

# 'Menace' depicts roots of violence

BY JOHN MONAGHAN  
STAFF WRITER

Another movie about L.A. teenagers totin' guns and talkin' trash to a noisy rap-music soundtrack? Maybe that's why it took me over a month to see "Menace II Society," the impressive new urban melodrama currently making a splash both at local theaters and on the editorial page.

Directed by a pair of former DeTrolers, twin brothers Allen and Albert Hughes, this ranks next to "Boyz n the Hood" as a movie that opens your eyes to the causes of violence and frustration in any inner city.

The brothers have cited Scorsese's "Goodfellas" as a major influence, and it shows from scene one. It's the late 1970s when five-year-old Caine sees his drug dealer father shoot a man in their living room. In voice-over narration, Caine notes, "It wouldn't be the last."

1993 — Caine (Tyron Turner)

## MOVIES

has just finished high school. His grandparents, who now raise him, talk about honest jobs and religion, but Caine is already making plenty of cash dealing drugs on the street. When the old man tells Caine if he cares whether he lives or dies, Caine replies honestly, "I really don't know."

It's this attitude that dominates the teenage psyche in "Menace II Society" and makes the film so fascinating. Much more vicious than Caine, O-Dog (Larenz Tate) doesn't care who he smokes — old ladies, kids — and repeatedly watches a videotape in which he shoots a young Korean in a party store robbery.

Caine's role model is Pernell, a big brother figure who gave Caine his first taste of alcohol and guns. The movie shows the vicious cycle when Caine takes Pernell's son Anthony under his wing. Ronnie

(Jada Pinkett), the boy's mother, doesn't like it one bit.

Visually, the movie is very accomplished, especially in its effective use of color. Purple, bright pink and green lights glow from various rooms at a house party where Caine, in one continuous shot from behind, wends his way through the food and eventually into the backyard.

While prominent black actors Bill Duke, Charles S. Dutton and Samuel L. Jackson appear, the movie is populated by newcomers to the big screen. Turner's complex Caine shows a spark of humanity despite the wrong decisions he makes time and time again.

Only Pinkett's single mother Ronnie is one-dimensional and far too perfect in a film that otherwise scores up on realism.

The movie has essentially the same message as "Boyz," spoken through the male role model that both films see as a key element

missing for African-American teenagers. Mr. Butler (Charles S. Dutton), the father of a friend, talks about his son's interest in the Muslim faith. He doesn't personally worship Allah but agrees that it has saved his son from getting mixed up with drugs. "Whatever it takes," he says, as long as it helps you survive.

That same philosophy applies to the directors. The 20-year-old Hughes brothers grew up in Detroit's inner city. Their mother, a woman apparently very much like Ronnie, bought them a video camera to help keep them off the streets.

The movie has been criticized for not offering solutions, but this seems a pretty strong one to me. If you're looking for role models, look no further than the Hughes brothers, who join John Singleton and a growing number of talented young filmmakers making themselves heard in the film industry.

# Callers share good and bad experiences

STREET  
SENSE



BARBARA SCHIFF

therapist to molest her, she went on to find another therapist, and eventual peace of mind.

Message from Voice Mail:

Barbara,  
I read your column June 7 and I really did enjoy it. I had a similar experience. A therapist helped me, too. So, I just wanted to say that I agree with you, that professional help is needed.

Dear Caller,

Thanks for taking the time to add your voice to this important subject. The more we hear from people like you, those who are successful, the more others will think it is possible for them.

Barbara

I read your column of June 7. I, too, had a similar experience, but without the happy ending your caller reports. When I was a teenager, I saw a therapist and told him that my father abused me. The therapist said things to me similar to those your caller reported were said to her. I was so terrified to think that I wanted my father, or my therapist, to do all those things to me.

I was confused then, and I am confused now. I am 15 years older but not wiser, or happier. I do not want ever to go to another therapist; I do not want to be more confused than I am already.

Your caller is better because she found a good therapist, but what if the second one was as bad as the first one. She could be worse off than she was before she found any therapist.

My choice is to make it on my own rather than to give someone control over me like the control my father had.

Dear Caller,

It is a sad truth of my profes-

son, and of others, that there are some bad practitioners as well as good ones. Many patients who are in therapy are healing, but for some, a bad experience like yours can make them worse.

Theoretically, all of us, including you, can defend ourselves from unintentional or intentional abuse. We do so by taking responsibility for our choice of a therapist, doctor, lawyer or any other person we hire to be our adviser. Thinking people learn to recognize if someone is good for them or not, they do not sheep-like follow anyone.

It is a damning statement for you to say you are "15 years older but not wiser." Do you mean you haven't learned anything in 15 years? Why not?

Going to a therapist is not giving up control of oneself to the therapist. One must be an active participant for counseling to work. In all areas of health, current books on healing emphasize the importance of individual responsibility. Even for treatment of physical problems, always the province of the doctor, progressive thinkers stress the necessity of patient involvement.

In this paradigm, the doctor and patient work together to define a healthy lifestyle. It is based on each person's genetics and inclinations, not on the doctor's prescription. Good psychological therapy reflects the essence of this kind of relationship.

The caller to whom you refer presents such a scenario. She knew her first therapist was bad for her, and she was responsible for not staying with him. Then, she was responsible for finding someone else, who could help her learn.

She is actively involved in her treatment. That is the ideal. It is true, however, that many who enter therapy do so because they are not responsible for themselves. Then, as you express, they are unable also to help themselves.

As I said in the June 7 column, I believe professional help is needed for recovery to take place. Your call confirms that because you say you remain confused. Your choice is to remain as you are rather than learn from your bad experience. I hope, someday, you will be strong enough to try again.

