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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Judith E., "Hollywood Imagines Revolutionary Haiti: the Forgotten Film Lydia Bailey (1952)" (2021). *American Studies Faculty Publication Series*. 20.  
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## Hollywood Imagines Revolutionary Haiti: the Forgotten Film *Lydia Bailey* (1952)

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### Abstract:

This essay explores the history of *Lydia Bailey*, the only US studio-made film to depict the Haitian Revolutionary period. It asks why, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, such an unlikely project might have seemed commercially promising enough to justify a significant production budget. The essay draws on private studio memos as well as public press discussions to shed light on the high stakes in debates over racial representation and colonialism/decolonization in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and to illuminate everyday assumptions of white supremacy as these shaped the making of the film and its promotion. Production files and a range of industry, daily and weekly mainstream white press and Black newspapers document the racial divide shaping the film's production and reception. The story of the making and forgetting of *Lydia Bailey* reveals the process by which transnational Black history and Black struggle became more public and legible in the wake of WWII anti-fascism and internationalism, and then was driven back off stage by the political mobilization of Cold War anti-Communism.

Special thanks for the expert guidance of archivists at: USC Film and Television Library, especially the incomparable Ned Comstock who pointed me to *Lydia Bailey* and its archival record; UCLA Film and Television Archives, where I initially screened *Lydia Bailey* in 2003; Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library, especially Kristine Kreuger; Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University. Michael Beckett, Sarah Siegmann, and Daniel Fishbein provided expert research assistance. Many generous American Studies and film history colleagues at UMass and elsewhere answered queries and offered helpful critical readings and encouragement along the way: Rachel Rubin, Barbara Lewis, Denise Khor, Linda Dittmar, Ann Holder, Tom Doherty, Brian Neve, Charlene Register, Matthew Bernstein, Dan Horowitz, Nancy Cott, Alan Lipke, Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall.

Jean Negulesco's *Lydia Bailey* (Fox, Technicolor, 1952) opens with unusual, intensely purposive close ups on the Black faces of ragged Haitian rebels. They are communicating by drum, passing messages unintelligible to white travelers and French colonials. Title cards then identify the film's source as a best-selling novel, and its setting as "the infant Republic of Haiti," in 1802 facing an invasion by "the Master of Europe," where "all that opposed Napoleon was an ex-slave, Touissant L'Ouverture, with tiny nation wracked by factions and keyed to hysteria by the constant beat of jungle drums."

Images of drumming as hysterical were familiar, long-standing cultural representations of Haiti. However, these opening images of drumming as secret communication for freedom fighters, and the title cards' reference to Louverture and the Black struggle for Haitian self-rule without sympathy for France's imperial claims were definitely not standard Hollywood fare.<sup>1</sup> Although *Lydia Bailey* is now largely forgotten, and has registered only minimally in film history, it was the first and only twentieth century Hollywood film attempt to represent Black agency in the revolutionary struggle in Haiti.<sup>2</sup> Given the power of mainstream public culture's denigration of Black agency and

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinarily Hollywood "restrained its criticism of the British and French empires"; Jon Cowans, *Empire Films and the Crisis of Colonialism, 1946-1959* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Lydia Bailey* is discussed briefly in Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: the Hollywood Message Movie from WWII to the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 256, 259-60; Donald Bogle, *Blacks in American Films and Television* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 140-1; it does not appear in Alan Gevinson, ed., *Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911-1960* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997).

resistance, and the historic conjunctures of WWII and postwar demands for and resistance to desegregation and decolonization, the stakes could not have been higher.<sup>3</sup>

The film's first three minutes cut back and forth to contrast Black Haitian resisting knowledge and messaging via drums and song with white American imperviousness. An elegantly dressed Haitian gentleman in a market square (William Marshall), registers the drums' warning and an intrepid American hero Albion Hamlin (Dale Robertson), hears but ignores the drums because his single-minded legal mission is to locate a white woman, the title character Lydia Bailey (Anne Francis). His quest will set in motion the adventure/romance to unfold amidst Napoleon's efforts to retake the island.

Costuming the Haitian gentleman in the market in a white suit that is nearly the mirror image of the American hero's light grey attire indicates this character's significance; he will soon be identified as a trusted associate of the Revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture. However, filmic focus on communication among ordinary Haitians via song and drums signals that the fate of the Haitian republic will depend on their committed and coordinated efforts. This opening contradicts the exoticized/ racialized spectacle promoted in the film's advertising campaign: "Pounding out of Kenneth Roberts' Greatest Best-Seller...to the Wild Beat of a Thousand Voodoo Drums;" an "Adventure in the Voodoo Jungles of Haiti with a Cast of Thousands."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Exhibitor's Campaign Book for *Lydia Bailey*, 11, 15, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Margaret Herrick Library [MH-AMPAS].

The Haitian gentleman in the market is “King Dick,” his naming invoking a long-standing mythology about Black men. Watching the talented left-wing singer/actor in his first screen role, white reviewers described Marshall’s portrayal of King Dick as “stealing the picture.”<sup>5</sup> The film represented Louverture and his military leadership as heroic, principled, Black non-racialists; Louverture opposes a Black renegade leader, Mirabeau, whose men viciously butcher white men, women and children. *Lydia Bailey* critically undermines French imperial claims on the island, especially by portraying the cast of French characters as villainous and reprehensible, with only one (elderly female) exception. The white American adventurer who has wandered into the midst of the Revolutionary struggle must win the expatriate American Lydia Bailey by wooing her away from her intended French planter fiancé. With help from King Dick, he rescues her from wartime dangers the French planter overconfidently underestimates. Imagining (and overstating) American sympathy for insurgent opposition to French colonialism, Hamlin claims that what the Haitians are fighting for “is no different than what men in my country fought for” and that Americans “recognize a fight for liberty.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For examples, see reviews in *Variety* (w) and (d), 5/28/1952; *New York Times* [NYT], 5/31/1952, 12; *Time*, 6/16/1952, 98; *Chicago Daily Tribune* [CDT], 6/9/1952, 13; *Baltimore Sun*, 6/21/1952,8; *Los Angeles Examiner*,[LAE]7/22/1952; *Washington Post*,[WP] 7/3/1952, 39

<sup>6</sup> For historical accounts of US response to the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); 222-226; Tim Matthewson, “Jefferson and the Non-Recognition of Haiti,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 140:1 (March, 1996), 22-48. For fictional liberties in the film’s retelling, see Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *Slave Revolt on Screen: The Haitian Revolution in Film and Video Games* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2021)

Emerging when neither mainstream culture nor Hollywood filmmaking acknowledged Black subjectivity or Black history, *Lydia Bailey's* representation of Black resistance signaled new possibilities. Black publications immediately claimed its historic significance. *Ebony* termed *Lydia Bailey* a "milestone" for Hollywood because "For the first time, a film has been built around a black country with great leaders who had the courage to fight for freedom and independence...Never before has a picture carried such a tremendous indictment against slavery or so glorified a segment of Negro history." *Jet* described it as a "brilliant" technicolor film and as "the first picture to depict truly the bravery of Negroes whose love of freedom did not melt in the face of guns, fire, and death." Covering the film's unprecedented "world premiere" in Haiti, veteran Black journalist James Hicks emphasized the Black character as "significant departures" from "the usual stereotyped roles given colored actors in Hollywood," and appreciated their appearing "...in a setting in which a colored person can view the film and not walk out in disgust." Hazel Lamarre, a Black newspaper critic in Los Angeles likely more knowledgeable about the industry, mused on what was so unexpected from a studio product: "To us, *Lydia Bailey* is inspiring because somewhere, somehow, the production staff captured the fire and spirit of Haitian revolutionaries and portrayed it with respect and sincerity." <sup>7</sup>

How did the sole twentieth-century film depicting the Haitian Revolution emerge from the Hollywood studio system in 1952, and why might it have seemed commercially

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<sup>7</sup> *Ebony* (7:2)1/1952, 44; *Jet*, 6/12/1952, 65; *Afro-American* [BAA] 5/7/1952, 7; *Los Angeles Sentinel* [LAS], 7/3/1952, B2.

promising? How does the history of its production and reception excavate ordinarily inaccessible but critically important conversations about racial representation and colonialism/decolonization in the late 1940s and early 1950s? The story of the making, marketing, and forgetting of *Lydia Bailey* reveals the process by which Black history and Black struggle became more public and legible in the wake of WWII civil rights militancy, anti-fascism and internationalism, and then was driven off stage by the political mobilization of Cold War anti-Communism.

### **Revolutionary Haiti in Kenneth Roberts' *Lydia Bailey* (1947)**

The novel *Lydia Bailey* from which the film was drawn included elements from previous divergent literary representations of the world's first independent Black republic, described variously "as a slave rebellion, an anticolonial war, and an atrocity."<sup>8</sup> Early accounts of former slaves defeating overwhelming European military force and claiming the most profitable colonial possession in the West Indies shocked the world, and intensified arguments both in defense of slavery and for its abolition. Twentieth century narratives of Haiti "held up the country as the highest model of heroism and race pride or used it as the lowest model of debased primitive beliefs, crushing poverty, and political instability," with many white writers attempting to "prove" that Black self-rule was a failure.<sup>9</sup> Military memoirs, sensational and sexualized travel narratives, and theatrical

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Kaisary, *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Lindsey J. Twa, *Visualizing Haiti in U.S. Culture, 191—1950* (London and Burlington, Vt: Ashgate Press, 2014), xviii, xxi

renderings produced during the time of the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 coincided with modernist exploration of Black “primitivism,” with writers both supportive and critical of the occupation representing Haiti as an exotic object of desire.<sup>10</sup>

Alternate accounts of Haitian history and culture began to appear in the 1930s, in plays, children’s books, paintings, and dance performances created by left-wing African American writers and artists Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Jacob Lawrence, and Kathryn Dunham. Their artistic work intended to represent a “usable past” from which African Americans could draw strength and collective pride as Black citizens of the world, and contributed to a radical Black Atlantic discourse.<sup>11</sup> Their accounts emphasized ordinary people and the “transformative complexities born out of violent struggle.” In his major treatment of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), the Caribbean radical C.L. R. James balanced attention to Louverture as a great individual who made history with a separate focus on Black agency in articulating the goals of universal freedom and the imperative of decolonization.<sup>12</sup>

*Lydia Bailey’s* author, Kenneth Roberts, was a contrarian writer who opposed FDR and the New Deal and was not particularly interested in the Haitian Revolution or Haitian history. In the 1920s, Roberts’ popular journalism and his advocacy of white (he would

