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THE EPITOME of black pride, accomplishment, and success must surely be Sidney Poitier, whose more than thirty films have moved him into that elect group known as the superstars. With such other superstars as Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, and Barbra Streisand, he is in the position to choose and finance his pictures. Lately he has become his own director. With all this heady power, one would think his choices would be more original than *A Warm December*, which might be described as a warmed-over *Love Story*, or any one of a number of pictures in which a nice man meets a nice woman, only to discover that she is the victim of an incurable disease. Since both hero and heroine in this case are black, the disease inevitably is sickle-cell anemia.

What makes this black film quite different from other black films, however, is the style and elegance with which actor/director Poitier has treated it. No poverty here, no one on welfare, no un-

skilled workers. These are upper-crust blacks. And they live less like people do in real life than the way they used to in Hollywood movies. I rather think Poitier wanted it this way, that he deliberately made the film to show that beautiful, handsomely dressed black people could move as naturally in stylish surroundings as whites. Certainly, as played by Poitier and his discovery, Esther Anderson, they do.

Poitier, of course, has been attacked by both whites and blacks for not participating in the black movement. But surely he is working as much toward parity for blacks as a Jesse Jackson or a Melvin Van Peebles. *A Warm December*, despite its rather saccharine story, makes a point: When you do not acknowledge the existence of prejudice or, rather, when you act as though it does not exist, indeed it does not exist. Poitier, in other words, is showing us relations between blacks and whites as he thinks, ideally, they should be. This is all very nice, but it's still never-never land; it should be said, though, a never-never land that, as far as I know, is being explored in film for the first time.

POITIER IS HIS customary character: upright, charming, strong, capable. This time he is Dr. Matt Younger, on holiday in England with his twelve-year-old daughter. Soon enough, he meets a beautiful African who, if mysterious at first, turns out to be the niece of the ambassador from an African nation (indeed, Miss Anderson's role may have been patterned after that of Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*). Love flowers, then, inevitably, the discovery of why the woman is unwilling to marry him. Poitier directs the film professionally—which is to say commercially. It's a nice film, and it may make people cry. But let it be said that for all his high motives, Poitier is playing it very safe.



Sidney Poitier and Esther Anderson in "A Warm December"—Black elegance.

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