

## DVD drama revisits malicious prosecution of Blacks in Texas

Written by Kam Williams

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On November 2, 2000, drug enforcement agents executed a sweep of the black community in the tiny town of Hearne, Texas, arresting 27 African-American residents, including a grieving father who was taken into custody during the funeral of his young daughter. The bench warrants had been issued on the word of an ex-con who claimed to have purchased crack from each of the accused, despite the fact that this sole eyewitness had a history of mental illness and was also facing criminal charges at the time.

Nonetheless, The District Attorney aggressively pursued convictions in all of the cases, generally succeeding since most of the defendants couldn't even afford to make bail, let alone hire a lawyer. What generally transpired was that after languishing in jail for several months while awaiting trial, many succumbed to the pressure to plead guilty to a lesser charge rather than face the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence.

In actuality, all of these unfortunate folks from the projects were victims of a state-sanctioned scheme to incarcerate innocent African-Americans. Ultimately, the ACLU would clear their names with the help of one of the defendants, an intrepid woman willing to risk incurring the wrath of the authorities by testifying against them in a lawsuit alleging malicious prosecution.

The intimate details of her ordeal is the subject of American Violet, a gripping dramatization of the events surrounding a sad tragedy which ruined many a life in Hearne. The film stars newcomer Nicole Beharie as Dee Roberts, a 24 year-old single-mother with four daughters whose life comes apart at the seams when she finds herself suddenly ensnared in a dragnet designed to rid the town of black people entirely.

In matter-of-fact fashion, this brilliant bio-pic effectively illustrates the likely fallout visited upon a law-abiding but unsophisticated person like Dee up against an impersonal legal justice system unconcerned with the truth. A movie which earns high marks simply for being the first feature film with the guts to take the subject of racial profiling dead seriously.

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### **Excellent (4 stars)**

Rated PG-13 for profanity, ethnic slurs, violence, drug references and mature themes.

Running time: 103 minutes

Studio: Image Entertainment

DVD and Blu-ray Extras: Director's audio commentary, Telluride Film Festival interviews and a theatrical trailer.

To order a copy of American Violet on DVD, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002FUIJ24?ie=UTF8&tag=insightcom-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B002FUIJ24>

To order a copy of American Violet on Blu-ray, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002FUIJ38?ie=UTF8&tag=insightcom-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B002FUIJ38>

To see a trailer for American Violet, visit:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78SyNyyH\\_Qc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78SyNyyH_Qc)