



Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100

(C11C)

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'Soldier's Story' is authentic

This "Soldier's Story" may not be a pleasant one, but it has the ring of truth to it.

Most important, it is a story that needs to be told; the story of what the pressures of white America have done to black Americans and what black Americans do to each other.

"A Soldier's Story" is the tale of Capt. Davenport's (Howard E. Rollins Jr.) investigation into the murder of



Howard E. Rollins Jr. stars as Capt. Richard Davenport, an Army officer investigating the murder of a black sergeant at a southern U.S. Army base during World War II, in "A Soldier's Story," directed by Norman Jewison.



the movies
Dan Greenberg

Sgt. Waters (Adolph Caesar). The time is 1944 when the United States Army was still segregated and black American soldiers, even ones like Waters who had served overseas combat roles in World War I, were largely confined to custodial duties.

Waters' unit is stationed in Arkansas and suspicion of guilt falls on two white officers when his body is discovered. Washington sends Davenport, an attorney and one of the first black officers, to investigate the murder.

What follows is an engrossing hour-and-a-half as Davenport threads his way through the troubled waters of southern politics-of-accommodation to the ugly truths of prejudice and segregation.

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED by Norman Jewison, and based on the original stage production by the Negro Ensemble Company which played the Fisher Theater recently, "A Soldier's Story" is an extremely well-mounted production that captures the bitter-sweet essence of black American survival in the South, in the Army, and in each others' way.

"A Soldier's Story" is not only about white America's pressure on black America. The real impact of the film lies in its frank approach to the many sub-groups within the black community and their various attitudes about how best to face the white world. Thus "A Soldier's Story" affords a free-wheeling discussion of class inter-relationships within the black community.

In addition to Charles Fuller's thoughtful scenario based on his stage play, the film looks authentic. It was photographed by Russell Boyd with a soft, nostalgic quality.

THE VISUAL MOOD of the film is appropriate for a historical film that stresses the intellectual and emotional rather than the action modes. In the few action sequences, the lighting and filtration shift to suitably harsh qualities.

The production was designed by Walter Scott Herndon, who represents the look of the times: the barren barracks, the dry, dusty southern roads and the cluttered, smokey aura of the soldiers' bar where Big Mary (Patricia LaBelle) pours out the whiskey and the blues.

As a matter of fact, the trip to the

movies is worth it just for those sequences and for the singing of Larry Riley as C.J. Memphis. Riley's singing, solo and with LaBelle, captures the blues idiom and the film's emotion. LaBelle evokes memories of Bessie Smith and the black southern tradition of survival.

CERTAINLY THE acting and the direction of those actors, is crucial to a thoughtful film with limited action in the conventional sense. This time out is no exception.

Davenport's investigation leads to testimony by Waters' men; testimony given in flashbacks that gradually characterize a tortured man, a portrait drawn by meaningful comments from his closest associates.

That the film works well is a testimony to the emotional power generated by the confrontations between Waters and his men and to the strength of feelings projected by Davenport as he deals with the base commandant, Col. Nivens (Trey Wilson), with the various white officers and with the black soldiers.

One touching vignette of inter-racial relationships, handled with sensitivity, comes when the colonel's wife, Ida (Patricia Brandkamp), brings the colonel's breakfast while Davenport is visiting. Her obvious discomfort at the presence in her home of a black officer is muted by her sense of good manners. She doesn't offer the captain coffee, as is her duty as a good hostess and southern lady, but she does offer to have someone get some for him — a small but subtle and significant difference.



Adolph Caesar stars as crusty Sgt. Waters in "A Soldier's Story," written by Charles Fuller and based on an award-winning play. It opens at area theaters next week.

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