toration by murder and violence of unchallenged white male supremacy. The Confederate States of America may, technically, have lost the war, but these two films guaranteed that the South was the victor in the ideological explanation and interpretation of what had happened.

Like Birth of a Nation, Gone with the Wind was based on a popular novel. The author was Margaret Mitchell, an Atlanta, Georgia, debutante who privately collected pornography and spent a year at Smith College in Massachusetts. At Smith, she became enraged at finding one of the school’s few black students in her history class, and she successfully demanded to be transferred to another section. Mitchell spoke of her kindly attitude to individual black people, and she was hurt, surprised, and perplexed by the social criticisms of her novel and the movie based on it.

Also like Birth of a Nation, Gone with the Wind was an epic production taking years to film, costing a fortune, and running extra long. A total of 474,538 feet of film was shot, edited down finally to 20,300 feet, making a movie that ran for three hours and forty minutes. It premiered December 15, 1939, in the racially segregated Fox Theater in Atlanta, which meant the black actors were prohibited from attending. Georgia proclaimed a state holiday for the opening.

Several of Gone with the Wind’s African-American performers were so good that they were able to transform their roles beyond the racist stereotypes. This was especially true of Hattie McDaniel, who played Mammy. She was the first black actor to win an Academy Award, voted Best Supporting Actress. Butterfly McQueen was brilliant as Prissy, who “didn’t know nuttin’ bout birthin’ no babies,” but she performed so well she was forever after identified with the role and permanently typecast as a feather-brained servant. McQueen refused to keep playing the same part, and as a result, her professional career was ruined. She was reduced to working as a clerk in Macy’s and as a dishwasher. Other notable black performers were Oscar Polk as Pork, Everett Brown, who played Big Sam, and, surprisingly, Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, who was Uncle Peter, but behind so much makeup no one recognized him.

If you want to know more:


“[Gone with the Wind] has been seen by an audience of more than 230 million, [and it has been] dubbed in five languages and sub-titled in 30 more. Since June 5, 1987, it has played every day at Ted Turner’s CNN Cinema 6 in Atlanta.”
—Michael Blowen

“In American book sales, Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind is second only to the Bible. It has sold more than 25 million copies and continues to be popular.”
—Michael Blowen

Who was the first African American to win an Academy Award?

Hattie McDaniel was a self-assured, outspoken, formidable woman who insisted on infusing with dignity the countless servant, cook, and domestic roles she played on radio and in films. As Mammy in Gone with the Wind she won a Best Supporting Actress Oscar in 1939, the first African American to receive an Academy Award.

McDaniel was born June 10, 1895, in Wichita, Kansas, which meant she had to learn a black Southern accent for her film roles, although she refused to use one in her Boulah radio show. Her parents were former slaves and her family became entertainers. McDaniel began an early career in minstrelsy and vaudeville, singing on Denver radio station KOA with George Morrison and the Melody Hounds, and singing blues songs on the Theatre Owners Booking Association (TOBA) black vaudeville circuit, including songs she composed herself.
Because Hollywood refused to give African Americans serious film parts, McDaniel, along with Louise Beavers and others, perfected the Mammy/maid role. She was criticized by the NAACP for helping perpetuate negative black stereotypes, but McDaniel replied that she'd rather play a maid than be one. Ironically, the sassy integrity and egalitarian stance with which McDaniel imbued her servant roles helped to alter the racial climate and enlarge the opportunities for African Americans in movies.

McDaniel paid a price for her success. David O. Selznick, the producer of *Gone with the Wind*, refused to allow McDaniel—or other black members of the cast—to attend the film's premiere in Atlanta in December 1939. She died on October 26, 1952, at the Motion Picture Country Home and Hospital in Woodland Hills, California.

*If you want to know more:*


"I did what I had to do."

—Hattie McDaniel

Who received mail addressed to "God, Harlem USA"?

One of the by-products of the Great Migration, with its relocation of hundreds of thousands of African Americans to Northern cities, was the rise of many new religious movements. They were often led by charismatic figures such as Prophet James F. Jones in Detroit, Mother Rosa Horn in Harlem, Noble Drew Ali in Newark, Sweet Daddy Grace, who had churches along the Eastern Seaboard, Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux in Washington, D.C., and perhaps the best known of all, Father Divine
The African American community knew World War II primarily for the "Double V" campaign: victory over fascism abroad and victory over racism at home. But during the war, black people, incredibly, made great gains in the arts and sciences.

Jacob Lawrence's family had left the South during the Great Migration. After his parents separated, he moved with his mother, first to Philadelphia and then to Harlem in 1930. In New York, the young Lawrence found plenty of trouble, so his mother enrolled him in an after-school program to keep him off the streets. There Jacob met Charles Henry Alston, who encouraged him to pursue his passion for art. Even after dropping out of high school to earn money for his family, Lawrence continued painting. He moved into a shared space at Alston's studio, where he met luminaries like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and Alain Locke.

Lawrence realized that he too was a "race man" and began to employ African and African American themes in his art. In 1936, he held his first solo exhibition at the Harlem Artists Guild. His profile grew so quickly that only two years later the Harlem YMCA invited him for a solo exhibition. Lawrence soon finished a series of forty-one paintings on the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture. Later he would complete series on Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. He also created series on historical moments, including the Great Migration (which launched his career in 1940), the civil rights movement, the American bicentennial, and the 1972 Olympic Games. He produced murals for Harvard University and the Times Square subway station. He remained actively creative until his death.

Hattie McDaniel rose to national acclaim through her singing and acting talents. Born in 1895, McDaniel grew up in Denver, where she sang at school and in local groups. In 1931 she moved with her sisters to California to try to make it in Hollywood. She had minor roles in the films Judge Priest (1934), Alice Adams (1935), and The Mad Miss Manton (1938). Her experiences playing a maid contributed to her earning the part of Mammy in the 1939 film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind. McDaniel won an Oscar for her performance, making her the first African American to win an Academy Award. Although she would never reach that level of success again, McDaniel performed in film and radio until her death from breast cancer in 1952.

