



Louis Gossett Jr. gives a powerful performance in "A Gathering of Old Men," a movie likely to be remembered at awards time

'A Gathering of Old Men'

Louis Gossett describes film as pure magic

By LANE CROCKETT
The Times

It's magic, says Louis Gossett Jr. about CBS' *A Gathering of Old Men*, in which he co-stars with Richard Widmark.

"I showed a few seconds of it on Joan Rivers' show, and the people were really excited."

In the film, Gossett plays



Gossett

Mathu, an old black man in a Louisiana parish, who stands up to the white establishment after a white man is killed. Widmark portrays Sheriff Mapes, who investigates the case.

The crux is that several other elderly black men rally to Mathu's defense. Charles Fuller, a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright for *A Soldier's Play*, adapted the script from Ernest J. Gaines' novel. German director Volker Schlöndorff directs.

The supporting cast features Holly Hunter, Will Patton, Joe Seneca, Woody Strode, Tiger Haynes, Papa John Creach and Julius Harris.

"The film is about love and respect," says an obviously pleased Gossett. "It is a gathering of old men who never spoke about their love and respect for this one old man. I think viewers will be impressed with the fact these men have respect for Mathu because they think

When it airs:

Tonight at 8

What channel:

KSLA, Channel 12

Stars:

Louis Gossett Jr.

Richard Widmark

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he did it.

"It's a strange, pleasant twist. The viewer thinks the story will go one way, and it doesn't. It's a beautiful and touching story."

Gossett, who won a supporting-actor Academy Award as the tough drill sergeant in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, says he likes Mathu's dignity, pride and warmth.

"Mathu is always there. You look

at him, and there's the eyes and face. He doesn't have all that much dialogue. That makes him very hard to do as an actor.

"What you have to do is use more concentration. When there are no lines, you write lines in your mind ... and those moments have to be clean. A director can't really help you. The satisfaction is that, after you see it, it's all there. The director didn't cut anything I did."

Is there life after the Oscar?

Gossett laughs. "It's getting there. I still don't believe it, even though that's a piece of history now. It brought a lot of attention to me and my house. But only now is my career getting there. This year is the first year I can realize the results financially."

"I didn't get any offers except for television after I won. It takes a while. Sometimes the Oscar is a curse. It says, 'Now, he's special.' Because of that, they sometimes don't offer you good roles because

they don't think they're big enough for you to take."

Besides *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gossett has a feature film coming out called *The Principal*, in which he stars with Jim Belushi and Rae Dawn Chong. It's a comedy-drama about cleaning up a troubled high school.

Gossett has been outspoken about the lack of roles for black actors and actresses.

"It's a failing in the policy-making positions. They are responsible for what projects to do and who to cast."

He points to his own experience. His Oscar-winning role was written for a white actor. Gossett's agent called and asked why a black actor couldn't play that role? The filmmakers switched and the rest, as they say, is history.

"Black people need to see a mixture on the screen, you know. They won't watch if they don't see themselves. That makes sense."

A checklist of this week's noteworthy TV shows, movies, books, records and other happenings

Tube BY JEFF JARVIS

A PAT ON YOUR BACK

Once again, the ratings have vindicated America's taste in TV. Look at the season's Top 10 Nielsens: *Cosby*; *Family Ties*; *Cheers*; *Murder, She Wrote*; *The Golden Girls*; *60 Minutes*; *Night Court*; *Growing Pains*; *Moonlighting*; *Who's the Boss?* By my count, that's seven great shows, two good ones and one (*Pains*) that's merely mediocre. Compare those shows to the books on a recent *New York Times* list of best-sellers, filled with trashers and romancers by the likes of Danielle Steel, Sidney Sheldon and Stephen King. The obvious conclusion: TV viewers have better taste than readers. . . . Now on with this week's shows.

