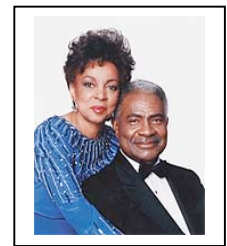




2005 Freedom Award
Lifetime Achievement Award
Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis



PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

Biography

Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis broke new ground, throwing open doors in the arts world that had been firmly closed to African Americans. Married in 1948 after meeting on the set of a Broadway show, the couple worked together on a number of projects that heightened the presence and prestige of African Americans in theater and film. Close friends of Martin Luther King, Dee and Davis served as the masters of ceremony for the momentous 1963 March on Washington. The pair was also close to Malcolm X; Ossie Davis delivered the eulogy at his funeral in 1965. Their activism has remained steadfast throughout their lives; they have protested for black voting rights, citizen involvement in democracy, and against McCarthyism. Ossie Davis died in February 2005. Throughout their careers, the couple portrayed with dignity and courage the potential for how society and racial interaction could be. In 2004 they were awarded the Kennedy Center Honors for exemplary lifetime achievement in the performance arts.

What terms below best describe Ms. Dee and Mr. Davis'? (circle your answers)

- A. Politician
- B. Activist
- C. Surgeon
- D. Actor

Answers:

B & D Ms Dee and Mr. Davis are activists and actors.

Vocabulary

Citizen involvement:

Participation in and awareness of social and political issues

McCarthyism:

A 1950s political movement that led to censorship and blacklisting, particularly in the arts, of individuals thought to be communist sympathizers

Can you name other groundbreaking African American actors, artists, or authors?



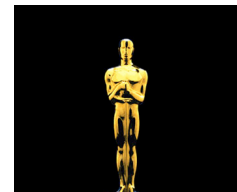
1.



2.



3.



4.

Can you identify the images above?

1. _____ 3. _____
2. _____ 4. _____

Answers:

1. World Map 2. United States 3. California 4. Oscar award

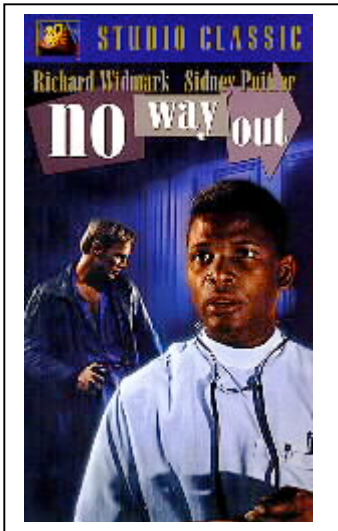


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POST-VISIT ACTIVITY

Racial segregation affected all areas of life. In the early 1900s, theater and the emerging film industry also contained elements of segregation. African Americans did work on films with whites in Hollywood, but often their roles were limited to small parts based on light comedy, music, or dance. From 1927 to 1948, there were also productions



of “race movies.” These films with all-black casts were usually low budget and intended to be marketed to black audiences in segregated movie-houses of the South and in urban areas with large black populations in the North. In 1949, attitudes in the film industry slowly began to change; producers were increasingly willing to tackle issues of race and class and to show positive racial relationships. Sidney Poitier starred in *No Way Out*, a landmark 1950 film presenting a black middle class family; Ossie Davis was a member of the cast. A number of African Americans became movie stars in their own right, including Poitier, Davis, and Belafonte. Poitier became the first African American to win an Oscar for his 1963 role in *Lilies of the Field*. Taboos against showing interracial couples also broke down;

Hollywood filmed its first interracial kiss in 1967 in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*.

Throughout history the arts have often been used to promote particular ideas about society. Because of its power to create and reveal meaning, the arts are frequently censored. Censorship can take many forms, ranging from forbidding the usage of objectionable language to controlling the ideas that people may discuss or present. Much of the segregation in the film industry resulted from social taboos, but an industry official also controlled the images of racial interaction, particularly between men and women.

New Vocabulary

Censorship: The process of controlling which actions and expressions are permitted

Taboo: A social custom that forbids a certain behavior or action

Why is it important for minorities to be active in the arts? How can art be used to communicate the history or identity of different groups?

How have African American artists contributed to and shaped American theater, art, and literature? How has these contributions impacted the struggle for civil rights?