Charles R. Drew made his mark in medicine. Success both in the classroom and on the football field at Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., earned him a scholarship to Amherst College in 1922. He continued to play well at Amherst, but a leg injury led him to consider a career in medicine. Drew graduated in 1926 and worked for two years as
Hattie McDaniel was born in 1895 in Wichita, Kansas, where her father was a Baptist preacher and her mother sang in the church choir. When she was six years old, her family settled in Denver, Colorado. It was there, when she was fifteen, that she won a gold medal for reciting a poem called “Convict Joe.” She was such a talented actress that her father let her join a traveling stage show that he had formed. She later became a singer with a popular orchestra in Denver, and it is said that she was the first African-American woman to sing on the radio.

In 1931, she went to Hollywood, where she had to work as a maid until she started getting regular roles in movies. She appeared on screen for the first time in 1932 in a movie called *The Golden West*, and was featured in more than fifty films. Even in the movies, though, Hattie McDaniel was usually given the role of a maid. She was such a good actress, however, that audiences always remembered her. When some people criticized her for the parts that she played, McDaniel said, “It’s better to play a maid than to be one.”

Hattie McDaniel’s talent was rewarded when she was given an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actress for her performance as Mammy in the 1939 hit movie, *Gone With the Wind*. She was the first African American to win an Oscar.
HATTIE Mc DANIEL  
(Born 1898—Died 1952)

Hattie McDaniel was the first African-American woman to win an Oscar from the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts, and Sciences. She won in the best supporting actress category for her performance in *Gone with the Wind*.

Ms. McDaniel was born on June 10, 1898 in Wichita, Kansas and moved to Denver, Colorado as a child. After singing on Denver radio as an amateur for some time, she entered vaudeville professionally and, by 1924, was a headliner on the Pantages circuit.

By 1931, she had made her way to Hollywood, where, after a slow start, she gradually began to get some movie roles. Meanwhile she supported herself as a maid and washer woman. *Judge Priest, The Little Colonel, and Showboat* were some of the movies in which she appeared, along with *Saratoga* and *Nothing Sacred*. Her portrayal of a "mammy" figure in *Gone with the Wind* is regarded as a kind of definitive interpretation of this role.

*Gone with the Wind*, David O. Selznick’s expensive film of Margaret Mitchell's best-selling novel, was the best film depiction of its time of the African-American plight on the eve of the Civil War. *Butterfly Queen* appeared as an urbane Easterner, and *Time* reported that in her shrill role she went beyond mere servitude toward "sly humor." While pretending to be the perfect servant, she would put her employers in their place without acting subservient. The African-American press plugged Hattie McDaniel's Mammy for its "dignity and earnestness" that would raise her to "more than a servant."
film's gaudy premiere, its reception, and the eventual Academy Award given to Ms. McDaniel polarized African-American opinion for and against the picture. Some people admired the work of the African-Americans in the movie, while others felt that the roles were degrading. Even the Communist party was divided on the subject. Thenceforth, African-American roles in film slowly improved.

In 1942, the trade paper Variety printed a headline reading, *Better Breaks for Negroes in H'wood*. The story referred to an agreement struck by major studio heads, Walter White of the NAACP, and Wendell Willkie, the defeated Republican presidential candidate in 1940, through which African-Americans could expect better roles—roles that would portray how African-Americans might normally appear in society, and that would depart from the old stereotypes. Ad hoc committees of African-American actors and citizens, liberal white groups, and the African-American press became micrometers for measuring the studios' cleaving to the new standards. Organized African-Americans gave awards to movies that took liberal stances.

By then African-Americans were at the mercy of Hollywood because race movies were slow to disappear. The one exception to white productions was the "soundies," short musical films starring many African-Americans produced for use in jukeboxes. Fritz Pollard, an old African-American football star, fronted the organization but gradually it fell under white control.

In addition to her movie roles, Ms. McDaniel had ample success on radio during the 1930s, particularly as "Hi-Hat Hattie." In the 1940s she played the title character of the very successful "Beulah" series.

Ms. McDaniel died on October 26, 1952.
Hattie McDaniel grew up in a very talented family. Her father, who had been a slave on a Virginia plantation, was a Baptist minister, singer, dancer, guitar and banjo player. Hattie’s mother sang in a gospel group. Some of Hattie’s twelve brothers and sisters had successful careers as singers and actors.

Hattie’s parents moved to Denver, Colorado, soon after Hattie was born. Although she was one of only a few black students in elementary school, Hattie was treated the same as everybody else. All of her teachers and classmates loved the outspoken and energetic, young girl.

Even at a young age, Hattie was comfortable being the center of attention. She sang at church and liked to recite poetry and passages from the Bible for her classmates. She performed in school plays and musicals, and she loved to dance.

In 1910, at the age of fifteen, Hattie won a gold medal for dramatic art. She recited the poem “Convict Joe,” and many members of the audience were moved to tears by her performance. Hattie got a standing ovation for her recital.

Although Hattie was a good student, she quit high school. She felt that it was time for her performing career to begin.

"I portray the type of Negro woman who has worked honestly and proudly."
Developing Skills

Hattie began her career as a singer, not an actor. In her teens, she joined her brother Otis's touring group of entertainers. They traveled from town to town, putting on their shows in tents. Hattie wrote and performed many of their songs. In 1915, she sang on a Denver radio station and became the first African-American woman to sing on the radio.

During the following years, Hattie sang with other groups. She joined the touring company of the musical *Showboat* in 1925. A few years later, finding herself out of work, she got a job as a maid in a hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She did not stay a maid for long. She auditioned for the hotel's variety show and won a starring role.

