

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

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## SIDNEY POITIER, HOLLYWOOD'S FIRST BLACK LEADING MAN, TO RECEIVE NINE-FILM RETROSPECTIVE

April 9–17, 2016 at Museum of the Moving Image



Sidney Poitier and Rod Steiger in *In the Heat of the Night*

Astoria, Queens, NY, March 14, 2016—Actor, director, activist, and humanitarian, Sidney Poitier was a pioneer on many fronts: He has been called Hollywood's first black leading man, and was the first African-American actor to win an Academy Award, in 1963. Poitier emerged as an iconic movie star during the dawn of the civil rights struggle, and during a time when there were few opportunities for black actors or directors in Hollywood. He projected a sense of dignity, moral strength, and determination balanced with cool poise. From April 9 through 17, 2016, Museum of the Moving Image will present a nine-film retrospective of Sidney Poitier.

The series, **Sidney Poitier**, is organized by guest curator Mia Mask, Associate Professor of Film at Vassar College, and the co-editor with Ian Gregory Stachan of the new book *Poitier Revisited: Reconsidering a Black Icon in the Obama Age* (2015, Bloomsbury). Informed by the essays in the book, the film series invites viewers to take a fresh look at Poitier's career, which is varied and complex, and includes significant work as a director as well as an actor.

Mask will introduce ***No Way Out***, which marked Poitier's feature film debut in 1950, and ***Buck and the Preacher***, his directorial debut, both screening on the opening day of the retrospective (April 9). The series also includes ***Edge of the City*** and ***Paris***

**Blues**, both directed by Martin Ritt; **The Defiant Ones**, in with Poitier co-stars with Tony Curtis as escaped convicts bound together; the Southern crime story/police procedural **In the Heat of the Night**, the Broadway hit play by Lorraine Hansberry adapted for the screen, **A Raisin in the Sun**, and two comedies in the 1970s he directed, **Uptown Saturday Night** and **Let's Do It Again**, which starred a who's who of African-American comic actors. Most films will be presented in 35mm. The complete schedule and descriptions are included below.

"Sidney Poitier is one of the most significant icons of the 20th century," said Mask. "He helped to change the American cultural and political landscape by portraying a range of complex, sometimes contradictory, but always dignified characters. He enabled Americans to re-envision black masculinity by deftly negotiating and navigating the color line in American cinema. This retrospective of films is a wonderful opportunity to revisit the relationship between Poitier's fascinating career and the current political landscape."

Sidney Poitier was born in 1927 in Miami while his parents were visiting the United States from the Bahamas. Raised in poverty in the West Indies, Poitier became a theater actor after moving to New York City. His stage work began in 1946 on productions as varied as *Lysistrata*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Anna Lucasta*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*, much of it for the American Negro Theater. He made a second Broadway debut, this time as director, with his 1968 production of Robert Alan Arthur's *Carry Me Back to Morningside Heights*. Like many New York actors of the day, Poitier appeared on live television during the fabled golden age. By 1950, Hollywood beckoned. His role as a young doctor in Joseph Mankiewicz's *No Way Out* set the tone for so many Poitier films to come. The calm center of an ugly hurricane, his performance transcended the racial angles of the script and cut to the universal conflicts and emotions underneath. His ability to work dramatically on all these levels would make him the first black superstar of his generation. In a career spanning 60 years, he has starred in more than 40 films, directed nine, and written four. In addition to the Oscar he won for Best Actor in 1963 for *Lilies of the Field*, Poitier received an Honorary Academy Award in 2002.

Museum of the Moving Image feted Poitier in 1989 at its fourth annual Salute, and the first one since it opened to the public in 1988. At the event, Poitier noted, "I started my film career where the museum is now housed," in a short training film called *From Whence Help Cometh*, in 1949, at the Astoria studio which was then in use by the U.S. Army Signal Corp. For an extensive interview with Poitier, from an event at the Museum in March 1989, visit [www.movingimagesource.us/dialogues/view/228](http://www.movingimagesource.us/dialogues/view/228)

#### **SCHEDULE FOR 'SIDNEY POITIER' APRIL 9–17, 2016**

All screenings take place at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Avenue in Astoria, New York. Unless otherwise noted, tickets are \$12 adults (\$9 seniors and students / \$7 youth 3–17) and free for Museum members at the Film Lover and Kids Premium levels and above. Advance tickets are available online at [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us).

Ticket purchase may be applied toward same-day admission to the Museum's galleries.

***No Way Out***

SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 2:00 P.M.

Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. 1950, 106 mins. 35mm. With Richard Widmark, Sidney Poitier, Linda Darnell. Poitier made his striking film debut in one of the first – and most powerful—Hollywood films to confront race relations in America. He stars as an idealistic doctor who is terrorized by Richard Widmark's racist psychopath when a white criminal dies at his hospital. Intelligently directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (the same year he made *All About Eve*), *No Way Out* is both a gripping noir and a potent rebuff of racism. Future stars and activists Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee appear in small roles.

***Buck and the Preacher***

SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 4:30 P.M.

Dir. Sidney Poitier. 1972, 102 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee. Poitier made his remarkably assured directorial debut with this rollicking revisionist western. He stars alongside Harry Belafonte as, respectively, a wagon master and a shiftless preacher who join forces to protect a band of freed slaves from white bounty hunters. Marrying a black power message to the form of a classical western, *Buck and the Preacher* is one of the first films to explore the African-American experience in the post-Civil War West. Jazz legend Benny Carter wrote the unique score, which is performed by blues greats Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Don Frank Brooks.