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 19

<sup>11</sup> Twa, *Visualizing Haiti*, xiv; Kaisary, *Haitian Revolution*, 41; Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 277-285; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 130-1.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted phrase from Twa, *Visualizing Haiti*, 174; Kaisary, *Haitian Revolution*, 21-23, 30-36

have called it “Nordic”) supremacy helped influence the passage of the racialized and exclusionary 1924 Immigration Act.<sup>13</sup> His turn to historical fiction, often loosely based on the lives of his Maine ancestors during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, eventually produced a best-seller, *Northwest Passage* (1937); Roberts appeared on the cover of *Time* in 1940.<sup>14</sup> Roberts’ unlikely turn to Haiti, and to the Haitian Revolution as the backdrop for *Lydia Bailey* emerged from their connection to incidents in US military and political history he wanted to probe. *Lydia Bailey’s* selection for book clubs made it an immediate publishing success.<sup>15</sup>

Roberts’ novel drew on prior conflicting versions of Haiti’s history. Roberts relied on two nineteenth century sources, British abolitionist writer John Beard’s 1853 account of Toussaint Louverture as an exceptional universalist savior of an inferior people, and the 1889 memoir authored by Spencer Saint John, *Hayti; or the Black Republic*, an infamously white supremacist screed making a case for Haiti’s history as proof of Black inferiority and barbarity.<sup>16</sup> Roberts also consulted newer 1930s revisionist studies. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits’s non-exoticized *Life in a Haitian Village* (1937) emphasized African and European influences in Haitian culture and offered a non-sensationalist account of Vodou religious practices. *The Black Jacobins* exposed Roberts to James’s emphasis on the developing consciousness of political universalism and anti-colonialism, and his focus on

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<sup>13</sup> Nell Painter, *The History of White People* (NY: Norton, 2010), 302-305, 322-3.

<sup>14</sup> “Angry Man’s Romance,” *Time*, 11/25/1940, 93ff. A technicolor film of *Northwest Passage* (King Vidor, MGM, 1940) valorized the American defeat of the Abenaki during the French and Indian Wars 1754-1763.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Roberts, “On the Evolution of LYDIA BAILEY,” *Wings: the Literary Guild Review*, 1/1947, 4; Jack Bales, *Kenneth Roberts* (NY: Twayne, 1993) 30-89.

<sup>16</sup> Twa, *Visualizing Haiti*, 176; Kaisary, *Haitian Revolution*, 5, 36;

Black agency in the revolutionary period. A handwritten comment inside the front cover of Roberts' copy did express skepticism about both James's personal and political authority:

"James is a negro [sic] and a Marxist, which explains..."<sup>17</sup>

*Lydia Bailey's* Haitian chapters borrowed promiscuously from these conflicting sources. They juxtapose lurid and sensationalized accounts of Black looting, raping, and killing white French male and female colonists alongside descriptions of admirably planned and executed Black military strategies to outmaneuver and triumph over contemptuous French landowners and overconfident French military forces attempting to retake the island. Newspaper reviewers praised Roberts' thick descriptions of the fighting in Haiti, and his explicit sensationalism ("huge and violent scenes crowded with the ferocity and cruelty of a numerous community..."), recognizing their cinematic potential.<sup>18</sup>

Roberts created the charismatic King Dick character, so compelling for *Lydia Bailey* film viewers, repurposed from an earlier novel. The 1931 *King Dick*, loosely based on a historical free Black man, Richard Cephass, spoke in minstrel dialect and showed up at key moments to help plan and enable the American hero's eventual escape from prison.<sup>19</sup> For

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts' well-marked copies of these four books are in Kenneth Roberts Library book collection, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. Dartmouth undergraduate researcher Daniel Fishbein reproduced Roberts' marginal notes and marked passages for me.

<sup>18</sup> Reviews in *Boston Globe*[BG], 1/2/1947, 11. *NYT Book Review*, 1/5/1947, 1; *WP*, 1/5/1947, 58L.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, *Lively Lady* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1936); Alan Thomas Lipke, "The Strange Life and Stranger Afterlife of King Dick Including His Adventures in Haiti and Hollywood With Observations on the Construction of Race, Class, Nationality, Gender, Slang Etymology

*Lydia Bailey*, King Dick again assumed the role of faithful local guide/servant/helpmeet for a traveler, as established by folk tale and literary precedent.: he appeared “as suddenly and as magically as though he’d popped from the ground like the Slave of the Lamp...”<sup>20</sup> As he was writing, Roberts consciously updated “King Dick’s manner of speech” which he now recognized as “too niggerish.”<sup>21</sup> Re-imagined as the son of a king in the Sudan, *Lydia Bailey’s* King Dick had travelled to Spain, Surinam, and New Orleans before jumping ship in Cap Francois and becoming a general in Louverture’s army. Still, Roberts’ “Nordic supremacy” views shaped his racialized delineation of King Dick as one who “preferred white Englishmen and white Americans to people of his own color.”<sup>22</sup>

While finding scenes of fighting more memorable than most characters, many white newspaper book reviewers singled out King Dick as “the most interesting character in the book, a man of limitless wisdom, loyalty, and abilities;” and “an enormously resourceful Negro who was Albion’s good genius throughout the tale.” One midwestern novelist and social historian reviewer went much farther, describing “the strange and fascinating King Dick, the soft-speaking and hard-hitting Haiti Negro who had the qualities of greatness that American diplomats and military leaders lacked.”<sup>23</sup>

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and Religion,” MA Dissertation, University of South Florida, 2013,  
<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4530/>

<sup>20</sup> Roberts, *Lydia Bailey* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1947) 80. A “native” character devoted to the European traveler’s welfare has a long literary lineage; a more recent term is “magic Negro” or “Magical African-American friend;” Jamaican critic Christopher John Farley, “That Old Black Magic,” *Time*, 156:22, 11/27/2000.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts’ diary quoted by Lipke, “Strange Life,” 68.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, *Lydia Bailey*, 86-90, 103, 214-15.

<sup>23</sup> *NYT*, 1/2/1947, 25; *Christian Science Monitor*, 1/2/1947, 24, *Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Canada), 1/4/1947, 8; Walter Havighurst, *CDT*, 1/5/1947, G3. Two reviews noticed “views of racial equality” and “race prejudice” in the foreword and expressed by the white hero as

Although NAACP leader Walter White expressed concerns about the novel's "incredible barbarity" as reinforcing negative stereotypes, other Black reviewers welcomed a popular author of Roberts's stature turning to the Haitian Revolution. Their coverage emphasized that struggle's rarely-acknowledged historical significance. The *Chicago Defender's* reviewer commended the novel's "considerable attention to Toussaint as Haiti's revolutionary hero." A review accompanying an excerpt in the *Baltimore Afro-American* was headlined "America Owes Freedom to 50,000 Haitians." Even though "the hero and heroine of *Lydia Bailey* are white," this reviewer wrote, "across the background stalk colored people who in themselves were tremendous personalities who shaped the course of the world's history."<sup>24</sup>

### **Darryl Zanuck 's Turn to *Lydia Bailey***

Twentieth Century Fox bought the film rights to *Lydia Bailey*, pre-publication and sight unseen, in late September, 1946; "we saw nothing—no manuscript or outline" before the purchase. Always watching for "presold properties" that would draw movie-goers into theaters, studio personnel likely saw a Kenneth Roberts historical fiction/Literary Guild

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striking departures from Roberts' prior public positions: *BG*, 1/2/1947, 11; *New York Herald Tribune*[*NYHT*] 1/2/1947, 17A. These appear in the foreword and on 276-9.

<sup>24</sup> White to Ambassador Joseph V. Charles, 9/20/1947 in NAACP papers, General 1943-1949, 33-46; *Chicago Defender* (national) [*CDn*], 1/25/1947, 15; *BAA*, 53/1947, M8; excerpt headlined "How the Haitians Slaughtered the French."

selection as a sure bet. Six of the top ten moneymaking films for Fox in 1946 had been based on popular novels.<sup>25</sup>

However, the industry faced increasingly uncertain box office returns in the postwar years. Fox films continued to make money, but despite record wartime profits and box-office surges in late 1945 and into 1946, there were signs of trouble: the anti-trust suit; rising filmmaking costs, strikes and wage disputes; the decline in recreational dollars devoted to movie-going; an uncertain international marketplace. Fox had its most profitable year in 1946, but that scale of profit was not sustained in 1947.<sup>26</sup>

The powerful and hands-on Fox production chief Darryl Zanuck involved himself directly in the making of *Lydia Bailey*. In the late 1930s, Zanuck had publicly announced his turn to dramas of social significance, making money and winning prestigious recognition with *Grapes of Wrath* and *How Green Was My Valley*.<sup>27</sup> In the 1940s, the terrifying rise of fascism in Europe and Zanuck's close friendship with Wendell Willkie, unlikely 1940 Republican Presidential nominee, influenced his thinking and his pictures. Zanuck actively supported and greatly admired Willkie, an outspoken internationalist, challenger of the "foreign aggression" spreading over Europe as well as a vigorous critic of Jim Crow

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<sup>25</sup> In *NYT*: 9/25/1946, 48; 9/29/1946, 67; 10/17/1946, 34. Rental figures in Aubrey Solomon, *Twentieth Century-Fox: A Corporate and Financial History* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1988,) 221.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (History of the American Cinema Vol. 6) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 290-303; Peter Lev, *Twentieth Century Fox: the Zanuck-Skouras Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 102-107.