Hattie moved to Hollywood. She appeared in dozens of movies before she got the role she is best known for in *Gone with the Wind*. Hattie's friends encouraged her to try out for the part of Mammy, the family maid. The role was perfectly suited to the lively, bossy Hattie. She read the book on which the film was based three times to prepare for her audition. When she went for her screen test, she dressed the part of a southern mammy. After one look at Hattie, the producer of the movie canceled all other auditions. He knew that he had found his Mammy.

*Gone with the Wind* became one of the most popular films of all time. On February 29, 1940, Hattie became the first African American ever to win an Oscar. At the Academy Awards ceremony, she received two standing ovations.

Hattie acted in over 300 other movies. In 1947, she returned to radio, starring in the comedy series "Beulah." The show became a hit, and Hattie received hundreds of letters a day from her fans across the country. Her salary was two thousand dollars a week, and her contract allowed her to change any script. Hattie was about to play the part of Beulah on a television series when she died of cancer in 1952. Her funeral was attended by her many friends in the movie business and thousands of her loyal fans.

**Accomplishments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Won gold medal for recital of poem &quot;Convict Joe.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>First radio appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Was the first African American to win an Academy Award for best supporting actress in <em>Gone with the Wind</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Starred on radio in &quot;Beulah.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame.</td>
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Overcoming Obstacles

Hattie's success was as much due to her hard work and determination as to her talents. During her career, Hattie appeared in more than 300 movies. However, she received credit for only about seventy of them. Her roles were often overlooked even though she could steal the show from better-known actors. She could never completely support herself from her film acting and often took radio jobs or worked as a maid.

On film and radio, Hattie played the parts of maids. Hattie's maids were not quiet servants in the background. Her strong personality and wonderful voice turned them into characters who were wiser than the white people they served.

In the 1940s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) criticized Hattie for always taking the roles of servants. The NAACP put pressure on black actors to accept only acting parts that would show African-American people in a positive way. Hattie was accused of hurting the image of African Americans.

The NAACP's actions upset and angered Hattie. Although she was proud of being African American, she was also proud of her work in films. She was also realistic. She knew there were few opportunities for black actors, and that there was little chance for her to play other types of characters. Racism was strong in those days. Even when Hattie attended the Academy Award ceremonies, she was seated at the back of the room.

Hattie fought racism in her own way. She helped organize entertainment for the black troops in World War II, and she raised money for educational scholarships for young African Americans.

In 1945, Hattie went to court to keep her house in a white neighborhood in Los Angeles. Her neighbors had tried to prevent Hattie and other African Americans from buying houses in the area. Hattie took the case to the Superior Court and won. Her efforts helped change the law for equal housing practices in the United States.

Special Interests

- Hattie loved to get fan mail and often wrote back to her fans.
- She was very soft-hearted and helped people who needed money.
she realized how the sound of applause affected her. It gave her an indescribable feeling, she later said, of joy, love, and even sadness.

Hattie McDaniel's background was natural for an entertainer, because her family was richly endowed with musical abilities. Her father, Henry McDaniel, was born into slavery as a fieldhand on a Virginia plantation near Richmond. Her grandmother was the plantation's cook and Mammy. In later years, Hattie remarked that she took after her paternal grandmother, and perhaps that was why she came up with so many Mammy roles in the movies. She also ascribed her love of cooking and good food to her grandmother (whom she never met).  

During the war, Henry was a soldier in the Union Army seeing non-combat service in various campaigns in Virginia. For some time after the conflict ended, large groups of black people roamed the open roads of the South, living off the land as best they could, vulnerable to climate, illnesses, and mean spirited white people. In one of these groups was twenty-five-year-old Henry McDaniel.

Henry drifted into North Carolina, working at odd jobs, such as chopping wood for his supper, planting tobacco, and gathering hay. When the opportunities arose, he sang and danced for the enjoyment of his white employers. Black minstrel groups were popular during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and Henry frequently played a banjo and guitar, and sang with these performers.

Henry existed hand to mouth for ten years after the Civil War ended, roaming throughout Virginia and the Carolinas. A decade of wandering was not really unusual for that day and time. Thousands of Henry's fellow freedmen remained nomadic much longer than ten years.

By 1875 Henry's meanderings brought him to Nashville, Tennessee. By the age of thirty-five he had become a part-time Baptist preacher. His experiences of slavery, emancipation, breaking ties with his family, and then grubbing for existence, turned Henry into an introspective, meditative man. He began to express the philosophy that he could best help his fellow freedmen through singing, oratory, and preaching.
its importance as a center of cattle shipping and an agriculturally productive hinterland.

Henry stopped in Wichita, prepared by his versatility to survive in its booming western economy. Hundreds of new structures—houses, stores, churches, schools, train stations—had to be built, and by now Henry had become adept in the building trades. He was a multi-talented person, necessary to survive the harshness of the post civil war period, and was now a banjo and guitar player, singer, dancer, minstrel player, Baptist preacher, carpenter, teamster, and construction worker. Many times both Henry and Susan conducted services at various churches in the Wichita area. Henry preached and Susan sang. They lived at 925 N. Wichita Street, where their fame spread very quickly throughout the black community.

Before going to Wichita, and during their stay there, Henry and Susan started what ultimately became a large family of thirteen children. Over half of them died either at birth or shortly thereafter. The youngest, born on June 10, 1895, was a bouncing baby girl, whom they named Hattie.

But life for the young Hattie did not settle down until her father's wandering urge carried the family to turn-of-the-century Colorado, first in Fort Collins and then in Denver.

In Fort Collins Henry worked as a teamster. The family lived in the 300 block of Cherry Street. Two blocks away on North Meldrum lived Hattie’s closest friend, Ruth Collamer, a white girl. Ruth and Hattie were inseparable, as they walked with each other every morning, hand in hand, to the Franklin School, where they were classmates.