▲ 20/20

ABC (Thurs., May 7, 10 p.m. ET)

In a special, show-long report, correspondent Stone Phillips tells us effectively but often that we are losing the war on drugs. After making the most and more of his war metaphor ("combat gear . . . soldiers . . . outgunned by the enemy"), Phillips goes along as Drug Enforcement Administration agents destroy cocaine labs in Bolivia and arrest dealers in New York. Then, in a gripping interview, DEA agent Victor Cortez Jr., tells of being tortured by Mexican police last August. Phillips succeeds in proving that the war is, in the words of a DEA pilot, "futile." What he doesn't do is ask whether it has to be futile, whether anyone has a better battle plan. That question begs another report. Grade: **B+**

▲ A GATHERING OF OLD MEN

CBS (Sun., May 10, 9 p.m. ET)

A crazed white Cajun chases a black man through a Louisiana cane field. "I come to kill you, boy!" the bigot yells. Then, from a shack where an old black man named Mathu lives, a shot is fired. And the white man is dead. Fear spreads fast. But there's something different about this day. Pride spreads faster. At the urging of Holly (*Raising Arizona*) Hunter, a white plantation heiress, 18 old black men come with their guns to stand by Mathu, each one ready to confess to the killing. They all give rich, warm performances for the sheriff—and for the audience. Papa John Creach (the jazz-rock violinist), Joe Seneca, Woody Strode, Tiger Haynes, Julius Harris and the other old men out-act the stars: Louis Gossett Jr. as Mathu and Richard Widmark as the sheriff. *Gathering* has just a few off moments when its messages blink in neon—but they don't distract from this wonderful story about courage and justice. Grade: **A—**



A Gathering of Old Men

Louis Gossett Jr., left, and Woody Strode stand (and sit) by each other through a frightening crisis

▲ HANDS OF A STRANGER

NBC (Sun.-Mon., May 10-11, 9 p.m. ET)

This one has all the earmarks of a bad made-for-cable movie: a sick crime (rape), cold-souled cops, lots of sex, little love, all shot on low-budget location in Canada. But this is a network miniseries. In an adaptation of Robert Daley's 1985 book, *Armand (Rage of Angels)* Assante plays a cop who cares more about his badge than his wife, Beverly D'Angelo. So she lets herself be tempted into a hotel tryst with her son's high school coach. D'Angelo chickens out but just as she tries to leave the hotel room, a rapist enters and performs no end of unspeakable acts. Assante almost ruins his career as he secretly, obsessively hunts the rapist. Meanwhile, he helps Assistant D.A. Blair (*Space*) Brown go after another bunch of rapists who videotape their crimes. The show has problems aplenty: Assante displays zero sympathy for D'Angelo. He shows no emotion, so he shows no motive for anything he does. Brown's D.A. comes off like a sexist's caricature of a career woman: hard and inhuman. Plots get dropped for long stretches. The sex scenes are implausible. The rape scenes are just too sick. In the last hour, the story finally gets watchable as all the characters stretch their webs of deception. But it's too late. Grade: **C—**

▲ MASTERPIECE THEATRE: LOVE SONGS

PBS (Sun., May 10, 9 p.m. ET)

In a purely intellectual, purely British, 1930s kind of *Moonlighting* about sexual tension

and fighting as a form of flirting, two young Cambridge brains—played by Diana Hardcastle and Michael Kitchen—argue, snipe, compete and then fall in love. By the time they're older—and now played by Constance Cummings and Maurice Denham—we finally get to like them, even if their wars of words aren't as witty as they should be. But then both characters become victims of a shamelessly manipulative ending to this story by Jeffrey Archer—an English writer and Member of Parliament who resigned last November in a sex scandal. Leave it to a politician to ruin a decent story. Grade: **C+**

▲ AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE: CHARLEY'S AUNT

PBS (Mon., May 11, 9 p.m. ET)

It's bad enough that PBS keeps giving us shows that make Brits look like twits. Now *American Playhouse*—once my favorite PBS series—has started doing likewise to us Americans. The season has been filled so far with Southerners made to look cute, quaint and fuzzy, like a bunch of crocheted golf-club covers in a souvenir shop. Worse, this week *Playhouse* imports an insufferably twin-kie, 95-year-old British farce and drag show and sets it in the U.S. In *Charley's Aunt*, Charles (*Ishtar*) Grodin impersonates a Yalie's aunt and chaperons a college date. As dated as an icebox. Next season, I pray that *Playhouse* will get back the hard edge it had in *Concealed Enemies*, *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and so many other great shows. Grade: **D**