<sup>27</sup> George Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (NY: Basic Books, 1997), 227-256

in the US.<sup>28</sup> In September, 1941, Zanuck and Willkie joined forces to successfully challenge Congressional isolationists, defending the studios' anti-Nazi films while promoting Hollywood's cultural power.<sup>29</sup> After Pearl Harbor and the US entry into WWII, Zanuck and Fox sped up production of films supporting the Allies, and Willkie used his new influence in Hollywood to arrange meetings between Zanuck, producer Walter Wanger, and his personal friend Walter White, chief executive of the NAACP, to press for new film representations of African Americans as "part of taking the offensive against the Axis."<sup>30</sup> Pushed by civil rights organizing, some wartime discussions of anti-fascism began to hesitantly question widely accepted norms of white supremacy, and some Zanuck films modestly began to screen new imagery.<sup>31</sup>

Both Zanuck and Willkie directly observed the world at war, and envisioned postwar reconstruction. Willkie described the non-white world majority as entitled to

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<sup>28</sup> On Willkie's political evolution and public anti-fascism, see Joseph Barnes, *Willkie: The Events He was Part of-The Ideas He Fought For* (NY; Simon and Schuster, 1952); David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country and Conceived a New World Order* (NY: Liveright, 2018); Samuel Zipp, *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie's Wartime Quest to Build One World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020). Zanuck campaigned for Willkie in 1940, and hosted him at Fox; *Motion Picture Herald [MPH]* 8/2/1941, 44.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and WWII* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993) 13-14, 41-2, and the forthcoming Chris Yogerst, *Hollywood Hates Hitler! Jew-Baiting, Anti-Nazism and the Senate Investigation into Warmongering in Motion Pictures* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> "Willkie in *The Exhibitor*, 3/4/1942, 11b. On Willkie and White's Hollywood campaign, see Barnes, *Willkie*, 327-8; Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (NY: Viking Press, 1948), 198-203; Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 35-63, and Ellen C. Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 108-119 160-169.

<sup>31</sup> Cripps, *Making Movies Black*, 58, 72-76; Rudy Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck* (New York, Grove Press, 1993), 59; Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, 116-119

national sovereignty in part because of possessing recognizably admirable American qualities, and Zanuck was drawn to Willkie's vision of a new American-centered internationalism. When Willkie returned from his 1942 visit to allies in North Africa, Beirut, Jerusalem, USSR, and China, he made the case for "an orderly but scheduled abolition of the imperialist system" in a national radio address and in his best-selling book *One World*.<sup>32</sup>

In returning to full-time filmmaking in July 1943, Zanuck sought new challenges.<sup>33</sup> He intended his big-budget "biographical drama" on Woodrow Wilson and the failure of his vision for a League of Nations to "serve as an object lesson against isolationism...." He bought the rights to film Willkie's "One World" journey, similarly intended to "present the case against isolationism." As he wrote to a colleague, "I can think of no greater contribution to the motion picture industry than to make at this time a film based on the life and philosophy of Wilson, and the philosophy of Willkie. Controversial, to be sure. However, I cannot remember a time when I have not been in some sort of controversy, so I expect to feel right at home in this one."<sup>34</sup> Addressing the Writers Congress co-sponsored

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<sup>32</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Zanuck: The Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Last Tycoon* (NY: McGraw Hill, 1985), 199-209; Zanuck's documentary footage screened on 3/18/1943. Willkie's post-travel radio speech in *NYT*, 10/27/1942, 8; publication figures for *One World* in Barnes, *Willkie*, 314-31. See also Samuel Zipp, "When Wendell Willkie Went Visiting: Between Interdependency and Exceptionalism in the Public Feeling for *One World*," *American Literary History* 26:3 (2014), 484-510, and "Dilemmas of World Wide Thinking: Popular Geographies and the Problem of Empire in Wendell Willkie's Search for *One World*," *Modern American History* 1(2018):295-319.

<sup>33</sup> Mosley, *Zanuck*, 210-211; Mel Gussow, *Darryl Zanuck: Don't Say Yes Until I Finish Talking* (1971: rpt. NY: De Capo, 1980), 117-118.

<sup>34</sup> *NYT*, 7/23/1943, X3; DFZ to Louis de Rochemont, 7/23/1943, cited by David Culbert, "Comment: A Documentary Note on Wilson: Hollywood Propaganda for World Peace," *Comment*, in *HJFRT*, 3:2 (1983), 193-4.

by UCLA and the left-wing Hollywood Writers Mobilization, he exhorted writers to be part of the solution to “the problems that torture the world.” Zanuck saw his own filmmaking as part of the solution, and he was absolutely confident that he knew how to use “showmanship” and “entertainment” to make “serious, worthwhile pictures palatable to mass movie audiences.”<sup>35</sup>

Although Zanuck’s personal production *Wilson* (1944) was not a commercial success, many reviewers recognized and applauded its message of internationalism; soldiers, sailors and civilians all over the world wrote in praise of the film’s contemporary relevance.<sup>36</sup> Zanuck also committed time and money trying to dramatize Willkie’s “refreshed American internationalism” for a proposed *One World* film, including dialogue posing this choice: “We can go back to narrow nationalism, we can become international imperialists—or we can create a world in which there will be equal opportunity for every race and nation.” After Willkie’s sudden death in 1944, the studio canceled this project.<sup>37</sup>

The films Zanuck did bring to the screen as “personal productions” into the late 1940s document his intent to address the pressing social challenges of the day. He relished

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<sup>35</sup> Colonel Darryl Zanuck, “Do Writers Know Hollywood? The Message Cannot Overwhelm the Technique,” paper presented at the Writers Congress published in *Saturday Review of Literature*, 10/30/1943, 12-13.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Knock, “History with Lightning: The Forgotten Film *Wilson*,” *American Quarterly* 28:5, 534, 538-540; on audience response see *NYT*, 9/10/1944, X1; *Los Angeles Times*[LAT], 5/13/1945.

<sup>37</sup> John B. Wiseman, “Darryl F. Zanuck and the Failure of ‘One World,’ 1943-1945,” *HJFRT*, 7:3 (1987); 283. Willkie’s approval for film plans in *MPH*, 5/13/1944, 9; “indefinite” suspension” in *MPH*, 12/16/1944; revived 1949 plans for *One World* as Zanuck’s “personal production,” *Variety*, 2/9/1949, 2.

the strategic maneuvering required to get controversial material past censors, and he adroitly maintained storytelling control via hands-on involvement with producers, writers and editors throughout the filmmaking process. His commercially successful social dramas in the late 1940s dramatized a central character's awakened exposure to forms of injustice: polite anti-Semitism in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) and racial discrimination in *Pinky* (1949).<sup>38</sup> In 1949 Zanuck touted his filmmaking to Walter White: "I believe I can say without immodesty that I have sought more than any other person in the industry to break new ground in touching on social and political causes."<sup>39</sup> A June, 1950 cover story in *Time* affirmed his exuberant self-assessment. The profile praised him as going "further than anyone in Hollywood in breaking down resistance to serious grown up films with controversial themes" and as proving that "stories based on unemployment, anti-Semitism, mental illness, and the Negro problem could pay off on the screen."<sup>40</sup> Zanuck's considerable involvement with *Lydia Bailey* between 1947 and 1951 grew out of and drew on these experiences.

### **Scripting Lydia Bailey: Imagining White Adventure, Black Revolution, American Anti-colonialism, 1947-1949**

Tensions between dramatizing a white adventure/romance that exploited a crowd-pleasing exotic Caribbean setting and representing the cause of the Haitian

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<sup>38</sup> Judith E. Smith, *Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 156-165, 117-123, 166-170, 184-198; Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, 119-133.

<sup>39</sup> DFZ to Walter White, 9/21/1949, cited by Scott in *Cinema Civil Rights*, 108

<sup>40</sup> "One Man Studio," *Time*, 6/12/1950, 66ff.

Revolution surfaced as soon as the studio began the adaptation process. Even though he was preoccupied with other films, Zanuck actively weighed in on how best to revise Roberts's jam-packed novel for the screen. In an initial treatment and script, veteran screen writer Milton Krims imagined Haiti as a "simmering volcano" and the Revolution as a race war. Right away producer Sol Siegel's memo to Zanuck identified "the all-important problem:" how to create "a story in which the white people were the principal characters and occupied the foreground of the picture," without "sacrifice to the color and history of Haiti."<sup>41</sup> Zanuck supported setting the film in Haiti, but worried that "the personal [white] story has been smothered in the epic of historical events and melodrama." He redirected Siegel and Krims to "develop the personal story, particularly the love story, and the relationships outside the melodrama and the blood and thunder." He repeated his commonly-stated political disclaimer: "I believe a story of this scope must have an intimate personal story or else all is lost..."<sup>42</sup>

Filming "blood, thunder, and revolution" and "technicolor of dashing action" celebrated by book reviewers promised to be very expensive at a time when the Hollywood trade papers warned of declines in box office and dark downtown movie theatres.<sup>43</sup> In addition, a filmic retelling of Haiti's revolutionary history might attract unwanted political attention. *Lydia Bailey* planning unfolded at the same time as the

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<sup>41</sup> Zanuck's main focus in 1947 remained on *Gentleman's Agreement* as his "personal production;" in Thomas Brady, "Potpourri from Hollywood," *NYT*, 1/12/1947, X 5. Sol Siegel to DFZ, 4/9/1947; Milton Krims Treatment, 4/9/1947; "Conference with Mr. Zanuck on 4/9/1947 treatment on 4/17/ 1947"; all in Fox Lydia Bailey[ script materials, Cinema Television Library, University of Southern California [Fox-LB, CTL-USC]

<sup>42</sup> DFZ to Sol Siegel, 4/14/1947, Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

<sup>43</sup> Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 290, 293, 332, 334.

House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) announced its plans to investigate the film industry, interviewing co-operative Hollywood figures in Los Angeles in May, 1947, and holding well-publicized formal hearings to “clean house” and expose “Communist infiltration” in Washington, DC in October, 1947. In November 1947, a Congressional vote to hold in contempt the unfriendly screenwriters and directors who refused to accept the Committee’s authority to force disclosure of their political affiliations was followed by an official statement from the Motion Picture Association of America declaring their collective refusal to employ known Communists. At this point, anti-Communism became film industry policy, although its impact was not yet fully apparent.<sup>44</sup>

Zanuck’s participation in the Hollywood blacklist was perhaps more reluctant than enthusiastic. He appreciated the distinctive writing and directorial talents of several left-wingers who worked for him. In the late 1940s, he remained fully committed to social issue filmmaking, and ready and willing to take up issues that infuriated HUAC’s right-wing Congressmen.<sup>45</sup> In 1947-1948, economic rather than political pressures likely stalled *Lydia Bailey*. Although *Variety* reported that the film was “back on sked” in January, 1948, writer Krims worried that their film would require “unreasonable millions to

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<sup>44</sup> Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 307-313; Thomas Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 299-307.