At school, Hattie and Ruth played jacks on the flagstone sidewalks, and a game called, “Pom pom pullaway.” Hattie taught Ruth how to bounce a rubber ball while repeating in rhythm, “one, two, buckle your shoe.” Each afternoon after school Ruth’s father drove his cattle to pasture, always passing by the McDaniel’s residence on the way. Hattie frequently came out of her house and walked with the herd for a way, she and Ruth picking flowers (violets and “Johnny jump ups” in the spring), and, hand in hand, “hippity-hopping” through the fields.

The picture of Hattie that Ruth always held was “of a sweet little colored girl about eight years old in a dainty ruffled bonnet, and a round face with one of the biggest smiles a girl could acquire. She had beautiful white teeth, which she showed very distinctly every time she smiled, and that was very often when we were together.”

In 1901, Hattie was again uprooted when the family moved to another boomtown, Denver, a short distance away. Henry saw working and living conditions as better for himself and family in Denver than in Fort Collins. Henry quickly got a job as a laborer on numerous construction projects, and his eldest son, Otis, became a porter in a barber shop, earning his share of the family upkeep by sweeping, and keeping the place clean. Over the next several years the McDaniels lived in at least ten different places in Denver from the time they arrived in 1901 to Henry’s death in 1922. Gradually, as they grew up, his family scattered throughout the city, his sons (including Otis, James, and Samuel) going into barber shop and hotel portering, and construction work, and his daughters (including Ruby, Adele, Orlena, Etta, and Hattie), generally became clerks. Hattie, for example, worked for some time as a clerk for the Charles Lind Bakery on Lincoln Street. “Clerking” meant not only keeping books, but the place clean as well. Hattie probably got the job because of her friendly nature and her ability to “cipher.” It was not, however, commonplace for blacks to become clerks in business establishments. All of the McDaniels had some talent in music and entertainment, and the children at least, who had not been directly involved with slavery, had outgoing personalities that caused them to seek employment beyond the usual maid and wash jobs. In addition, Denver was such a boom town with so many business establishments to be run that “color” was frequently put aside when managers looked for employees. Also in the western parts of the country around the turn of the century, Populist Party politics created a system in which blacks had at least a semblance of “place.” Perhaps that political factor was one reason why Henry McDaniel, though frequently moving around in the city of Denver itself, stayed permanently after 1901 in the state of Colorado.
Hattie: The Life of Hattie McDaniel

Even with all the changed ways of life Henry and Susan had left behind, the McDaniels—especially the men—could usually get only menial jobs in Denver. Their situation in the Colorado capital, however, was probably better than if they had stayed in the South. “White supremacy” took root in southern states and state legislatures put into effect a large number of “Jim Crow” segregation laws. On the other hand, much of the West at this time was so economically active, with enough work and adequate housing to go around, that there were generally too many activities for people’s racial biases to become obsessive, as they had done in the South.

Nevertheless, there was some bigotry, even in Denver. In the Fall of 1916, a debate raged over a proposed ordinance to prohibit blacks from living on the same residential blocks as whites. The Denver Property Owners’ Protective Association, was made up almost entirely of white real estate agents, and it supported the efforts to segregate Denver’s housing. (Ironically, during the late 1940s, Hattie battled exactly the same kind of housing discrimination in Los Angeles.)

Besides the housing problem, another cause for racial strife in Denver, as indeed around the country at the time, was the screening, in 1915, of D. W. Griffith’s epic film, The Birth of a Nation. Based upon Thomas Dixon’s The Clansman, the film glorified the Ku Klux Klan at the expense of black people, and for the first time depicted black villains on the screen. The newly formed (1909) National Association for the Advancement of Colored People fought against showing this film anywhere. The Denver chapter of the NAACP was formed in 1915, in no small part because of The Birth of a Nation. Thus, while Denver in the early twentieth century was quite liberal compared to other parts of the country, it did have its own racial problems.

These difficulties, though, remained unapparent to Henry and Susan’s youngest child, Hattie. She was one of a few black students at Denver’s Twenty-Fourth Street Elementary School, and her teachers and classmates loved her.

Her favorite teacher, Louise Poirson, often permitted Hattie to do what she liked best: to stand before the class reciting poetry or singing popular songs. Mrs. Poirson wrote to Hattie later on in

Hattie’s career: “The reason I remember you so well is due to the fact that as a child you were so full of rhythm. You had an outstanding dramatic ability, an ability to project to your listeners your strong personality and your ever present sense of humor. I recall with pleasure the keen enjoyment of the pupils and myself whenever you sang or dramatized a story.”

Hattie began singing at the Central Baptist Church in Denver almost as soon as she arrived, sang spirituals at school, and recited passages from the Bible for the pleasure of her classmates. Hattie herself said that she sang so much as a child that it sometimes got on the household nerves. “My mother would say, ‘Hattie I’ll pay you to hush,’ and she’d give me a dime. But in just a few minutes I’d be singing and shouting again.”

From an early age, Hattie was a “take charge” person, a characteristic which remained her entire life. In grammar school she organized, improvised, and directed the activities of the other children, a foreshadowing of future successes and “firsts.” Being first almost became a way of life for Hattie. Later, she would be known as the first black woman to sing on radio, the first black person to win an Oscar, even the first black to be buried in a previously all white cemetery.

Her best friend at Twenty-Fourth Street School was Willa May, and after graduation Hattie and Willa went together to East Denver High School. The most “daring” thing the two friends did in high school was to have their initials tattooed in blue in the bend of their arms. Hattie could stare down at a big “HM” imbedded into her arm, while Willa gazed at “WM.”

Still the center of Hattie’s life at East Denver was singing and dancing, and her theatrical abilities. She was always much in demand for school plays and musical performances, and excelled at a number of dances that were popular in that era. The most notable of these were the cakewalk, the juba, the footlet softshoe buck, and the wing dance, and they were among hundreds that blacks brought from Africa, or created once they were in the United States. (See Appendix D for a description of these dances.)

