

Heat Wave

Film Study Guide

Director: Kevin Hooks

1990 | Fiction | 92 Minutes | USA | English | Unrated

Synopsis: As the Watts riots erupted one steamy night in 1965, the Los Angeles Times sent its reporters to the scene – white men who, soon after they arrived, had to run for their lives. Then Bob Richardson, a young African American messenger for the paper, volunteered to cover the story alone. He braved fire, fury, bullets and death to report the courage and the cowardice, injustice and hate that engulfed the streets. His work helped earn the Times a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the uprising. *Heat Wave* tells the dynamic true story of America on the brink of racial meltdown and of citizens – black and white – who refused to allow violence to conquer hope.

Post-Screening Discussion Questions

1. The quote “What shall it avail our nation if we can send a man to the moon but cannot cure the sickness of our cities” appears at the end of the film. Interpret what you think this means, and why they use this quote to end the film.
2. Research the Watts riots (helpful links below). Discuss the events that led to the riots. Do you feel the actions taken by the police and the rioters were justified? Could the riots have been avoided? How?
3. Bob and J.T. seem to be divided by the point of view that you are either “black” or “white.” Bob believes he can regardless of the discrimination of his race, J.T. feels this is a betrayal. How do you think these points of view come to help Bob and hurt J.T.?
4. When Bob gets his job at the Los Angeles Times, J.T. lashes out at him. Why do you think he reacted in this way? How are Bob and J.T. different? How are they similar?
5. It could be argued that neither the police or the drivers were to blame for starting the riots. Do you agree with this? If not, who is to blame/is at fault?
6. The Watts riots stand as the most severe riots in Los Angeles History until the Los Angeles riots of 1992. Compare the cause/effect of both riots. Do you feel the film is an accurate representation of how a riot actually builds?

7. As a result of the riots, 34 people were killed, 1,032 injured, and 3,438 arrested. Can this type of damage be justified by the positive results of the riots? What were the positive results of the Watts riots?
8. Bob is determined to become a success. Talk about your idea of what it means to be successful. What are the challenges that stand in your way. How are your ideas and dreams different or similar to Bob's?
9. When they arrive in Watts, Mr. Turpin has found it difficult to find a job because of the color of his skin. Have things changed? Do you think people are still discriminated against based on their race, gender, age, etc?
10. Do you think Chicago newspapers are fair, unbiased, and speak for the voices of the various citizens of Chicago the way Los Angeles claims to?

Useful websites:

General information about the Watts riots http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watts_riots

Looking back at the Watts riots 40 years later

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/la-me-watts11aug11,0,1955949.story>