<sup>45</sup> Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (1979; rpt: Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 326-333; Lev, *Twentieth Century Fox*, 110; Larry Ceplair, “Julian Blaustein: An Unusual Movie Producer in Cold War Hollywood,” *Film History* 21 (2009), 261; Doherty, *Show Trial*, 301. Left-wing screenwriter/director Cy Endfield thought that the studios sometimes sought out left-wing writers during WWII because of their political sophistication concerning home front and overseas issues; Brian Neve, *The Many Lives of Cy Endfield: Film Noir, the Blacklist and Zulu* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 42-3.

produce....Spectacle is inherent in *Lydia Bailey*, it requires difficult locations, masses of people, expensive sets... It would lose tremendous values if it were made in black and white instead of Technicolor." In Krims's view, "it would be better made in more propitious times."<sup>46</sup>

Highly contentious issues of racial representation continued to dominate when the adaptation moved forward in the spring of 1948. Zanuck and Siegel passed the responsibility for the screenplay to Philip Dunne, a Screenwriter's Guild activist, and a founder of the Committee for the First Amendment, the only organized industry resistance to the HUAC hearings. Zanuck had worked closely with Dunne since 1938, and admired him and his writing.<sup>47</sup>

Dunn's several *Lydia Bailey* scripts replaced Krims' "race war" premise with supposedly "colorblind" 1940s race liberalism.<sup>48</sup> He wrote in a contrast between Toussaint Louverture's non-racialism and General Dessalines's extreme racist views, describing Dessalines as suffering from "race prejudice. He hates all whites. He was a bad slave and he was whipped often. But he is probably the greatest soldier alive." (In a later

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<sup>46</sup> *Variety* (D), 1/23/1948, 10; Krims to Sol Siegel, 1/5/1948, in Milton Krims Collection, file 32, Special Collections, MH-AMPAS

<sup>47</sup> Dunne shared Zanuck's perspective on social filmmaking, which he expressed in a letter seeking work on *Pinky*: Dunne to DFZ, 4/19/1948, in Philip Dunne Collection (PDC), Box 4, Folder 1, CTL-USC. He worked on LB scripts from March-November 1948, and then joined Zanuck working on *Pinky* scripts November 1948 -May 1949. See *Visions of Belonging*, 117-123, 184-198; Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, 119-126, 177-179.

<sup>48</sup> This section draws on the six *Lydia Bailey* scripts drafted by Dunne between March 1948 through November 1948; in Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

script revision, a fictional maroon marauder had trouble with “race prejudice: if there’s anything Mirabeau hates more than a white man, it is a black man who deals tolerantly with whites.”) His scripts described Louverture’s trusted generals as an interracial group, black, white and mulatto, citing a French general who said of Toussaint, “race melts under his hands.” He imagined a historical Henri Christophe as taken in by French promises to serve as a foil for the American Hamlin’s warning of French treachery.

Dunne went to some lengths to justify the interracial comradeship between Albion Hamlin and King Dick. In one script, Hamlin describe himself as “not entirely white” because his grandmother was a “full-blooded Seneca Indian” and Hamlin recognizes the “secret of the drums” as like “smoke signals.” In a related move, Dunne wrote King Dick as conversant with the classical European literary canon. He quoted Shakespeare but misidentified a phrase from Euripides as spoken by Plutarch; Hamlin, maintaining white superiority, corrected him.

Dunne’s scripts decisively took the side of the Haitian revolutionaries opposing the French colonials. He wrote explicit racial contempt into his characterization of the central French plantation owner; D’Autremont refers to the Haitian military forces as “monkeys in uniform;” he claims they could be bribed “with money, titles, flattery, hatred” to fight on the French side; he argues that “there is no logic in blacks. They reason like animals. And need to be treated the same way.” Dunne’s research in Haitian sources resulted in a detailed Vodou ceremony to function as backdrop for D’Autremont’s elderly mother’s sympathetic account of the earlier slave rebellion victories and restoration of the sugar economy. The

“passions” of the ceremony could also stir the growing “feelings” between Albion Hamlin and Lydia Bailey.<sup>49</sup>

Zanuck continued to carefully monitor the representation of the Black Republic in *Lydia Bailey*, still referred to as his “personal production.” In conference, Zanuck warned against replicating conventional Hollywood stereotypes: “We should not show Negro soldiers wearing elaborate uniforms. If we do, they are liable to look like a musical comedy army... Cutting of the bridge [for an escape from the French forces] may become too Tarzan-like.” Zanuck’s preferred strategy was to depict Haitian exoticism to create distance between the film and current US racial practices and controversies: “If we stick to the voodoo [sic] thing and show other Haitian customs, our Negroes will look more like natives, and less like Pullman-porters on parade.”<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps still inspired by “One World” transformed American internationalism as an alternative to isolationism and imperialism, Zanuck did push for the film take the side of Haitian independence rather than French imperial claims. According to his notes, “we should feel that it is a pretty solid government or we won’t pull for them when the French try to take them over. We want to believe that they are substantial people who will govern well if left alone. “He criticized scenes that showed “Negro traitors ...working with

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<sup>49</sup> In an early draft, Dunne wrote: “In these sequences we should follow a voudun[sic] ceremony as closely as possible, although perhaps omitting the sacrifice of chickens and goats...It is a scene indescribably primitive and yet with a wild beauty;” script dated 5/18/1948, in Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

<sup>50</sup> *Variety*(W) 9/22/1948, 16; Notes of First Draft Continuity Conference”, 10/14/1948, 10/21/1948, and conference 11/4/1948, with Zanuck, Siegel and Dunne, in Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

Napoleon's people" and asked for cuts of any "talk about Negroes double crossing their own people." He wanted the film to persuade audiences to "believe that the Haitian government is a good government...it is young, and it is growing."<sup>51</sup>

The Hollywood framing of a film set in Revolutionary Haiti "where white people were the principal characters and occupied the foreground," threatened historical credibility. When Zanuck colleague and Fox producer Michael Abel read Dunne's script, he thought it seemed like "a glorified Western set in Haiti...lots of fighting and suspenseful chase...plot continues to be contrived and improbable, and the leads to be conventional puppets usually associated" with this kind of story. Still, Abel singled out King Dick as "a fine, believable personality, easily the most interesting character in the story."<sup>52</sup>

By December, 1948, *Lydia Bailey* was on a list of "blockbusters," signaling a high-cost production with commercial potential (the announced budget was \$3,000,000).<sup>53</sup> Plans for location filming in Haiti were repeatedly announced in the trade press.<sup>54</sup> Walter White, consulting with Zanuck on the *Pinky* script, had worked since 1947 to promote US-Haiti tourism by publicizing Haitian's historical significance and development. He encouraged filming *Lydia Bailey* in Haiti, suggesting locations to the second unit director,

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<sup>51</sup> "Notes of First Draft Continuity Conference", 10/14/1948, 10/21/1948, and conference 11/4/1948, with Zanuck, Siegel and Dunne, in Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

<sup>52</sup> "Michael Abel to Darryl F. Zanuck," 11/4/1948, in Fox-LB, CTL-USC.

<sup>53</sup> *Variety*(d), 12/2/1948, 14; Sheldon Hall, "Pass the Ammunition: A Short Etymology of 'Blockbuster,'" in *The Return of the Epic Film*, ed. Andrew B.R. Elliott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 147-166.

<sup>54</sup> *Variety* (d) 3/31/1948,4; 10/28/1948, 4.

and proposing a “world premiere” in Port Au Prince.<sup>55</sup> However, the production itself appeared to be back on the shelf. Zanuck’s attention was elsewhere, focused on depicting southern and northern racial discrimination in *Pinky* (1949) and *No Way Out* (1950).<sup>56</sup>

### **Debating how to “show the Negro attitude—the Negro situation” in scripting *Lydia Bailey***

Arguments over how to balance the white adventure/romance story with the Haitian Revolution intensified when work on *Lydia Bailey* resumed in November, 1950. By this point plans for filming locations in Haiti had been abandoned in favor of the Fox Ranch in the Hollywood hills. The film had a new producer, Jules Schermer, recently come to Fox from Columbia, a new left-wing screenwriter, Michael Blankfort, and a director, Jean Negulesco, part of Zanuck’s croquet-playing crowd.<sup>57</sup> Blankfort came to Fox in the summer

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<sup>55</sup> White to Ambassador Charles re Public Relations Campaign for Haiti, 9/20/1947; White to Charles, 6/2/1949, both in NAACP, General, 1943-1949, 33-46 and 113-116; White to DFZ, 6/17/1949, in NAACP papers, “Motion Picture Industry, 1952,” 55-59. Filming in Haiti continued to be announced in 1950; *Variety* (d) 2/10/1950, 14; *Variety* (d) 4/7/1950; 12/13/1950, 7, and in *Twentieth Century Fox Dynamo*, April 1950. On Walter White’s promotional campaigns for Haiti, see Millery Polyne, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 131-153.

<sup>56</sup> Zanuck described *No Way Out* “as real as sweat...deal[ing] with the absolute blood and guts of Negro hating”; Kenneth Geist, *Pictures Will Talk: The Life and Films of Joseph Mankiewicz* (New York: Da Capo, 1978), 153. On these films, see Smith, *Visions of Belonging, 184-204*; Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights*, 123-133. Additional *Lydia Bailey* scripts 12/1/1950, in Fox- LB, CTL-USC.

<sup>57</sup> “‘Lydia Bailey’ Again Revived Project,” *LAT*, 11/9/1950. Negulesco, an artist born in Romania, came to Hollywood via New York in 1934, directing for Paramount, Universal, and Warner Brothers before moving to Fox in 1948. He was someone who “avoided political activism,” and was “never a participant in activities to defend the First Amendment freedoms of their accused friends and colleagues...but he was apt to get involved when people in the industry seemed threatened by political repression;” Michelangelo Capua,

of 1949 as the screenwriter of record for the pro-Indian Western *Broken Arrow* (1950), nominated for screenplay awards from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Writer's Guild of America.<sup>58</sup>

Director Jean Negulesco immediately challenged Blankfort's attention to Haiti in his first script. He asked, "About whom are we telling this story? The Negroes or Albion Hamlin-Lydia Bailey—and D'Autremont? All of a sudden the background and local atmosphere are predominating...We want to get into Albion's story...but not making King Dick and his confederates the central story point....I am more interested in an adventure love story told against this Haitian background...I understand why you and Blankfort have done what you have done. You want to show the Negro situation—the Negro attitude."<sup>59</sup>

Zanuck quickly weighed in, arguing that the political uprising and revolution should be "only a background and backdrop" for the personal story, noting Dunne's efforts "to boil the novel down to at least the framework of an adventure story." He again reiterated his political disclaimer: "To me, Lydia Bailey offered a great chance for an adventure story loaded with sex, romance, off-beat characterizations and excitement. I am

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*Jean Negulesco: the Life and Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017) 7,69; Gussow, *Zanuck*, 128.

