

Hollywood Happenings

By Walter Burrell

His name is Don Mitchell and he's the kind of actor who doesn't cut corners when it comes to his screen roles. He does them with what he feels is honesty, or he turns them down. To many he's the image of the New Negro Actor -- young, talented, aggressive -- and it's undoubtedly his breed of black actors who will bring a more honest image of the American Negro to television and movie screens.

Mitchell is starring in his first really big film, "Ironside," with Raymond ("Perry Mason") Burr and it's one of those movies being made especially for TV. Of his role, he says frankly: "The first half of the show is great for me. I come on strong as the beautiful, confident black man who has all the strength. But in the second half, I wind up walking around as Burr's aide. Well, that's what's happening right now in films for the black actor. That's where it is.

"However," Don continues, "this is a film which will be considered by the movie-making establishment as being outstanding for this generation, simply because it says more than most films have had the guts to say thus far. But it still isn't a completely honest portrayal. This lack of honesty (whether conscious or not) is partially due to the fact that few, if any, scripts are ever written by Negroes and whitey simply can't tell it like it is'.

"They just don't get to the heart of the matter," Don points out. "The white writer, pro-

ducer, director comes to us and asks us about ourselves or watches us, then he writes a script from his point of view. And what he puts on paper isn't usually the deep-down truth.

"I forget who said it, but some Negro writer once pointed out that 'I got one face for white folks to see, got another I know is me', and it's so true. We don't tell them the whole truth because we know they don't really want to hear it, so we just feed them what they want to hear about 'how it is to be a Negro'."

And just how far off does Mitchell feel an honest portrayal of the Negro on the screen is? "I don't think it's very far away," he reflects. "Maybe about five years. There are too many young Negroes coming into the industry -- both in front of the camera and behind it -- and they'll insist on more.

"And when the real breakthrough comes, it'll be with films we've produced ourselves, independently. We've got to produce them ourselves because the big studios won't make a really honest effort for perhaps another 15 years. We've got to get the money together and produce our own movies. And to hell with this myth that 'the public isn't ready'. The movie industry has always been a force in selling ideas to the country, so why shouldn't we help speed up the brain washing?

"As for the Negro actor's part in this, well, he has a very basic problem. Like a ditch digger or a lawyer, he has to eat so he takes parts he can get. The roles which have been handed to him in recent years have, for the most part, been just short of Uncle Tom parts, but he's taken them because he wants to go on acting -- and eating. But now more and more Negro actors, especially the younger ones, are saying 'no' to certain parts or they're saying 'okey, I'll take the part, but I'll play it this way, with some substance'. Through more of this aggressiveness the honest portrayals will emerge.

"Right now we have the white writer's interpretation of us on the screen. And we have either stereotype casting or casting to play it safe; casting to make



"IRONSIDE" SCENE -- Raymond Burr and Don Mitchell are captured in a tense scene from Universal's "World Premiere: 'Ironside'," one of 15 full-length motion pictures being produced exclusively for the NBC Television Network. Mitchell stars as the rebellious young Negro who becomes Burr's aide and confidant.

sure that not too much of the realities of today come through. And this means anger; the anger which is happening to almost every Negro today. Just stop and think of the many ways this suppressed anger and suspicion shows up in everyday life; the looks, the rejections, nods, unspoken curse words which are part of reality, but hardly ever shown on film.

"To 'tell it like it is' is an over-used phrase, but that's where it is; that's where the movie industry has to wind up. And you can be sure that black people will have to instigate such change, because the white-controlled establishment isn't going to just hand us anything."

Brock Peters, who scored so heavily as the villainous pimp in "The Pawnbroker," has been set by producer Edward J. Montagne for the top featured role of a Bahamian chief of police in the Raymond Burr-George Peppard starrer, "Criss Cross." Mr. Peters will be the subject of an upcoming edition of this column.

Tan stuntmen-actors Cal Brown and Eddie Smith will have lots to say in the very near future regarding a Negro branch of the Stuntmen's Association. The group, composed of both men and women, is already in existence and has purchased

motorcycles and other equipment to train members in the breath-taking behind-the-scenes art of stunt coordination in motion pictures. Brown and Smith have been on the Hollywood scene for years and their group has already gained impressive stature.