***Edge of the City***

SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2:00 P.M.

Dir. Martin Ritt. 1957, 85 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, John Cassavetes, Jack Warden, Ruby Dee. A searing tragedy of racism and racketeering plays out against the New York City waterfront in this noir-tinged drama. John Cassavetes stars as a drifter who takes a job in the dockyards and whose friendship with an African-American coworker, played by Poitier (receiving co-star billing for the first time), makes them both a target for a racist supervisor. Sensitively helmed by socially progressive director Martin Ritt (*Hud*, *Norma Rae*), *Edge of the City* is a starkly realistic, path-breaking depiction of interracial friendship and union corruption.

***The Defiant Ones***

SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Stanley Kramer. 1958, 97 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, Tony Curtis. Poitier and Tony Curtis are a pair of escaped convicts—shackled together and none too happy about it—who must work together to survive as they flee across hostile Southern terrain. Distinguished by tour-de-force performances from the two leads and moody, Oscar-winning black-and-white cinematography, Stanley Kramer's groundbreaking microcosm of America's racial struggle packs both genuine suspense and a pointed social commentary.

***Paris Blues***

SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 1:30 P.M.

Dir. Martin Ritt. 1961, 98 mins. 35mm. With Paul Newman, Sidney Poitier, Joanne Woodward, Diahann Carroll. Poitier and Paul Newman are a pair of American ex-pat jazz musicians living la

vie boheme in Paris in this intoxicating, music-filled romance. Amidst the beatnik cool of Left Bank jazz clubs, the two men each find romance with American girls on holiday—but music is their real passion. The highlight is a joyous jam session between Poitier, Newman, and none other than Louis Armstrong. Another jazz legend, Duke Ellington, composed the evocative, Oscar-nominated score, which includes classics like “Take the ‘A’ Train” and “Mood Indigo.”

***In the Heat of the Night***

SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Norman Jewison. 1967, 110 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, Rod Steiger, Warren Oates, Lee Grant. Poitier and Rod Steiger make for one of the most riveting dramatic teams in movie history as a brash Philadelphia detective and a racist Southern sheriff thrown together to solve a rural Mississippi murder. Featuring moody lensing by the great Haskell Wexler and a bluesy score by Quincy Jones, Norman Jewison’s multi-Oscar winner (including Best Picture and Actor for Steiger) functions as both a crackling police procedural and a potent examination of American racial tension.

***A Raisin in the Sun***

SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 1:30 P.M.

Dir. Daniel Petrie. 1961, 127 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Claudia McNeil, Diana Sands. Lorraine Hansberry’s landmark vision of black family life made it to the big screen with nearly all the original Broadway cast intact. Poitier reprises his role as Walter Lee Younger, an ambitious husband and father living in poverty on Chicago’s South Side. When his recently widowed mother (Claudia McNeil) inherits a \$10,000 life insurance policy, Walter sees a chance to build a better life for himself—but his mother has other ideas. Poitier delivers one of his defining performances in this heartrending drama of struggle in the face of adversity.

***Uptown Saturday Night***

SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Sidney Poitier. 1974, 104 mins. 35mm. With Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, Harry Belafonte. Poitier makes the perfect foil to Bill Cosby’s unhinged funnyman in this freewheeling, smash-hit buddy comedy, the first of their three films together. The duo plays a couple of working stiffs who dive into a criminal underworld to retrieve a stolen, winning lottery ticket. In his first crack at comedy, director Poitier assembles a remarkable, who’s who cast of 1970s black entertainers, including Harry Belafonte, Flip Wilson, and a scene-stealing Richard Pryor as a bogus detective.

***Let’s Do It Again***

SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 6:30 P.M.

Dir. Sidney Poitier. 1975, 110 mins. Digital projection. With Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, Calvin Lockhart. Following the success of the previous year’s *Uptown Saturday Night*, Poitier and Bill Cosby reteamed for this comedy. They play a couple of fraternal lodge members who try to make a quick buck by fixing a fight in New Orleans—but get in over their heads when the mob gets involved. The funky soundtrack is by Curtis Mayfield, with a title track performed by The Staple Singers.

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**Guest curator Mia Mask is available for interviews. To schedule interviews and to request screeners (available for most films), please contact Tomoko above.**

### **MUSEUM INFORMATION**

Museum of the Moving Image ([movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)) advances the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the art, history, technique, and technology of film, television, and digital media. In its stunning facilities—acclaimed for both its accessibility and bold design—the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings of significant works; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, craftspeople, and business leaders; and education programs which serve more than 50,000 students each year. The Museum also houses a significant collection of moving-image artifacts.

Hours: Wednesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Friday, 10:30 to 8:00 p.m. Saturday–Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$15 adults; \$11 senior citizens (65+) and students (18+) with ID; \$7 youth (3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. Admission to the galleries is free on Fridays, 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Film Screenings: Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless otherwise noted, tickets are \$12 adults / \$9 students and seniors / \$6 children 3–12 / free for Museum members at the Film Lover level and above. Advance purchase is available online. Ticket purchase may be applied toward same-day admission to the Museum's galleries.

Location: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street) in Astoria.

Subway: M (weekdays only) or R to Steinway Street. Q (weekdays only) or N to 36 Avenue.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)

Membership: <http://movingimage.us/support/membership> or 718 777 6877

The Museum is housed in a building owned by the City of New York and located on the campus of Kaufman Astoria Studios. Its operations are made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation). The Museum also receives generous support from numerous corporations, foundations, and individuals.