<sup>58</sup> The original script for *Broken Arrow* was written by blacklisted screenwriter Albert Maltz, a close friend of Blankfort's since the 1930s. With producer Julian Blaustein's knowledge and co-operation, Blankfort accepted the considerable risk involved in serving as Maltz's "front," attending script conferences, rewriting and changing dialogue: in Larry Ceplair, "Who Wrote What?: A Tale of a Blacklisted Screenwriter and His Front," *Cineaste*, 18:2 (1991), 18-21; Ceplair, "Julian Blaustein," 260-1.

<sup>59</sup> Negulesco to Schermer, 1/11/1951, in Michael Blankfort Papers [MBP], Box 88, Folder 1, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University [HGARC-BU]

not for a split second interested in the 'cause' or the political incidents connected with the revolution in Haiti except as we use them as the background for our personal story."<sup>60</sup>

Producer Schermer defended Blankfort's use of "exposition in terms of dramatic action rather than dialogue," promising more "passionate development" in later sections.<sup>61</sup>

Michael Blankfort was committed to conveying "the Negro situation—the Negro attitude" differently than prior representations on Hollywood screens. Blankfort had come of age immersed in the 1930s literary and theatrical left. One of the founders of the Theatre Union, he had directed the company's April 1934 electrifying production of *Stevedore*, a groundbreaking play about Black and white New Orleans dockworkers described at the time as showing that "It is possible for black and white workers to stand together."<sup>62</sup> Promoting the production in the *Daily Worker*, he had contrasted its powerful leading Black roles to usual Broadway fare: "stock Mammies or night club jazz babies or comic butlers, or any other of the false characters which colored actors or actresses are called on to play in the bourgeois theater."<sup>63</sup> Blankfort had participated in the American Writers Congress in 1935, identified as the setting for the first serious Black literary critique within

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<sup>60</sup> DFZ to Schermer and Blankfort, 1/11/1951, MBP, Box 88, Folder 1, HGARC-BU.

<sup>61</sup> Schermer to DFZ, 1/12/1951, MBP, Box 88, folder 1, HGARC-BU. Here Schermer praised Blankfort's work on the white leads: they "are no longer stilted and passive but to define them simply—they are Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler."

<sup>62</sup> Quote from George Streater, "'A Nigger Did It;' About a Play Called *Stevedore*," *The Crisis*, July, 1934, 216-7.

<sup>63</sup> Blankfort's article in *the Daily Worker*, 4/27/1934; excerpts read at his public appearance before the HUAC, 1/28/1952; *Communism in Hollywood Motion Picture Industry, Part 7, House of Representatives, 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, Second Session, 2338-2340.*

Communist party circles, and he was a member of the left-wing League of American Writers.<sup>64</sup>

After Blankfort moved to Los Angeles to work in Hollywood in 1937, he continued to associate himself with left-wing organizations whose various activities opposed Jim Crow, supported labor organizing, including in the film industry, and after 1945, questioned the new Cold War. At this time, the novelist and screenwriter was a public critic of HUAC, and in September, 1949, he added his name to the list of more than two hundred people working in the film industry supporting the amicus brief challenging contempt sentences for members of the Hollywood Ten.<sup>65</sup>

When Blankfort began to work on *Lydia Bailey* in November, 1950, his left-wing associations from the 1930s and 1940s, and accusations of his Communist Party membership were on the record, in California's HUAC-like Tenney Commission's 1945-9 listings, 1949 anti-Communist watchdog publications *Alert* and *Counterattack* and in *Red Channels*(1950) <sup>66</sup> Writing to an ACLU investigator after *Red Channels* came out, he was

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<sup>64</sup> Blankfort's contributions to the AWC 1935 in Henry Hart, ed. *American Writers Congress 1935* (NY: International Publishers, 1935), 26, 188; Black literary critique at AWC noted in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), n34, 271.

<sup>65</sup> In 1950, Blankfort listed his political associations since 1942 as the American Veterans Committee, the ACLU, the American Jewish Congress, the Screenwriter's Guild, and League of American Writers, and noted that he signed every petition to abolish HUAC, and as well as the Amicus Brief for the Hollywood Ten; Blankfort to Malin, 10/1950, MBP, Folder 86, MH-AMPAS.

<sup>66</sup> "Smear Tactics Are Seen By Some Listed in Report," *NYT*, June 9, 1949, 3. For public listings naming Blankfort, see A.B. Leckie to Clore Warne, 2/6/1951, MBP, folder 86, MH-AMPAS.

worried, but thought his Fox contract would be renewed "... since my last two pictures were quite successful." <sup>67</sup>

Negulesco and Blankfort continued to spar over the screenplay's race-conscious characterizations. Negulesco pressed for deepening the white characters, Hamlin, Lydia Bailey, and French planter/ fiancé, D'Autremont, to engage viewers presumed to be white: "Our basic story, if we are going to seek the most box office appeal here, is love and adventure." His guiding principle was to "tell a Douglas Fairbanks story of adventure and excitement" against what he characterized as a "bizarre" background. He preferred a King Dick with "easy going genial charm" to one more powerful and self-determining. Negulesco pushed for the white hero's primacy; he wanted Hamlin to upstage Louverture and King Dick in confronting Napoleon's general in order to emphasize his courage and his centrality "as an active participant in the conflict"<sup>68</sup>

Negulesco was on guard for anything that seemed "too pointed in political view...suddenly preaching and in terms of a Negro." <sup>69</sup> He assumed he recognized "offensive" language that "would offend every Negro in the country," proposing cuts in a scene when Lydia tells Hamlin (who has travelled through rough countryside stained with black dye,) to go wash because he "smells terrible." But Negulesco's own comments

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<sup>67</sup> Blankfort to "Mr. Malin," 10/1950, MBP, Folder 86, MH-AMPAS. In addition to *Broken Arrow*, Blankfort wrote *The Halls of Montezuma*, showcasing a Marine unit fighting in the Pacific, made with the cooperation of the Marines.

<sup>68</sup> Negulesco to Schermer, 1/11/1951; Negulesco to Blankfort, 1/18/ 1951, MBP, Box 88, Folder 1, HGARC-BU.

<sup>69</sup> Negulesco to Blankfort, 3/6/1951, MBP, Box 88, Folder 1, HGARC-BU.

revealed his obliviousness to racial paternalism and segregationist assumptions. He praised Lydia's concern for her maid as "showing her inner sentiment, how she really cares about the blacks." When she finds herself amidst refugees fleeing the fighting, he argued that "instead of blaming the French for the hatred she sees around her, her first and most natural inclination would be to blame the blacks as "responsible for the terror and disorder on the island." He insisted that it would take time for her to "bring herself to look on a black as a human being capable of feelings and the rights which she enjoys," and warned: "this is asking a lot of her, fraternizing with blacks." <sup>70</sup>

Blankfort forcefully resisted Negulesco's expository suggestions ( his least profane marginal note insisted on "see, not talk"). His several scripts made use of plot points and dialogue written by Dunne, but streamlined the action, and sharpened the characterization of King Dick and Louverture. He slipped in a left sectarian political insult when the maroon rebel leader Mirabeau characterized King Dick as "Toussaint's running dog." Lydia's sympathy for the refugees stayed in, alongside Hamlin's new-found identification with, and incendiary formulation of, the Haitian cause: "If I were a native today whose liberty was threatened by Napoleon's cut-throats, I'd kill any white man I could lay hands on." <sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Negulesco to Schermer, 1/11/1951 and 2/8/1951; Negulesco to Blankfort, 3/6/1951, in MBP, Box 88, Folder 1, HGARC-BU

<sup>71</sup> Blankfort annotated Negulesco's 7 pages of notes and suggested dialogue from 3/6/1951 with marginal comments such as "Shit! Over my dead body" and "vomitous;" see also Negulesco to Schermer, 2/8/ 1951; Blankfort to Zanuck, 3/12/ 1951, MBP, Box 88, Folder1, HGARC-BU. This line, in Blankfort's first script, is quoted in *Ebony*, 1/52, 40. All Blankfort's scripts in MBP, Box 35, Folders 5-8, HGARC-BU.

Zanuck was pleased with Blankfort's final script, despite its tendency "to emphasize too strongly on the political significance of freedom, revolt, liberty, etc." He suggested using title cards for essential political and historical background, and pushed to make Hamlin less "self-righteous" ("why is he always shouting against slavery: we had slavery in the United States at the same time"). Still, his notes in March, 1951 signaled hopefulness about the film's potential appeal, as "something more than box office. It is an interesting story and way off the beaten track, and it will have a certain real significance if we do not constantly pound in the significance. After all, this is a romantic adventure story told in terms of excitement and a certain amount of sex...if we handle them effectively this will be a picture we can all be proud of."<sup>72</sup>

### **Production Underway, Summer and Fall, 1951**

The trade press avidly covered the newly activated and aspiring "blockbuster" production of *Lydia Bailey*. Early casting "wish lists" had floated stars for leading white male roles (Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, John Garfield for Albion Hamlin; Jose Ferrer, Melvyn Douglas, Paul Henreid for Gabriel D'Autremont). But plans for sensational special effects required cost-cutting above the line, resulting in the casting of unknown Fox contract players Dale Robertson and Anne Francis as the romantic couple. Charles Korvin,

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<sup>72</sup> Zanuck to Schermer, copy to Blankfort, 3/19/, 1951, MBP, Box 88, Folder 1, HGARC-BU; Dunne's final script, 10/24/1950, scripts (nd), 3/10/1951 and "revised final" 4/13/1951, in MBP, Box 35, Folder 5-8, HGARC-BU. His experienced associates knew how to write what Zanuck wanted; Philip Dunne later recalled Zanuck's direction; "we go into a tender love scene: he rams his tongue down her throat. I knew what he meant: it could be tender, but not boring": *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics* (1980: rpt NY: Limelight, 1992), 55-6.

familiar as a 1940s romantic cad, played the French plantation owner. The highest weekly salary went to New York actor/singer William Marshall, receiving effusive praise for his first star turn on Broadway in March 1951, and at the top of the list of Black actors for the central role of King Dick.<sup>73</sup>

The black press carefully monitored *Lydia Bailey* as workplace and history lesson when filming got underway in July, 1951. Quotes from Marshall enabled Black writers to emphasize his unprecedented role and the Black Republic's historical significance. They noted "a pride in his labor seldom found on a movie set," and his satisfaction "in playing such an admirable character." Marshall contrasted King Dick to "colored people pictured so often as a stereotyped character, usually a buffoon. But this time, he is drawn from history, from a period when he was resisting a tyranny that had engulfed most of Europe." Black writers also called attention to LeRoi Antoine, leader of the Port au Prince Royal Caribbean Singers who sang the Haitian songs in the film's Vodou ceremony and served as the film's technical advisor. One Black press writer critiqued reliance on experienced but uncredited black actors working without contracts as "day labor:" Ken Renard as Toussaint; Juanita Moore as resourceful servant Marie who uses proximity to French colonials to warn Toussaint of French treachery. This writer also challenged the film's diminishing of the "colorful material" featuring the historical actors in favor of the "American heiress... lost in Haiti "and the "mythical" and "fictional" character of King Dick.