In a way, the development of black music and dancing talents was one way of compensation for their conditions of servitude.
Thus, when Hattie went through the rigors of “Convict Joe” that night at East Denver High, she exemplified many generations of black talent. Her natural abilities, coupled with Henry’s and Susan’s encouragement, turned Hattie, at an early age, into an important performer.

In fact, as early as 1908, when she was only thirteen, Hattie was billed as part of a minstrel show, J. M. Johnson’s Mighty Modern Minstrels performed at East Turner Hall (later known as German Hall). The show featured “Happy Dick Thomas and the Merry Howards,” and “just a few” of the “big, mighty company,” included Etta, Hattie, Otis, and Samuel McDaniels (misstated as even press agents would do for years to come). The show was as much a competition as a performance, because its program announced that the “challenging cakewalk, fleetfoot softshoe buck, and the wing,” were “open to all comers,” as they had been in plantation tradition.

A few months later, in March 1909, a minstrel group, the Red Devils, came to East Turner Hall, under the management of the Colored American Amusement Company, with Miss Hattie McDaniels, “Denver’s favorite soubrette,” at the bottom of the bill. Already, Hattie was acquiring a reputation of acting the coquettish maid.

In 1910, Henry decided that he had had enough of hard labor and so he formed his own minstrel show, with his sons, Otis and Sam as regulars. For some time the two brothers had played with the All-Star Minstrels at both East Turner and the Empress. Otis and Sam were clog dancers; Sam played Pappy Rufe, and Otis played Aunt Miranda of the Lime Kiln Club, leaving the house in a constant uproar of laughter and applause, according to one reviewer. The Henry McDaniel Minstrel Show was popular entertainment for people all over Colorado. With Henry at the top of the bill with his banjo and guitar the show toured Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Boulder, Fort Collins, and other cities. Although fifteen-year-old Hattie begged to travel and perform, her mother, Susan, forbade it, protecting her from the rigors of show business life, one-night stands, tiresome travel, and stays in segregated, inferior parts of towns they visited.

Generally, black performers preferred to travel by train rather than by car to engagements, because they were not as likely to be stopped by unfriendly policemen. Sometimes, however, a remote destination required several black groups to travel together by automobile, exposing them to dangers along the way. Susan also considered that since everyone in the show was black, hotel rooms were hard to come by, compelling a dependence on a black “bed and breakfast” circuit that flourished along the black entertainment routes.

For her part, Hattie seemed to be doing just fine as a student at East High. Nonetheless Hattie quit high school at the end of her sophomore year. While she waited for her “real” career to begin, Hattie continued to perform at local theaters such as the Empress, and at carnivals. Then, in 1910 she gave her famous rendition of “Convict Joe,” and after that experience nothing could stop her from full time entertainment. She enlisted the help of her brother, Otis, in convincing Susan that the time had come. Reluctantly, Susan bowed to the inevitable, even though it meant giving up her cherished dream of seeing Hattie earn a high school diploma.

The next three years were among Hattie’s busiest and happiest. She toured from Colorado to the West Coast, sometimes with a minstrel group called the Spikes Brothers Comedy Stars. Primarily, though, she traveled with her father and brothers, and frequently wrote the programs that her father’s minstrel group performed. Also, she began to show a lively talent for writing songs, a talent that was fully developed during the 1920s.

But in 1916, tragedy struck. Her older brother, Otis, who had always been the star of “that talented McDaniel family,” died of an undisclosed cause, at the unfulfilled age of thirty-five. His funeral was conducted at the Campbell Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and he was buried in Riverside Cemetery. For awhile it appeared that Henry’s minstrel group would fall apart without Otis’ guidance, and gaps increased between engagements. During these periods, Hattie worked in Denver cooking, clerking, and taking in washing. By the late 1910s, Henry had become inactive as the years and busy life began to catch up with him,
forcing Hattie, Etta, and Sam, to turn to other outlets through which to display their talents.

At last around 1920 Hattie first came into contact with one of Denver's most noted black musicians, Professor George Morrison, and his “Melody Hounds,” who gave her the “big break” that carried her to a greater exposure than she was accustomed to. She traveled with the Morrison Orchestra to Portland, Salt Lake City, El Paso, and even a short stint in Juarez, Mexico. Newspapers lauded Hattie's entertainment abilities. The Portland Telegram said that “the biggest show stopper of them all was Morrison's Orchestra and its Hattie McDaniel, billed as the female Bert Williams,” (an internationally known black vaudeville performer). Hattie McDaniel was “taken in riotous fashion,” said The Telegram. The Oregon Daily Journal said that Morrison's work on the Pantages Circuit was “not exactly a jazz offering of the syncopated, slam-bang order,” but a “refined and accomplished act which not only hits the musical high spots, but interjects a humorous surprise in Hattie McDaniel. . . . who did a hop, skip, and jump act on the stage while keeping up her vocal stunts. . . .” Another paper, the Oregonian, complimented Morrison's band for its “melodious playings” of its theme song, “By the Waters of Minnetonka,” which took on “new and charming values.” The paper described Hattie as a “large Negro woman who sings jazz songs.” The Evening News of San Jose, California, called Morrison's band “as excellent a vaudeville show as anyone would care to see,” and Hattie a special feature whose dances blended “to the peppiest music ever heard in this man's town.”28

In 1922 Hattie suffered two more losses. In his seventies, Henry had developed hearing and sight problems, which sharply curtailed his activities with the minstrel show. On December 5, 1922, he died, at the age of 82. He was buried in a special Grand Army of the Republic section of Denver's Riverside Cemetery. His death deeply affected Hattie: though she had always leaned most heavily on Susan for aid and understanding, she had adored Henry, and learned much of her musical craft from him.29

Hattie had married George Langford, from a prosperous black Denver family, a few months before her father's death. A short while later, Langford died—shot, according to one of Hattie's relatives—and Hattie became a widow. She did not marry again until the mid-thirties (a short-lived marriage to a man named Howard Hickman, not the same person who played John Wilkes in Gone With the Wind).

