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**FILM AND MODERN
SOCIETY
1983**

NORTH CAROLINA
HUMANITIES COMMITTEE
Forsyth County Public Library

FILM AND SOCIETY 1983

The motion picture! It is an enormously powerful medium that feeds our senses. It provokes us to thought and action. How did it get its start?

One theory is explained by James Burke, the writer and narrator of the popular *Connections* television serial produced by BBC-TV. Thomas Edison, Mr. Burke explains, fit together pieces of a puzzle that included the development of surveying, the invention of a billiard ball made from synthetic materials, and a wager that determined whether or not a horse will have all its hooves off the ground when galloping.

Confused? Consider this. In the early 1800's the British needed to survey the Irish landscape. So foggy was the land that existing line-of-sight surveying devices were inadequate. A gas-arc lamp, which could pierce the Irish mist, enabled surveyors to pin-point locations. It was a shortage of ivory that necessitated the invention of a new material for billiard balls. Celluloid, a volatile substance that coated these balls, may not have been the best idea for billiards but it came in handy when George Eastman needed a material for long strips of photographic film. Finally, to settle the bet about the horse, a clever photographer rigged a series of cameras to photograph a horse at a gallop. The motion of the horse was captured in stills (with all four feet OFF the ground). These stills, Edison surmised, could be re-worked to show motion. The lamp, photographic film, still pictures into motion — THE MOVIES!

What Edison may not have foreseen was a medium that generated even more problems to solve. The movies present to us social phenomena that demand explanation and analysis. The Forsyth County Public Library, in conjunction with the North Carolina Humanities Committee, will present five such examples of Edison's invention. Each will concern an important social issue. We invite you to share your thoughts and ideas with us.

FILM CALENDAR

January 11	— Ticket to Heaven
February 1	— Fundi: The Story of Ella Baker
March 1	— Soldier Girls
April 5	— Atomic Cafe
May 3	— Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle

ALL PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.
PROGRAMS BEGIN AT 7:30 P.M. IN THE
NEW AUDITORIUM OF THE MAIN LIBRARY.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DISCUSSION TO FOLLOW EACH FILM SHOWING.

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Support for this program comes from funds provided by the North Carolina Humanities Committee. The North Carolina Humanities Committee is a foundation, supported by federal tax funds and private gifts whose purpose is to encourage and assist public educational activities in the humanities for adults.



TICKET TO HEAVEN

Tuesday, January 11, 1983. 7:30 p.m.

United Artists Classics 1981

107 min. color.

Directed by R. L. Thomas.

Program Leader: Dr. Paul Court-right, Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