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<sup>73</sup> Casting materials and salary lists in William Gordon Papers, 3/16, 3/23, 6/7, 1951; Folder 179, Special Collections, MH-AMPAS. Brooks Atkinson, "First Night at the Theatre: William Marshall as the Lawd in Marc Connelly's 'The Green Pastures,'" *NYT*, 3/16/1951, 35.

Deep disagreements about how to represent the Black Revolution amidst “a romantic adventure story told in terms of excitement and a certain amount of sex” remained unresolved. Zanuck and his staff continued to revise the Blankfort-Dunne script, framing the goals of the Haitian Revolution in an American idiom (Toussaint as “the George Washington of Haiti”), heightening antagonism and attraction between the romantic leads to justify Lydia Bailey’s turn to the American hero.<sup>74</sup> Negotiations with the Production Code Association, begun in 1948 with Dunne’s first script, continued through the filming in the summer of 1951. Chief censor Joseph I. Breen demanded special “care and restraint” in screening sex and “elements of brutality, violence, killing and bloodshed.”<sup>75</sup>

The filmed scenes attempted to emphasize adventure and to finesse Breen’s concerns. These included daring escapes through forbidding jungles and across roaring rivers while evading snarling dogs, renegade maroons, and French elite allies of Napoleon. References to the racial/sexual spoils of empire and the presumed dangers for white people, especially women on a majority Black island, remained explicit, with repeated references to black dye salaciously applied “all over” white bodies for travel

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<sup>74</sup> “Revised Final Script Blankfort, 3/10/ 1951,” Revised Final 4/13/1951,” “Shooting Final 4/18/1951,” Revised Shooting Final 5/12/ 1951,” and in the copy of Blankfort’s “final” 3/10 script in MBP, Folder 14, MH-AMPAS, inserted pages from 5/12, 6/7, 7/17.

<sup>75</sup> The PCA objected to Dunne’s 10/14/1948 script (overly revealing dress, many “implications” of sex between white men and “the Negroes,” King Dick’s multiple wives and their staining Albion’s body “all over”); Joseph Breen to Colonel Jason Joy, 11/2/1948 . Blankfort’s final March 10, 1951 script “seems to meet the provisions” of the Code; Breen to Joy, 4/27/51. All wardrobe stills for the women and translations of all the Haitian creole songs submitted for Code approval, 4/11/1951 through 10/1/1951, in PCA LB files, Special Collections, MH-AMPAS.

through the countryside: transgressing sexualized racial boundaries became possible by means of this improbable “blackface” artifice. Camera angles spotlighted sexual display: the introduction of King Dick’s talented eight wives; repeated attention to Lydia Bailey’s breasts and legs in all costumes; the bodies of the romantic couple in various forms of dishabille; the lavish decadence of the royal French festivities. The mysterious “voodoo” ceremony popularly associated with Haiti appeared as a spectacular modernist musical dance sequence. Its passions licensed Hamlin and Bailey’s attraction to each other, and enabled a circuit of revolutionary communication when the Vodou priest signaled to King Dick to kill a collaborationist Black general paid off by D’Autremont to betray Louverture. Scenes of marauding Haitian rebels torching D’Autremont’s plantation were answered by the devastating collapse of French colonial authority amidst the burning of the capital.

Script revisions, postproduction screenings and conferences continued into fall 1951. Zanuck, in conference with Schermer, Negulesco, Zanuck’s favored editor Dorothy Spencer, screenwriter colleague Richard Murphy and others, demanded costly reshoots, requiring both principal actors and extras, and delaying the film’s release. Despite Zanuck’s repeated preference for “the intimate personal story,” the majority of these new scenes showcased Haitians, Black agency and the Haitian Revolution.<sup>76</sup>

The new scenes included the opening close-ups of the three drummers’ communication, illegible to outsiders, and explained Louverture’s military strategy to

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<sup>76</sup> Conference to discuss new scenes and retake for picture, screenings 9/7, 9/11/1951; Combined notes of screenings 9/7, 9/11, 9/20/1951; New Ending and Added Scene, 9/29/1951; in Fox-LB, CTL-US.

outlast the French and destroy colonial wealth by withdrawing from and then burning the towns. Trying to find the best ways to “film him interestingly” involved reshooting the scenes with Louverture and his trusted generals seriously debating military/political strategy, with Hamlin promising “I know what it is you are fighting for, no different than what men in my country fought for,” then responding to French treachery with the final order to burn the capital. By the end, King Dick has again rescued the Americans, accompanied by Marie, Lydia’s “servant,” enabling their return to America. He refuses Albion’s invitation to join them, suggesting instead: “You’ll come back to us. We won’t have much, but we’ll have our freedom.” The film’s reshot finale featured the towering figure of King Dick in front of Cap Francois in flames: “Camera holds on King Dick, who raises his club and brandishes it. On his heroic figure we fade out.”<sup>77</sup> In the reshot scenes, the drama of the Haitian Revolution eclipsed the improbable American characters, romance and sensationalized Caribbean exoticism.

### **The Right Turns Up the Heat**

Anti-Communist accusations directed at Hollywood gained new force just as the *Lydia Bailey* project got “back on sked.” In January, 1951, just as he was fighting for his version of the script, Michael Blankfort was targeted by an increasingly aggressive anti-Communist campaign initiated by the newsletter *Alert*, joined by the area American Legion chapter, and then circulated nationally by syndicated right-wing Hearst newspaper columnists. By mid-January, Zanuck had received threatening letters from the commander

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<sup>77</sup> New Ending and Added Scene, 9/29/ 1951; in Fox LB Script materials, CTL-US. Notices of reshooting in *Variety*(D) 10/4/1951, 4; 10/10/1951, 4;10/12/195, 12.

of the Hollywood American Legion Post, as well as from angry anti-Communist women “defenders of the home;” by March, Blankfort no longer worked at Fox.<sup>78</sup>

During the casting and filming of *Lydia Bailey*, HUAC renewed its demands that Hollywood “Reds” name names, convening more hearings in the spring in Washington and relocating to Los Angeles in the fall of 1951. Blankfort successfully “cleared himself” in secret testimony to HUAC in the spring of 1951 but the noisy American Legion campaign continued.<sup>79</sup> In December, 1951, as *Lydia Bailey*’s publicity machinery was gearing up, the American Legion escalated the pressure, listing Blankfort first in a list of “movie celebrities lending their glamour” to “the ugly face of sedition.” When fresh public allegations of his Communist Party membership appeared in the mainstream press in January, 1952, Blankfort offered lengthy and “friendly” testimony to HUAC. Coverage of his co-operation made *Variety*’s front page.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Accusations of “fellow travelling” by *Halls of Montezuma* screenwriter Blankfort and its director, Lewis Milestone in *Alert*, 1/4/1951; “Alleged Commies Tell it to the Marines,” *Yellowstone Legionnaire* section of the *Herald* (Billings, Montana), 1/5/1951, 5. Blankfort answered the letters personally. See his letters and memos to DFZ, 1/17 and 1/22/ 1951; MBP, Folder 86, MH-AMPAS. “Smear articles” by Westbrook Pegler (column 1/18/1951; in *LAEX*, 1/19/1951), and by Victor Reisel appeared in newspapers across the country in mid-January, 1951.

<sup>79</sup> Blankfort described a “secret hearing,” where he “cooperated with the committee and they were good enough to keep it secret...” Blankfort hoped he was now fully employable: “they [Columbia] checked with Washington and received from the committee a clean bill of health;” Blankfort to DFZ, 5/5/ 1951, MBP, Folder 87; also in “notes for use by Beilin contact,” n.d but probably spring 1952, MBP, Folder 100, MH-AMPAS.

<sup>80</sup> J. B. Mathews, “Did the Movies Really Clean House?,” *American Legion Magazine*, 51:6 (12/1951), 12-13, 49-56. Blankfort’s name on 50. *Variety* (d), 1/29/1952, 1,8; see also *LAT*, 1/29/1952, 1,6.

*Lydia Bailey* stayed out of the red-baiters' sights, not mentioned on the list of "forthcoming films," even when Legionnaires were instructed to campaign against any film associated with anyone whose name appeared in this or other listings of "subversives." However, conservatives began actively picketing other films considered suspect in the fall of 1951, continuing into the spring of 1952. The "Wage Earners' Committee," a right-wing anti-Communist and anti-union group financed by wealthy businessmen, picketed the film version of Arthur Miller's widely-admired *Death of a Salesman* when it opened in Los Angeles in December 1951, joined in mid-March 1952 by a Washington D.C. American Legion chapter. A listing of 92 "subversive films," accusatory materials related to these and other films, and advice for how to mobilize picketers appeared in the Committee's newsletter, the *National Wage Earner*.<sup>81</sup> In April, 1952, the Los Angeles Wage Earner's Committee picketed the opening of *The Marrying Kind* because its 1951 Academy Award winning star Judy Holliday had been subpoenaed to appear before the Senate's Internal Security Committee. In New York, Catholic War Veterans picketed the film's opening carrying posters proclaiming, "While Our Boys are Dying in Korea, Judy Holliday is Defaming Congress."<sup>82</sup> These picketers and calls for boycotts unnerved a film industry already on edge and deeply concerned about declining attendance, the "so called 'Lost Audience.'"<sup>83</sup>

### **Promoting *Lydia Bailey* in Segregated Public Culture, 1952**

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<sup>81</sup> Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition*, 386; Jennifer Frost, *Producer of Controversy: Stanley Kramer, Hollywood Liberalism and the Cold War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2017), 47-48.