In the months following Henry's death, Hattie performed mostly in the Denver area, still singing with George Morrison's band. One great opportunity opened up to her on December 15, 1924. That was the date radio station KOA in Denver had its first broadcast.

Many sources indicate that Hattie was the first black person ever to sing on KOA. The Denver station broadcast its earliest black program on January 10, 1925, with the choir from the Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church. Professor Morrison and his band started their KOA broadcasts on December 5, 1925, offering classical music and jazz, whose fans sent scores of congratulatory letters and telegrams.27 Hattie, still affiliated with the Morrison Orchestra, thus may have been the first black soloist to sing on KOA. In any case, radio turned out to be Hattie's "tour de force." Indeed, even though in the years ahead, she may have attained fame in the movies, radio probably remained her first love. In effect, she began her career with radio (KOA) and ended it in the same medium, as Beulah. Perhaps the notice given to her radio performances led Hattie to a career—at least for awhile—as a performer on the western entertainment circuits, the most notable of which were the Pantages and Orpheum.

Alexander Pantages was a Greek who went from running a shoe shine parlor in Seattle to one of the world's greatest show producers. Entertainers on the Pantages Circuit were always extremely popular, and they usually played to full houses.

The Orpheum Theatre Circuit was founded by Martin Beck originally from Czechoslovakia. In 1899 circumstances placed him in charge of the vaudeville entertainment at a saloon concert hall in San Francisco previously known as Gustave Walters' Orpheum, which became the first house "to dominate the big time west of Chicago."32

Morrison contracted with the Pantages Circuit in 1924, and
on one of his tours, took Hattie and another Denverite, Jimmie Lunceford, with him. He said, “Hattie McDaniel and I got our act all worked up, practicing about seven or eight hours a day, every day, and got it down pat.” They opened, in 1924, in Minneapolis. “We were billed as George Morrison, the colored Paul Whiteman, and Hattie McDaniel, the female Bert Williams. . .” They’d open each night with “Vesti la guibba” from Leoncavallo’s I Pagliacci and proceed to “The Waters of Minnetonka.” The tour in 1924 took Morrison and Hattie to Tacoma, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, Kansas City, and “a lot of little places.”

One other entertainer with whom Hattie was frequently compared was Sophie Tucker, and was often called the “black Sophie Tucker,” because of the way she presented her songs. Hattie was the black “last of the red hot Mamas.” That Hattie was black and Sophie white marked a world of difference between their two careers in the 1920s. Though reputedly, “talent” was the only important factor in choosing acts, no black actor or actress received top billing in the 1920s, and for that matter, well on into the 1930s.

While touring for Pantages and Orpheum, Hattie developed her song writing talent. On numerous occasions in the past she had written skits while she traveled with Henry and her brothers.

She wrote the words for “Sam Henry Blues,” and the music by her friend, Richard Jones, of New Orleans fame, merged into the Jazz-Blues style of the 1920s.

Sam Henry was a gamblin’ man,
I loved him for myself
I swore if I caught him cheatin’
He won’t cheat on nobody else.
‘Cause he’ll be graveyard bound,
Then he’ll stop runnin’ round.

The chorus exemplified the plight of a sweetheart who is in fact merely “one of many.”

“That Talented McDaniel Family”

They say he’s got me and six others too
But when he loves me, Lord what can I do
Now when I went down to that gamblin’ shack
He’d just left with notorious Ida Black
I love my man, don’t care what he do
Don’t care if he got me and ten thousand, too!

Another McDaniel-Jones musical contribution was “Poor Wandering Boy Blues,” like “Sam Henry Blues,” written in 1927.

I’m just a wandering child
I’m just a wandering child
I’ve wandered round this world alone
No place to call my home
My mother told me so,
My mother told me when I was leaving
My home sweet home
She begged me not to go
Now when I get back home
Now when I get back home
When I get back to that old shack,
No more I’ll roam.

Hattie’s other titles—to which she wrote both the lyrics and the music—included “Quittin’ My Man Today,” “Brown Skin Baby Doll,” “I Wish I Had Somebody,” “Boo-Hoo Blues,” “Wonderful Dream,” “Lonely Heart,” and “Poor Boy Blues.” Still others, written in the late twenties, were “I Thought I’d Do It,” “Just One Sorrowing Heart,” “Destroyin’ Blues,” “Dentist Chair Blues,” “That New Love Maker of Mine,” and “Any Kind of Man Would Be Better Than You.”

Some of these songs were recorded, with Hattie singing them, frequently accompanied by the Richard Jones Jazz Wizards. “Dentist” Jackson sang several duets with her when these songs were recorded by the Merritt Company in Kansas City, and on the Okeh and Paramount labels in Chicago. Most of Hattie’s songs, however, remained as sheet music.
Hattie: The Life of Hattie McDaniel

Though the Pantages and Orpheum circuits gave the greatest outlets for Hattie's talents, they were not always available to her. For one thing, she was generally not a headliner. Her performances were geared to the better known black stars, such as George Morrison, and even he did not always get engagements. For another, black entertainers were simply not treated as well as whites by the Pantages and Orpheum managements. These conditions made it logical for Hattie to work for other circuits, such as the black Elks Club and Shriners. These fraternal organizations sponsored "indoor circuses" around the country. As a part of their shows, the circuses frequently included minstrel performances, where Hattie McDaniel served her apprenticeship. She traveled with the Elks and Shriners to many American cities, and was even headlined in some of their shows.

By far, the organization that most frequently booked Hattie, and other black performers, was the Theatrical Owners Booking Association, or TOBA, as it was commonly called. TOBA was made up of black theatre owners, who, to keep their houses busy, shared booking responsibilities and arranged lodging and eating facilities for its guest performers.

