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One Potato, Two Potato

Yank indie treats miscegenation with tact, not exploiting the theme. It looms a good specialized bet if well placed with its unknown but excellent thespians.

Sam Weston-Bowalco production and release. With Barbara Barrie, Bernie Hamilton, Richard Mulligan. Directed by Larry Peerce. Screenplay, Raphael Hayes; camera, Andrew Laszlo; editor, Robert Fritch; music, Gerald Fried. At Cannes Film Fest (In Competition). Running time, 102 MINS.

Julie	Barbara Barrie
Frank	Bernie Hamilton
Joe	Richard Mulligan
Fiona Mary	Marti Merika
Judge	Harry Bellaver
William	Robert Earl Jones
Johnny	Sam Weston
Ann	Faith Burwell

Cannes, May 4.

Made in Ohio on a subscription basis for a reported \$250,000, this is a tender, tactful look at miscegenation that speaks in human rather than polemic terms. If some Southern markets may be difficult, this pic could well emerge an indie with solid arty and some general possibilities in most parts of the U.S., with foreign chances also potent.

Set in a midwest U.S. location (northern tier), it deals with a seemingly well-adjusted young Negro office worker who meets a young white divorcee who has a little girl. Their idyll grows slowly and gently as both react on normal planes with the color no apparent problem. But it sometimes intrudes when a policeman brands her a streetwalker because she is out late at night with him. The point is made that if he had been white this would not have happened. But after a kiss and professions of love, his parents object strongly and try to make him conscious of the problems marriage would bring.

But the woman's simple, sage declaration of love's lack of boundaries and color lines leads to marriage. He suddenly withdraws from all his friends and they live with his parents in a farm outside the town. Tastefully done is the father-in-law's final acceptance of the wife after a child is born.

Then along comes the woman's first husband who has made his fortune after leaving her and demands the custody of the little girl. His unconscious jealousy of the Negro husband, and insistence that the girl's life would be made difficult if brought up in these surroundings backs this up.

A sympathetic judge locates the girl in a good home, since he feels that as long as prejudice exists the little girl's life could be touched by it. All this is helped by fine delineations of character and added help from some new faces and the on-the-spot lensing.

Barbara Barrie has a striking presence and manages to mix intensity with need to etch a firm, moving character as the woman who finally finds the right man only to have her child taken away on racist principles. Bernie Hamilton is taking as the Negro husband who suddenly finds his manhood and very human liberty threatened by something that prevents him being a complete man.

Others are fine, especially the sober playing of Robert Earl Jones as the father; Richard Mulligan, as the ex-husband and Marti Merika, as the little girl. Rarely has a Yank moppet performance been so natural.

Director Larry Peerce, for his first pic, has wisely told his story without many heavy symbolical and overdramatic embellishments. This sometimes leads to faltering in some spots that repeat already made points rather than enhancing them. One scene, when the distraught husband revisits scenes of their early courting, is gratuitous. But otherwise there is a fine feeling for the characters, story and theme.

Film is poignant. And its simple, precise direction, script and thesping make the big scenes effective. For example, the grandfather's slowly being won over to life and out of his dogged, if not stated, opposition to his daughter-in-law, the woman's breakdown after the verdict and the little girl's hitting her mother because she doesn't understand why she is sent off to a home.

This is an independent production on a touchy theme that is faultlessly handled. Pic should get plenty of attention on this alone if tastefully placed and sold. Music is also an asset in its counterpointing and underlining of the characters and theme. Technical credits are fine and the lensing excellent. At a time when civil rights battles are almost daily affairs, this has an additional selling point.

This is an excellent beginning for all concerned in this first production. It also showed its class by being one of the first non-Hollywood pix to be invited directly in competition for some time at Cannes. It is true that another indie, "Long Day's Journey Into Night," was picked by the Hollywood Fest Selection Committee two years ago, but it did have known stars in it. Film was reportedly turned down by the Committee for showing at any fest and its direct fest invite on its own merits is commendable. Mosk.