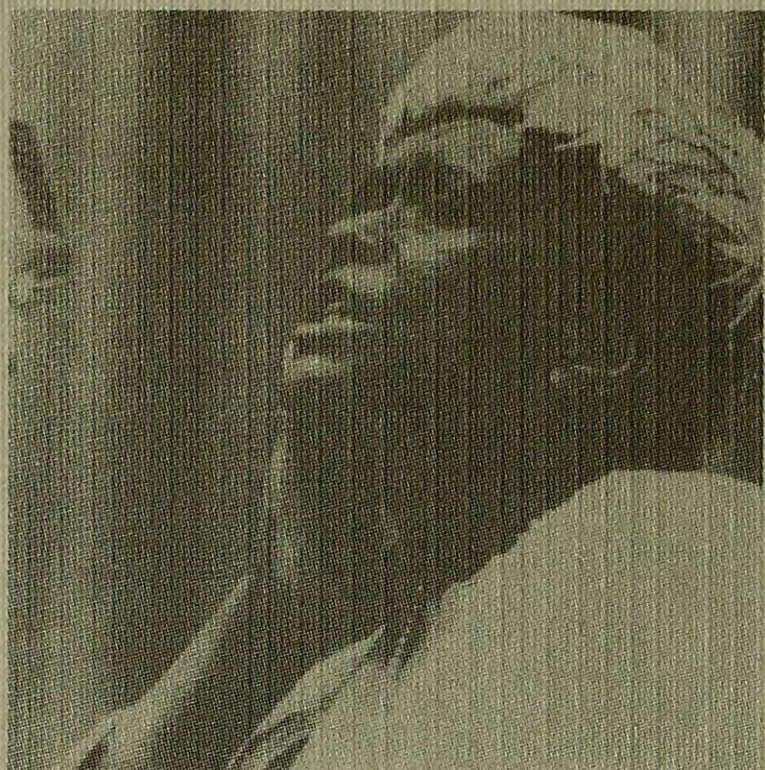
THE LURE OF THE FANATIC RELIGIOUS CULT

SUMMARY:

Ticket to Heaven follows the story of David Kappel, a school teacher from Toronto who is going through a period of emotional turmoil over his work and his relationship with his girlfriend. Desiring to get away for a while, he visits an old friend in San Francisco. He accompanies his friend to a retreat sponsored by a new religious community. There he becomes "converted" by the highly sophisticated methods of persuasion used by the cult members. In desperation his family and friends, risking imprisonment, kidnap David from the cult and put him through a deprogramming experience.

DISCUSSION:

The film is a powerful and disturbing one. It raises a number of questions that will be pursued in the discussion following the film. What is the religious world of the cult? What are the cult's methods of recruiting new members? What ethical questions are involved in rescuing a loved one from such a group even when it means breaking the law to do it? How should a democratic society respond to the cult phenomenon? What similarities and differences are there between the community and methods of the cult movements and those of "mainstream" religions during the period of their own origins?



FUNDI: THE STORY OF ELLA BAKER

Tuesday, February 1, 1983. 7:30 p.m.

New Day Films 1981 63
min. color.

Directed by Joanne Grant.

Program Leader: Dr. Elwanda Ingram,
Assistant Professor of English,
Winston-Salem State University.

SOCIAL CHANGE BY PERSONAL COMMITMENT

SUMMARY:

"Fundi: The Story of Ella Baker," depicts the life of a pioneer woman in the Civil Rights Movement, Ella Baker. This one hour documentary, which received acclaim at a London film festival, includes footage from various civil rights gatherings of which Ms. Baker was a part, interviews with people who have known and worked with her, and comments from Ms. Baker herself.

The word "Fundi" is a Swahili term which means one who masters a given craft, through the community and teaches it to other people, without ever being institutionalized. "Fundi" describes Ms. Baker who helped develop some of the well known and little known national and community leaders of the black struggle. Also called "The Mother of Struggle," and "the Godmother of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee," Ms. Baker was the first executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and an organizing member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. For those unfamiliar with the events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement and the role that black women played in that movement, this film is an excellent historical and educational document which interweaves the committed career of Ms. Baker with the history of black struggle for human rights and dignity in this country.

DISCUSSION:

How important was the role of black women in the civil rights movement? How did some black male leaders of the civil rights movement perceive black women in positions of leadership in the movement? How much, if any, has that perception changed? Are similar methods of activism used today as effective as in the 1960s?



SOLDIER GIRLS

Tuesday, March 1, 1983. 7:30 p.m.

First Run Features 1980 87 min. color.

Directed by Joan Churchill and Nicholas Broomfield.

Program Leader: Dr. Judith White, Director of the Women's Resource Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

WOMEN IN TODAY'S ARMY

SUMMARY:

The film follows a platoon of fifty young female recruits in Charlie Company at Fort Gordon, Georgia as they undergo seven weeks of basic combat training. Focusing on the experiences of three women, two of whom are quickly disenchanted with military life and one who embraces it and readies herself for the 82nd Airborne Division, *Soldier Girls* is a startling expose of the methods and rituals involved in training today's Army.

Soldier Girls highlights the ironies of training for war in peacetime and preparing women for lives of combat. Horrifying and funny: the ineffable Sergeant Mellinger biting off the head of a live chicken to demonstrate survival techniques, women chanting, "I want to go to Iran, I want to kill an Iranian, pillage, plunder, burn, RAPE," lectures on the "friendly" use of nuclear weapons and how to "brush off" radioactive dust. *Soldier Girls* demonstrates in no uncertain terms how a sergeant describes basic training: "You can't teach people to kill nicely."