Barbara

## SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters throughout metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

### HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY

13671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)

"Our Town" (USA — 1946), 7 p.m. June 23. William Holden plays the pivotal role of stage manager in the stiff but faithful first film version of Thornton Wilder's play about small-town life in turn-of-the-century New England.

### MAPLE THEATRE

4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$5.75 evenings; \$2.95 twilight)

"Much Ado About Nothing" (USA — 1993). Kenneth Branagh, the force behind "Henry V," returns to Shakespeare with this delightful film adaptation of the popular comedy. Branagh, real-

life wife Emma Thompson, Michael Keaton, Denzel Washington and Keanu Reeves star.

"Wide Sargasso Sea" (Australia — 1993). The prequel to Bronte's "Jane Eyre" finds Rochester's first wife Antoinette driven mad on a Jamaican island. Australian director John Duigan ("Flinging") creates a sensual and fascinating portrait of a woman only referred to as the crazy woman in the attic in the original story.

"MICHIGAN THEATRE 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8337 for information and show times. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"Strictly Ballroom" (Australia — 1992), through June 30. In this surprise Aussie hit, a rebellious young dancer urges his partner to break the rules at a stuffy dance competition where the judges insist upon "strictly ballroom." "Watch It" (USA — 1993), through June 30. Three guys live together in a suburban Chicago

house and play practical jokes on each other, always followed by one of them yelling "Watch It!" When a new player arrives, the game gets out of hand. Pat Gallagher and Suzi Amls star.

### STATE THEATRE

2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-5450 for information. (\$1.89)

"Alien" (USA — 1979), 9 p.m. June 28. Ridley Scott's epic about an unwelcome stow-away on a spaceship reworks "Jai The Terror from Beyond Space" (1958) with

added shocks and incredible set design.

### TOP OF THE PARK

Shown atop the parking structure across from the Power Center, 121 Fletcher, Ann Arbor. All films begin at dusk and are usually accompanied by a short. Call 747-2278 for information. (Free)

June 28: Karloff/Lugosi — "The Raven" (USA — 1935) and "The Black Cat" (USA — 1934). The horror duo in two of their best films.

# Hope is one thing 'City of Hope' lacks

BY LEANNE ROGERS  
STAFF WRITER

Say you are a decent, hard-working guy trying to make a living and take care of your family with your construction business. There are things you accept — like the phantom workers who show up on the payroll — just to keep guys with juice at the city and union halls happy, so you can still get contracts and permits.

Does that make you corrupt, or are you just realistically working the system you can't change? What if you have to go a bit further, maybe stopping maintenance at an apartment building which is in the way of new development?

That is the kind of issue director John Sayles considers in "City of Hope," an ironically titled film about corruption and politics in a decaying inner city on the east coast. There is a large cast featuring familiar faces from previous films, some in brief scenes aimed at catching the panorama of a large city and sketching in many of the intertwined relationships. Thanks to the finely tuned script and deft performances, we get a thumbnail sketch.

Among the characters receiving more attention are the harried construction company owner, played by Tony Lo Bianco, and his son, played by Vincent Spano, who abruptly quits his "job." He

shows up at the construction site but doesn't work.

Nearly 30, the son is much younger in appearance and behavior, almost stuck in late adolescence. He drinks, does some drugs, gambles and aimlessly hangs out with a bad crowd.

A former African-American college professor, now serving on the city council, finds himself pressured from many sides. Played by Joe Morton, the council member tries to leverage jobs from the largely white politicians. When he visits his constituents, he is attacked by poor inner city blacks as an "Oreo."

Opportunists abound in "City of Hope," with most people not considering any ethical questions about their actions. Morton gradually joins the fold, grabbing an opportunity to get some power by capitalizing on a media circus over an assault complaint.

A lot of the scenes are familiar from real life. Citizens refuse to pay more for schools; they already pay too much in taxes and the students receive a poor education.

Sayles, who takes the part of a sleazy garage owner, doesn't offer any answers. He does offer a couple of glimpses of hopeful touches toward the end of a film in which characters seem powerless against their fates.

## VIDEO

**READER'S**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ AGE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF RELEASE \_\_\_\_\_

☐ ALBUM

☐ CD

☐ TAPE

☐ CONCERT

ARTIST \_\_\_\_\_

RECORD LABEL \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEW: Please print or type your review (50 words or less) on a separate sheet of paper, attach this coupon and mail to: Street Scene, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

► You can also call in your review at 953-2030.

DINING & ENTERTAINMENT

# On the Town

## Happy Endings Do Happen Just Like In The Movies!

"We met, fell in love and married in March, 1993. Thanks to Personal Scene."

John and Nancy of Plymouth

"We met in July, 1992 and are still going strong."

Tina P.

"The first time I responded to an ad I met Paul. That was September, 1992 and we have been together ever since."

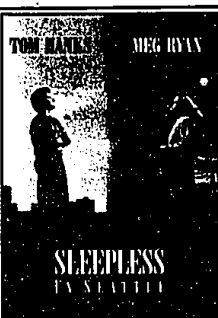
Lisa and Paul

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## Brothers from page 6A

The organization is helping them get bigger shows out of state. To succeed outside the area, the group needed to strengthen its professionalism so the group recently hired a new drummer, Vincent "Vince" Panze of Detroit, and guitarist Jake Smith of Birmingham and formerly of Park The Karma.

"We're not thinking small. That's why we got Jake in the band," Spencer said prior to Pan-

zo's hiring.

Brothers from Another Planet perform Thursday, July 1, with The Opague at The Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor (996-8555); and Friday, July 23, at Alvin's, 5766 Cass, Detroit (832-2355). The group will record a live CD during their performance Saturday, July 24, at Criss Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti (483-6550).

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