

In the Heat of the Night

By Emily Fancett

“In the Heat of the Night” is a prominent film made in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement. It follows Virgil Tibbs, played by Sidney Poitier, and Sheriff Gillespie, played by Rod Steiger. It takes place in a small, Southern town during a time of racial tension. The movie overall is a crime drama.

The movie begins by revealing that a wealthy man has been murdered, and Virgil Tibbs (who is trying to get a train at the time) is arrested as a suspect. It is quickly found out, however, that he did not kill the man and would actually be a great help in finding out who actually did.

Sheriff Gillespie reluctantly allows Virgil to help. The two go on a wide search to find the murderer (at times getting into spats with each other as they disagree on who committed the crime). They do, in the end, manage to track down the murderer through a series of connected evidence.

“In the Heat of the Night” has masterful design that helps immerse viewers into the world it creates. For the period of time the movie takes place the clothing and background choices are well done. The sets, which are based off a real Southern town, feel as though one could go there. Sparta, Mississippi may not be a real place, but the set design manages to convince viewers otherwise.

As each character appears, it is made clear where they stand in their social order. Virgil Tibbs who, unlike everyone else in the town, is wearing a suit. This combination of design makes the film feel a lot more timeless while also taking place in the past.

The soundtrack is a wonderfully unique collage of blues music that makes the movie stand out against other movies made at the time. Made by Quincy Jones, the music is a stark contrast to the usual classic music found in films coming out at the same time. It also never distracts from the scene being played out, only enhancing the experience and ambiance of the film. In the car chase scene, for example, Virgil Tibbs is bumper-to-nose with a group of rough individuals, and the music increases in speed and intensity during the tense scene.

This film is a fantastically crafted piece that continues to hold relevance even today. The story holds up through time, and the shocking moments (as well as the light-hearted ones), will continue to be remembered. It takes a daring, successful spin on a story that has been told time and time again. It deserves the praise it has received and continues to earn, hopefully for a long time to come.