

Hollywood 'stereotypes blacks'

By Carla Engstrom

Hollywood films dominated by western culture stereotype blacks, contends filmmaker Halle Gerima.

Film is a powerful weapon, Gerima said, it's used to sell anything from a product to a lifestyle.

Gerima spoke Wednesday in conjunction with Black History Month and also participated in Sheldon Film Theatre's Filmmakers' showcase.

At times, independent American and African black filmmakers have risen to make positive films which negate stereotypes, he said.

However, people are used to seeing blacks in a negative light, he said.

In Africa it's common to see blacks going to "Tarzan-type films," Gerima said.

Men and women in the Third World countries mold themselves into western images because of western values, Gerima said.

Blacks in films such as *Gone With the Wind* have no sex or personality, he said.

Roots

Black filmmakers also use stereotypes, according to Gerima. He cited such films as *Shaft* and *Mandingo* as westernized images of macho.

There are still good guys and bad guys in Hollywood films and to pacify blacks, the bad guys are the whites and the good guys are the docile blacks, Gerima said.

To counteract stereotypes blacks must develop to their fullest potential, he said.

This is where *Roots* fails, he said, "*Roots* falsify reality.

"To romanticize literature at the expense of realism" is negative, he said.

"Kunta Kinte is like John Wayne," he said.

After the dollar

"*Roots* is for a few blacks and a few white who are forgiving each other," Gerima said.

He said the film industry is out to make money, but also pushes western values on blacks.

The filmmaker said he likes to be in direct control of all aspects of his films.

Gerima's first features *Harvest: 3,000 Years* and *Bush Mama*, were shown at the filmmakers' showcase. His first film *Child of Resistance*, a 47 minute documentary on Angela Davis, was made at the University of California at Los Angeles.

The filmmaker left Ethiopia and studied drama at the Goodman School in Chicago. He currently teaches at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

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