<sup>82</sup> *Variety* covered picketing (d), 3/17/1952, 1,3; 4/14/1952

<sup>83</sup> Discussion of 'Lost' Audience," *Variety* (w) 1/4/1950, 3

Much now rested on Fox's publicity campaign for *Lydia Bailey*, orchestrated by Fox publicists in New York. It had been five years since the book's bestseller status. There was extra pressure on the publicity campaign's ability to attract bookings and drive ticket sales because *Lydia Bailey* was the studio's first film to be distributed after enforcement of the antitrust "divorce" of production from exhibition caused a competitive "wild product scramble" (In Los Angeles, Fox itself lost the bid to show the film at their preferred downtown first-run theater.)<sup>84</sup>

In 1950, Fox materials had promoted *Lydia Bailey* as a special Technicolor production with "universal appeal," promising a "first" of location shooting in Haiti, and defining the story as concerning "the liberation of Haiti during the Napoleonic era."<sup>85</sup> By 1952 the language of "liberation" disappeared, replaced by more sensational and conventionally racialized terms. Now publicity taglines on widely reproduced advertising imagery repetitively referred to Haiti's Black Republic as the mysterious dark place of "lush voodoo jungles," utilizing widely circulating words and images that carried the imprint of deeply rooted assumptions of white supremacy. These promotional materials would "school" film reviewers and audiences in what to expect.

The graphic materials in the "Exhibitor's Campaign book," prepared by white publicists and addressed to a presumptively white exhibitors to draw white audiences,

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<sup>84</sup> *Variety* (d)5/21/1952, 6; 6/4/1952 1, 11

<sup>85</sup> "A Studio pledge," "1950-51 Feature Output Proof 'Movies are Better Than Ever,'" "Production Periscope," "*Lydia Bailey*," all in *Twentieth Century Fox Dynamo*, April 1950.

repetitively associated the Black Republic with sexuality and violence, identifying “the primitive jungles of Haiti” as the space where white characters confronted “intrigue,” “violent armed revolt,” “danger and “savage ambush,” and where white women were forbidden and prized objects of desire. The primary images on advertising mats, lobby cards and posters foregrounded Lydia Bailey’s bared white legs and breasts, her rescue by, and in the arms of, her heroic bare-chested white leading man; a smaller image of the fully dressed Black King Dick holding his stylized club appeared off to the side. Often the three were pictured against a background of less distinct representations of disorderly crowds of “native” dancers and smaller even less distinct crowds of “armed” natives. Both visuals and written text associated Haiti with uncontrolled passion. Only when the list included “Toussaint” and “Napoleon” was there even a nod to the film’s depiction of the “ragged armies” who halted the French invaders.<sup>86</sup>

Because the studio intended (and needed) to bring Black ticket buyers to the film, they relied on Black publicity materials alongside white-focused promotional efforts. Black news stories accentuated the racial significance of the liberation struggle. One critique of the continued dominance of “pale movie stars” in studio films explicitly praised the film’s “minimum of white actors.”<sup>87</sup> Studio publicists relied on *Ebony* as their primary pathway to Black middle class moviegoers. *Ebony*’s extensive early preview of the film in early 1952 included five pages of production stills and text emphasizing the historical

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<sup>86</sup> Twentieth Century Fox, “Exhibitor’s Campaign Book,” and *Lydia Bailey* Press Book, AMPAS-MH

<sup>87</sup> *PC*, 4/19/1952, 8.

significance of Haiti's successful slave rebellion and insisting that "Character of King Dick Overshadows Movie's [white] Lead." Although exhibitors' campaign materials covered Marshall much more minimally, referring to his playing a "featured role" and featuring only a single head shot, they recommended "*Ebony's* spread" and spending in the Black press for exhibitors marketing to Black communities<sup>88</sup>

An unprecedented aspect of *Lydia Bailey's* publicity campaign was an extravagant "world premiere" in Port Au Prince, Haiti, to be attended by dignitaries, stars, and US journalists, hosted jointly by Fox and the Haitian government. To promote tourism, Walter White had first proposed such a plan to Darryl Zanuck in 1949.<sup>89</sup> Fox executive for advertising and publicity Charlie Einfeld had been organizing "junket premieres" with newsmen and stars traveling to unusual places since the 1930s. Haitian president Paul Magloire agreed to "pick up the bill for \$25,000" for festivities connected with the premiere in Port Au Prince, designating May 4, 1952 as "Lydia Bailey Day," inviting "internationally prominent persons," including President Truman. The studio's contribution of \$5,000 would pay airfare for fifty-two newsmen and women, including six

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<sup>88</sup> *Variety* headlined *Ebony's* praise: "Negro pub kudos 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox...production of *Lydia Bailey*...glorifies Negro history for the first time in a Hollywood film." "*Variety* (w), 12/19/1951, 14; *Variety* (d), 2/7/1952, 2; Exhibitor's Campaign Book, 11; *Lydia Bailey* Press Book, 10.

<sup>89</sup> White to DFZ, 6/17/1949, in NAACP papers, "Motion Picture Industry, 1952," 55-59. White's campaign, 1947-1955 in Polyne, *From Douglass to Duvalier*, 131-153; Plummer, *Haiti and the United States*, 166; Mathew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 151-5.

prominent writers for Black publications, to cover the events.<sup>90</sup> Fox executives, cast members William Marshall and Anne Francis, and Jean-Leon Destine, leader of Haitian folkloric dance troupes in New York and Haiti, were also part of the delegation.<sup>91</sup>

*Lydia Bailey's* "Press Party" in Haiti garnered plenty of press. The mainstream coverage focused on Haiti's tropical setting and lavish hospitality. Several did acknowledge the novel inclusion of Black journalists presumably to interest Black ticket-buyers "in the Republic of Haiti."<sup>92</sup> But the unspoken norms of supposed color-blindness limited their articles when they identified President Magloire as well as the actors without racial signifiers.<sup>93</sup> Only occasionally did more progressive journalists acknowledge Haiti's importance as "the only Negro republic in the Western hemisphere," or note the contrast between opulent festivities and everyday Haitians, "most of whom are Negro, with a small percentage of mulattoes."<sup>94</sup>

In contrast, Black press coverage shouted out the event's political racial significance with words and photographs, picturing and naming the arriving journalists as "newsmen and women of all races, creeds and colors from various parts of the world," and

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<sup>90</sup> *Jet*, 1/18/1952, 12; Alyssa G. Sepinwall, "Hollywood Goes to Haiti: The Port-au-Prince Premiere of *Lydia Bailey* (1952)," Paper presented to Haitian Studies Association, 11/3/2017.

<sup>91</sup> On Destine and folkloric dance in Haiti, see Polyne, *From Douglass to Duvalier*, 154-168.

<sup>92</sup> Announcements of the Haiti premiere in *Variety*(d) 4/23/1952, 4; 5/1/1952, 4; 5/6/1952, 9; 5/7/1952, 11; *Hollywood Reporter*, 5/1/1952, 8; *MPH*, 5/3/1952, 14; 5/10/1952, 35; "'Baily' in the Negro Press," *MPH*, 5/17/1952, 50; "Managers Round Table section of *MPH*," "A Different Premiere," 5/17/1952, 47

<sup>93</sup> For ex., Charles S. Aaronson, "Haiti Spreads Hospitable Arms to 'Lydia Bailey,'" *MPH*, 5/10/1952, 35

<sup>94</sup> *Cue*, [n.d but likely June, 1952], *Daily Compass*, 5/14/1952

honoring Magloire as a Black president.<sup>95</sup> James Hicks's reporting for the *Afro-American*, reprinted widely in other Black newspapers, burned with fighting words challenging US norms of white supremacy. Hicks pointed how the premiere itself "made history...throughout the four days of the premiere festivities, white people took a back seat to colored people in a manner which has probably never occurred before in the Western hemisphere and which may not occur again for a long time." He thought white journalists and other white premiere attendees must have noticed "...that it was more important to be black than white," and he emphasized how comfortably the stars crossed segregation's supposedly firm boundaries. In Haiti, the premiere's Hollywood stars, "tall handsome" William Marshall and beautiful Anne [Francis] were "inseparable companions, accorded the full privileges and rights of stars such as never could be accorded in America." Black reporters also consulted Haitian viewers at the premiere, reporting them as fully aware of the film's "faulty interpretation" and departure from "authentic history," but still "satisfied with the film as entertainment."<sup>96</sup> In a related move, New York City also sponsored "Haiti Day," with ceremonies at City Hall in conjunction with the film's theater premiere. Black press coverage emphasized Haitian history, describing the film premieres as celebrating "the anniversary of negotiations for peace between Toussaint L'Ouverture and General Le Clerc," and commemorating "the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful launching of the revolution for Haitian independence."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Plain Dealer* (KC,Ks), 6/13/1952, 6, featuring nine photographs provided by ANP wire service; *NYAN*, 5/10/1952, 1, 18.

<sup>96</sup> *BAA*, 5/17/52,7; reprinted in *New Journal and Guide*[Norfolk, VA] 5/24/52, 22; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 5/24/1952, 1B; *CD*, 5/17/1952, 23; *LAS*, 5/22/1952, B3.

<sup>97</sup> In *NYT*, 5/25/1952, 71; 5/29/1952, 15; *NYAN*, 5/31/1952,26; *Variety* (w), 5/21/1952, 52; *BAA*, 5/3/1952, 6; *PC*, 5/31/1952, 23.

However, many reviewers covering *Lydia Bailey's* opening in downtown first-run theaters across the country praised the action/adventure romance as racialized exoticized spectacle; others were surprised to see Black actors fighting for the Black Republic on screen. Exhibitors' trade papers emphasized "the dangerous spirit of the period, when no white man was safe in Haiti" and the "savage rebellion against the forces of Napoleon," and praised the film as a "lush technicolor tale of period adventure, action and romance."<sup>98</sup> Daily newspapers applauded how the "exotic background, including the blood-maddened voodoo dance for war," added up to "the sort of swashbuckling colorful adventure-romance that is hard to resist." Others described the film as "different and refreshing," "worthwhile entertainment," or "sheer escape."<sup>99</sup> Several critical reviewers who recognized "a lack of interest in "documenting facts" described "principals...removed from the cold truth" who "always seem to be having a hot time." Others satirized the film's premise, a white American as hero of the Haitian revolution: *Time's* reviewer labeled *Lydia Bailey* as "a technicolor blend of Haitian history and Hollywood horse opera."<sup>100</sup>

Most Black newspapers focused on the film's monumental representational breakthroughs, their articles illustrated with movie stills showing Marshall as the film's King Dick planning military strategy with Louverture, even while some Black reviewers

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<sup>98</sup> *Variety*)d) 5/28/1952 and (w) 5/28/1952; *Harrison's Report*, 5/31/1952; *Green Sheet*, 6/1/1952.

