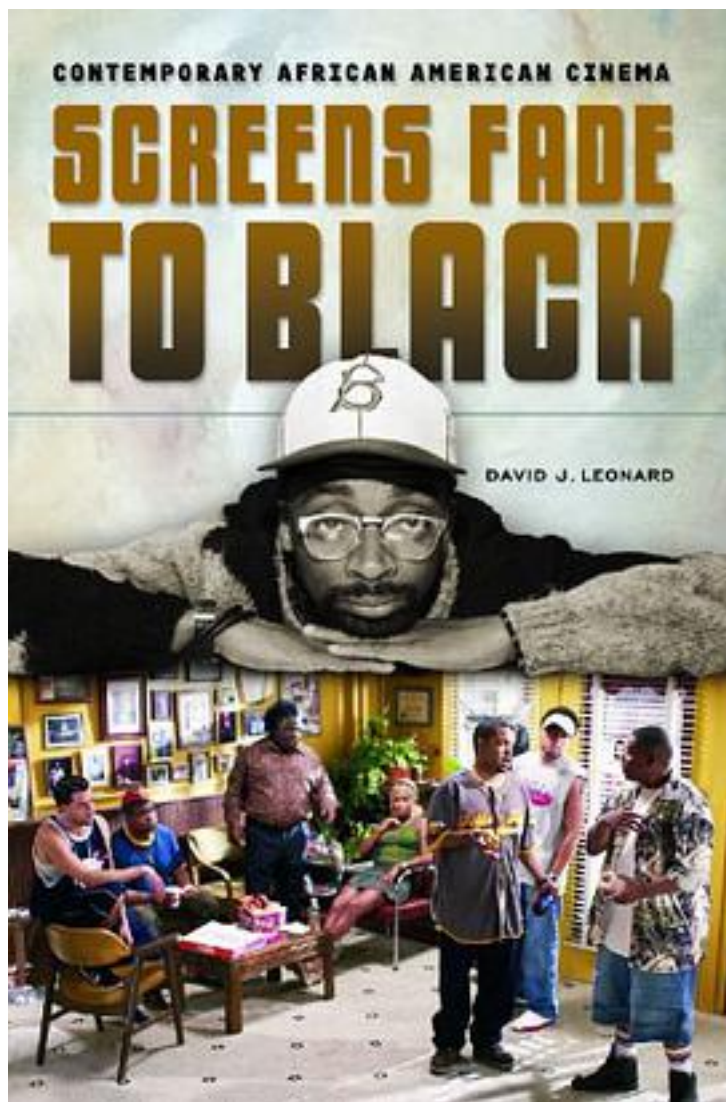# Screens Fade to Black

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The triple crown of Oscars awarded to Denzel Washington, Halle Berry, and Sidney Poitier on a single evening in 2002 seemed to mark a turning point for African Americans in cinema. Certainly it was hyped as such by the media, eager to overlook the nuances of this sudden embrace. In this new study, author David Leonard uses this event as a jumping-off point from which to discuss the current state of African-American cinema and the various genres that currently compose it. Looking at such recent films as "Soul Food", "Antwone Fisher", "Training Day", and the two Barbershop films - all of which were directed by black artists, and most of which starred and were written by blacks as well - author David Leonard examines the issues of representation and opportunity in contemporary cinema. In many cases, these films have made a great deal of money while hardly playing to white audiences at all; meanwhile, they walk a line between confronting racial stereotypes and trafficking in them. And by examining such elements as plot, ideology, character development, and racial imagery and stereotyping, along with the cultural issues at the fore at the time of the film's release, Leonard shows that while certainly there are differences between the grotesque images of years past and those that define today's era, the consistency of images across genre and time reflects the lasting power of racism as well as the black community's response to it.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Screens Fade to Black_下载链接1_](#)

标签

评论

[Screens Fade to Black_下载链接1_](#)

书评

[Screens Fade to Black_下载链接1](#)