DISCUSSION:

After all the ERA debates on drafting women, this film gives us an opportunity to look at the other side of the question — the women who have chosen to pursue military training. Even though military officials have said that the experiments of coed training have not lessened military readiness, today some branches are changing back to sex-segregated outfits. The reasons are unclear, but these moves make *Soldier Girls* all the more pertinent: what cherished notions of masculinity are challenged by training women to fight? does military readiness have more to do with ideas of control than measures of strength? do military ready women threaten those ideas of control? do military ready women deal with questions of femininity — or feminism?

ATOMIC CAFE

Tuesday, April 5, 1983. 7:30 p.m.

New Yorker Films 1982 88 min. b/w
Directed by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne
Loader, Pierce Rafferty.

Program Leader: Dr. James Clotfelter,
Professor of Political Science,
University of North Carolina at
Greensboro.



HAVE WE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NUCLEAR AGE?

SUMMARY:

The subtitle of a film of the early 1960s was "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb." During the late 1940s and 1950s the U.S. government devoted a great deal of effort to persuading the American people to stop worrying and — if not live — at least learn to accept nuclear weapons as a part of the nation's military capabilities.

Beginning in 1976 three young documentary filmmakers spent five years tracking down and screening government films designed to inform the American public on the effects of nuclear weapons. The result was the film *Atomic Cafe*. Only footage from the 1940s and 1950s is used, and there is no narration; the voices of political leaders and broadcasters, plus music of the period, provide the sounds of that era. The result is often humorous, although it is the kind of humor that is troubling as well. The *New York Times* reviewer called it a "devastating" portrayal of "official and unofficial U.S. attitudes toward the atomic age." "One gets the impression from all of these propaganda films," he said, "that we should anticipate nuclear war as inconvenient but fun, like being snowed in on the farm for a weekend."

The portrayal of nuclear war in U.S. government filmmaking became more sophisticated after 1960, but the filmmakers suggest that one should remain concerned about the role of official propaganda in shaping our attitudes.

DISCUSSION:

When is it proper for the government to attempt to "educate" the American people? How should citizens react to and use government "education" and information about policies and programs? How has government information shaped our attitudes toward nuclear war?

MILES OF SMILES, YEARS OF STRUGGLE

Tuesday, May 3, 1983. 7:30 p.m.

Paul Wagner Productions 1982
59 min. color.

Directed by Jack Santino and
Paul Wagner.

Program Leader: Kate Mewhinney,
Adjunct Professor, Clinical Programs,
Wake Forest University. Attorney for
Legal Aid Society of Northwest North
Carolina.



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WELFARE OF WORKERS?

SUMMARY:

This film tells the story of the Black Pullman Porters, bringing to light a little known chapter in American Civil Rights and Labor History. Working for tips, the porters provided elegant personal service to overnight railroad passengers for 100 years after the Civil War. To their white passengers, the men were ever-smiling servants. In the black community, they have been both envied for their "good jobs," and reviled for being "Uncle Toms." Rebuked by white organized labor, they miraculously formed the first black trade union in the United States in 1925, under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph. In the film, a group of retired porters and one remarkable 100 year old woman, aided by archival films and photographs, tell a story filled with drama, humor and an inspiring sense of human dignity.

DISCUSSION:

If there are audience members with relatives who were sleeping car porters, what effects did that connection have on your family? How have social attitudes towards blacks changed since the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was organized? How have these attitudes remained the same? Would the U.S. labor movement have been strengthened or weakened if the American Federation of Labor had actively supported the organizing efforts of black workers? How does racism hinder the movement for positive social change today? In light of the experience of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, would you agree with Frederick Douglass when he wrote: "Power concedes nothing without a struggle, it never did and it never will."?



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