Among all these outlets—Pantages, Orpheum, Elks, Shriners and TOBA—Hattie was kept fairly busy throughout most of the twenties, a "star" sometimes, particularly if she played for TOBA, but a "fill in" at other times, primarily for Pantages and Orpheum.

As the decade drew to a close, Hattie became involved with a TOBA sponsored road production of "Showboat," playing and singing "Queenie," as she did in the movie version. The group was performing in Chicago (where Hattie had played from time to time at the Royal Gardens, owned by black businessman, Virgil Williams) in October 1929, when the great stock market crash occurred. Her company announced its bankruptcy which, of course, left several black players, including Hattie, stranded.

By chance, Hattie heard that there might be some work up north, in Milwaukee, where Sam Pick's Club Madrid frequently hired new talent. But the black ladder to success started a few rungs down: she did get a job at the club—as the attendant in the ladies' washroom for $1.00 a night, plus tips.

The Club Madrid, located on Bluemound Road in Waukesha County, just across the county line from Milwaukee, attracted customers from Marquette University and State Normal School, with a whimsically unpunctuated sign, "Dancing Sandwiches." Done in middle western rococo with an exterior in Spanish motif, it was ringed by a stone wall complete with valet parking. Within its grounds were numerous sunken gardens, an interior featuring several lounges with velvet plush seats, a recessed band stand, and a huge raised stage. On the second floor were roulette wheels and gaming tables. Obviously, the casino attracted a wealthy clientele enabling Sam Pick to hire better bands and singers for the enjoyment of the patrons on the first floor. The consumption of bootleg liquor was protected by lookout stations at strategic locations throughout the road house, and its approaching thoroughfares.

As for Hattie, her first gig at the Madrid was no more than the classic black tale of servant—at first, anyway. Many people remember Hattie at the club. She was widely referred to as the "lovely lady" in the washroom. She kept a "tip saucer" handy, and she considered a gratuity of a dime to be generous. Her work place was close to the stage, so washroom patrons were frequently amused to see her clapping her hands and dancing to the rhythms of the songs. Often she hummed the tunes, and sang them to herself, leading the ladies who used the washroom to suggest that Hattie become a regular performer. Unfortunately, the club's management did not agree. It seemed clear that Hattie's color kept her from singing at the predominantly white club, thereby wasting her vast experiences in vaudeville and in theatrical entertainment circuits.

Eventually, Hattie broke the color barrier and in melodrama style began to sing on stage. Various accounts attest to how Hattie happened to sing one night at Club Madrid. One story was that the ladies using the washroom brought so much pressure on Sam Pick that he finally yielded and let her perform, while another told of a slow night, with few of the club's clientele present. According to this version, the manager, trying to liven up the evening, exclaimed "I'd let the help sing if I thought it would do any good!"

The regular performers that night were Art Krueger's Colum-
bian Band, and its soloist was Mark Steger, who remembered that Hattie “came to the band in a rather shy way and said, ‘somebody wants me to sing.’”

According to Steger, Hattie claimed that she “didn’t know any tunes,” (of course, quite untrue, since Hattie had been singing and writing songs for more than a decade), but thought, however, that she knew some of the words to “St. Louis Blues.” Steger, who was “thoroughly surprised,” for he “never knew Hattie, the washroom attendant, could sing,” recalled:

We figured out a decent key and away we went. She really had a good beat, and got a standing ovation from the few people in the club. . . . Soon people were coming out just to hear Hattie sing. That was the beginning for Hattie.35

Hattie’s tip saucer that night had more than dimes in it. When she counted her “take,” she had $90.36 in a day when $90 would buy a lot of food!36

Night after night at Club Madrid Hattie belted out the “St. Louis Blues,” and other songs, many of which she had written herself. Soon her fame spread throughout the Milwaukee area, and people traveled to Bluemound Road just to catch her nightly act. For Hattie, it was a “Cinderella” story. The more she sang before Club Madrid’s well-to-do, success oriented, clientele, the more popular she became, and thus more receptive to the idea that she seek even greater things. One of her friends even suggested that she go to Hollywood, and try her hand at the movies.

CHAPTER TWO

“A Woman’s Gifts Will Make Room For Her”

While Hattie toured the East with various vaudeville groups, her brother Sam and sisters Etta and Orelia sought their fortunes in California. The late twenties were boom years for Hollywood, and Sam and Etta got bit parts in movies, while Orelia ran a rooming house for Pullman porters. Like Hattie back East and all struggling performers, when they could get no entertainment work, they resorted to menial employment.

When Sam and Etta heard about Hattie’s break at the Club Madrid, they begged her to join them in Hollywood. For Hattie this became an easy decision since Sam Pick’s enterprises in Milwaukee suffered with the Depression, and Hattie’s work and pay soon became irregular. She decided to go West and try the movies. There she could live with Etta and Sam until she got established.

Accounts of how Hattie traveled to Hollywood vary. According to one she and a group of friends from Milwaukee drove the distance in a ramshackle automobile; in another she rode a train to Los Angeles. Whatever the case, she arrived in California in 1931, with about $20 in the cheap, new purse she had bought as she passed through Denver. Also in her purse was a rabbit’s foot, and a
clipping from a Denver newspaper that Hattie, the “hometown
girl,” was on her way to movie stardom in Hollywood.¹

Like every movie hopeful she faced the cold reality of sunny
Hollywood, and her savings were soon depleted, as she went from
one studio to another trying to get work. Many times producers
told her that she probably did have a future in films; but just not
with them. Accordingly, Hattie once again took on household
jobs of sweeping, cooking, and ironing. Later in her life, she estimated
that she washed three million dishes on her way to stardom.

Sam took Hattie to see Harry Levette, a veteran stringer who
sold movie gossip to black press services, who had connections
with the Tivoli (later Bill Robinson) Theatre in Los Angeles.
Levette introduced Hattie to the Tivoli audience, and she sang with
Sarah Butler’s Old Time Southern Singers. Hattie’s “sparkling smile
and naturalness” at once made her a hit that night at the Tivoli.²
Word got around the area about her unpaid performance, and she
began to get more attention than in the past.

