressure for wider, more equitable use of blacks in films, leading eventually to more sympathetic casting of racial roles, such as that of Sam, the piano player in the 1942 classic *Casablanca*. A lively, thorough history of African-Americans in the movies, *Slow Fade to Black* is also a perceptive social commentary on evolving racial attitudes in this country during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

About the Author

Thomas Cripps is Professor of History at Morgan State University. He is also the author of *Making Movies Black* (Oxford, 1993).

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