<sup>99</sup> *Commercial Appeal*(Memphis, TN), 7/23/52; *Hollywood Citizen News*, 6/28/1952; *Baltimore Sun*, 6/21/1952; *WP*, 7/3/1952.

<sup>100</sup> *NYT*, 5/31/1952, 12; *Daily Compass*, 6/1/1952; *Time*, 6/16/1952,98

were critical of the film's fictional divergence from "documentary history." <sup>101</sup> They borrowed *Ebony's* formulation, hailing *Lydia Bailey* as a profound leap forward: "For the first time, a motion picture has been built around a black country with giant leaders who had the courage to fight for freedom and independence, to successfully repulse the superior forces of the great Napoleon."<sup>102</sup> They insistently described the film as "the story of the slave revolt against Napoleon and the French and the making of the Haitian republic," and identified Haiti as "a country of liberated slaves."<sup>103</sup> Emphasizing ongoing Black resistance-- "not once does the action allow one to lose sight of the fact that Haiti is at war with the French and that an attack by Napoleon's General Le Clerc is being bitterly contested by the Haitians – enabled a writer to reframe the movie's white actors as serving "as the background through which the sterling performance of William Marshall as King Dick demonstrates the know-how involved in a fight for the liberation of his country and his people." (emphasis added) <sup>104</sup>

### **What happened to *Lydia Bailey*?**

*Lydia Bailey's* contradictory storytelling could not deliver a commercial success. The film's New York opening allegedly set a record at the Roxy; *Lydia Bailey* continued to draw crowds, and reportedly "did well" in London. Weekly *Variety* headlines told a

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<sup>101</sup> Black critics challenging historical accuracy included Al Monroe, *CD*, 5/17/1952, 2; Walter White in "*CD*(n), 6/21/1952, 11; Lorraine Hansberry in *New Challenge*, 1952;

<sup>102</sup> *Ebony*, 1/1952, 44; repeated in *California Eagle*, 6/19/1952, reprinted in *LAS*, Jun 19, 1952, A9.

<sup>103</sup> *PC*, 5/31/1952; *Ebony*, 1/1952, 39

<sup>104</sup> *CD*, 5/17/1952.

different story: “Passable” in Chicago, “Good” in Providence, “Dull” in Buffalo. New bookings pushed the film briefly up to fourth place in the national box office listing. But exhibitors’ reports were unenthusiastic, describing interest as “average.” Although the film ranked in the middle of *Variety*’s list of “Top Grossers of 1952,” ticket sales did not cover the costs of filming its spectacle.<sup>105</sup>

Most Black viewers had to wait weeks or even months until the film opened in neighborhood theaters, because customary segregation kept them out of first-run theaters. One theater manager wondered if *Lydia Bailey* had played in New York at a Times Square theater at the same time as at a neighborhood theater in Harlem, “double exploitation” might have expanded ticket sales. Eventually, Black audiences did find their way to the film, and many lauded it, voting it third place in the Pittsburgh *Courier*’s film poll, close behind the second place choice, Stanley Kramer’s dark real-time Western, *High Noon* (first place was RKO’s noir thriller *Sudden Fear* ).<sup>106</sup> International ticket sales were more robust, perhaps because international distributors could rename the film on publicity posters, foregrounding Haiti’s struggle and/or sensationalizing/sexualizing the

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<sup>105</sup> *Variety*(w), 6/4/1952, 9; *Variety*(Int), 6/11/1952, 11; *Variety* (w) 6/18/1952, 8 and 6/25/1952, 22; *Variety* (w) 7/2/1952, 2. “Independent Film Buyers Report on Performances,” *MPH*, listings 10/11, 10/25, 11/1, 11/8, 11/15, 11/29, 12/8, 12/20, 12/27, 1952; “Top Grossers of 1952,” *Variety* (w) 1/7/1953, 61. Production costs were \$1,775,000; domestic rentals were \$1,750,000, in Solomon, *Twentieth Century Fox*, 246, 224.

<sup>106</sup> “Manager’s Round Table,” *MPH*, 7/4/1953, 37; Final Tabulation of Courier Theatrical Poll,” *PC*, 4/25/1953, 22. Rankings were *Sudden Fear* (1100) *High Noon* (580), *Lydia Bailey* (570); higher than *Member of the Wedding* with Ethel Waters (260) or *Bright Road* starring Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte. (190).

title character: in Italy and Spain, “The Revolt of Haiti;” in Netherlands, “Insurgents’ Haiti;” in Germany, “Black Drums;” in Argentina, “The Sorcerer of Haiti.”<sup>107</sup>

In the years after 1950, the industry crisis and concerns for film’s “lost” audience deepened. While *Lydia Bailey* circulated, Zanuck questioned the viability of filmmaking he had previously embraced. In 1953 memos, he queried, “Can you name one message picture in the last three years that has not lost its shirt?” and warned, “If you feel the urge to make a ‘message picture’ or if you feel the urge to take an ‘intellectual splurge,’ be sure that it can be told in terms of adventure, showmanship, and certainly in terms of sex.”<sup>108</sup> In 1957 Zanuck would find commercial success revisiting white colonialism and Black resistance in *Island in the Sun*, [perhaps] at least in part because this film sensationalized the crossing and policing of racial/sexual boundaries only artificially transgressed in *Lydia Bailey*.<sup>109</sup>

Anti-Communist surveillance and the blacklist continued to exert intense pressure on the film industry, and they came too close to *Lydia Bailey* for comfort. Actor Charles Korvin did not face widely publicized allegations, but he fell under suspicion in 1951.

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<sup>107</sup> Zanuck’s assessment: “*Lydia Bailey*’ (ordinary in the domestic market but will do more than \$ 1,000,000 in the foreign market)”; in DFZ to Philip Dunne, “Strictly Confidential,” 8/1/1953, in PDC, Box 8, Folder 16, CTL-USC.

<sup>108</sup> DFZ to Dunne, “ ‘Nineteen Eighty Four’ by George Orwell, ”7/7/1953, and DFZ to Dunne, “Personal and Confidential,” 7/7/1953, in PDC, Box 8, Folder 16, CTL-USC; Behlmer, *Memo*, 168-244.

<sup>109</sup> Judith E. Smith, *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical* (Austin: University of Texas, 2014), 147-162; On Zanuck’s shaping of this film, see Scott’s rich analysis in *Cinema Civil Rights*, 133-146.

Because he refused to name names, *Lydia Bailey* was his last Hollywood film.<sup>110</sup> By 1953, William Marshall's left-wing Black arts activism in association with Paul Robeson made him the target of aggressive anti-Communist blacklisting.<sup>111</sup> Even Darryl Zanuck, life-long Republican, found himself attacked from the right. A substantial article in the conservative *Chicago Tribune* appeared in July, 1952, describing Zanuck as "long friendly to internationalist and leftist causes," and accusing Zanuck of "support for the Communist party line," based on his appearance at the 1943 Writers Congress and his production of "controversial" films.<sup>112</sup>

The right-wing conservative project to redefine "internationalism" as suspect, to sabotage the imperfect and underdeveloped aspirations to self-determination written into the 1941 Atlantic Charter, and especially to make sure that these could not be used to challenge Jim Crow justice and forms of educational and voting exclusion, had hardened into widely circulating Cold War imperatives. These defined the foremost principle of US foreign policy as providing assistance to anti-Communist regimes.<sup>113</sup> To even imagine an American adventurer fiercely opposed to French colonial goals and fully in support of the

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Korvin, "Letters to the editor: Actors Suffered, Too," *NYT*, 5/4/1997, H11. Korvin had worked with Herbert Klein, of the Film and Photo League on the 1937 Spanish Civil War documentary "Heart of Spain."

<sup>111</sup> Marshall, part of Paul Robeson's circle of left wing Black arts activists in the early 1950s, appeared with him at the National Negro Labor Council in 1951. Publicity in *Counterattack* (12/25/1953) halted his film and television career until the late 1960s.

<sup>112</sup> *CT*, 7/3/1952, 5; Zanuck response in Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 209-213.

<sup>113</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Haitian Revolution seemed increasingly out of step, let alone an acceptable subject for a Hollywood film.

So, *Lydia Bailey*, and its glimpses of the Black Republic's defeat of the French invaders, quietly disappeared, from Hollywood conversation, and then from film history. Black artists, however, continued to pursue the goal of filming Haitian revolutionary history. As soon as he organized his own independent production company in 1957, the singer Harry Belafonte and novelist John O. Killens pitched a film dramatizing the exploits of Henri Christophe to studio executives.<sup>114</sup> William Marshall also developed a film script featuring Christophe, collaborating with the writer Julian Mayfield beginning in 1968. Marshall's 1972 announcement of his plans explicitly rebuked the 1952 version: "The successful revolt of the African people in Haiti, unique in history, was used in *Lydia Bailey* as a backdrop for the love story of two white Americans, and my objective is to bring the backdrop to the forefront."<sup>115</sup> The actor Danny Glover began making plans to film this history in the 1990s, as did the filmmaker Euzhan Palcy.<sup>116</sup> Still, to date, *Lydia Bailey's* contradictory film version is the only one made in the US. It stands as a celluloid artifact from those postwar years when anti-colonialism's challenge to white supremacy seemed

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<sup>114</sup> Keith Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens: A Life of Black Literary Activism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 129

<sup>115</sup> Mayfield Papers, Box 4/Folder 6, Box 6/Folder 8; Box 7/ folder 3, Box 18/folders 8,9 NYPL-SCRBCS; "Star William Marshall Talks about 'Blacula,'" *Box Office*, 8/7/1972..

<sup>116</sup> "Danny Glover Says Producers Told Him His Haiti Film Lacked White Heroes," *Miami Herald*, 7/28,2008; Stuart Jeffries, "Interview: Danny Glover: The Good Cop," *Guardian*, 5/18/2012; "Danny Glover's Toussaint L'Ouverture Film That Never Was, But Still Could Be, and Other films on the Haitian Revolutionary," *Shadow and Act*, 7/31/2015, <https://shadowandact.com/danny-glovers-toussaint-louverture-film-that-never-was-but-could-still-be-other-films-on-the-haitian-revolutionary>

to create the possibility to imagine, even briefly, American heroism emerging in support of collective Black struggle.