Yet another source of gigs in these struggling times was her
brother, Sam, known as Deacon McDaniel, or The Doleful Deacon.
He was performing for Los Angeles radio station KNX, on a
program titled “The Optimistic Do-Nut Hour,” sponsored by the
Perfection Bakery Company. Hattie begged Sam to get her a spot
on the show. Sam facetiously told his little sister, “Well, I don’t
know, Sis. This is big time, you know.” In addition to Sam,
“Optimistic Do-Nuts” featured such popular attractions as the
Satchel McVey Orchestra and White Wash Weldon, a singer whose
well known songs included “Asleep in the Deep,” and “Ten Thou-
sand Leagues Under the Sea.”³ Despite these popular regulars, Sam
did get Hattie a place on the program, and she instantly became a
hit with black West Coast listeners, writing her own songs and
gags, and playing the cook in “Miss Ann’s Kitchen.”

For her first broadcast, Hattie came into the studio “dressed
down like a debutante. . . .” She wore a formal evening gown, while
the rest of the cast had on casual clothes. The cast took a look at
her, and Tom Breneman, a KNX announcer, yelled, “Hattie’s gone
High Hat.” From that day forward, she was known as Hi-Hat
Hattie. She was, as one author put it, “a big, black, bossy, and

beautiful maid who continually forgets her place.” Some began to
refer to her as Her Haughtiness.⁴ Every Friday morning, another
KNX announcer, Bert Betterworth, gleefully proclaimed the “Opti-
mistic Do-Nut Hour,” starring Hi-Hat Hattie McDaniel, but soon
Hattie’s effervescence took over and the show actually became
known to some listeners as Hi-Hat Hattie and Her Boys.⁵

For each of her weekly performances, Hattie received $5.00.
(Later, when she became a movie extra, she also got $5.00 for each
appearance, causing her to quip that no-one in Hollywood could
count above five).⁶ Though she was “making it” popularly with
Optimistic Do-Nuts, her salary was not enough to keep her solvent.
Even in 1931, five dollars did not go very far. During the week, she
worked as a maid in wealthy, Los Angeles households, and prayed
that central casting would contact her for a movie part. She became
so depressed under these circumstances that frequently letters from
back home went unanswered. Fans in Denver were enthusiastic
about her work in Hollywood, thinking she was going “like a ball
afire.” She was then in her mid-thirties, and her sojourn to Holly-
wood was in many ways a do or die situation. But she rarely spoke
of her troubles at the time she had them. She’d always stop negative
talk about her—or anyone else’s—career, by saying, “Don’t put
that in the ether.” The admonition meant that if you didn’t want
something to happen, you didn’t even speak of it—for words have
power.

Hattie had to borrow car fare money to go for an interview at
a downtown studio. A friend advised her not to let those movie
people know that she was down and out. “Look breezy,” and
people will think you are,⁷ was the good advice Hattie got; advice
that in the years ahead she imparted to other young, struggling
actors and actresses on their way up. When Hattie went into the
studio (which, unfortunately, she did not name), for her interview,
she breezed past about twenty of her friends who were waiting,
and landed the job.⁸

Hattie sang in choruses of Southern singers in several movies
in 1931 and 1932. As merely one of dozens of such performers,
she got no screen credit; she did, however, get $5.00 a movie for
her services.
At last in 1932 she appeared in her first feature, Fox's *The Golden West*. A Romeo and Juliet like story, the film was set in the town of Preston, Kentucky, in 1845. Bad blood prevailed between the Summers and Lynch families. Betty Summers and Jerry Lynch loved each other, but could not marry because of their parents' obstinacy. Jerry moved West, and while he was away, Betty's father forced her to marry Calvin Brown. Jerry then married a girl named Helen, but was heartbroken because he had lost Betty. His sorrow ended when he was killed in an Indian raid.

Hattie, uncredited, portrayed one of the numerous house servants in the Summers household, and she tried, generally unsuccessfully, to ease Betty's pain caused by the intrusion of her family toward Jerry Lynch.10 Her part here as a beloved black servant who also became a confidante of the young daughter of the family set a pattern for many of Hattie's future movies.

In 1933, Hattie got small, household maid parts in three movies. The first two were *The Story of Temple Drake* (Paramount—based on William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*) and *The Blonde Venus* (Paramount—directed by Josef von Sternberg). The third, *I'm No Angel*, (Paramount), starred Mae West, with the part of the maid, Beulah, played by Gertrude Howard. It was in this movie that Mae West spoke those "immortal" words, "Beulah, pass me a grape." In later years, journalists frequently misidentified the person to whom it was spoken as Hattie.

The next year, 1934, Hattie started out, unlisted in the movie's credits, with *Operator 13* (MGM). Set in the Civil War, it starred Gary Cooper and Marion Davies. Hattie played Annie, the cook for the U.S. Secret Service people who were spying on the Confederates. Etta and Sam were also in this movie, along with Louise Beavers and the Mills Brothers.

During one of the fight scenes in *Operator 13*, Hattie got tickled as she watched a man get punched in the stomach. She blurted out, "He hit him in the front and bulged him out in the back."11 Though he never used the line, the director, Richard Boeslavsky, liked it, and it got Hattie some added attention. She always attributed this ad lib to the fact that soon after *Operator 13*, she got a leading part in a Will Rogers movie, *Judge Priest* (Fox).
movie; so much more in fact that she bought a house at 2177 West 31st Street in Los Angeles, and made her home there for the next several years. Also, her face became familiar. One day she was on a streetcar in Los Angeles when a young admirer came up to her, and asked if she was Hattie McDaniel. He was Wonderful Smith, himself a black performer, and that chance encounter with Hattie began a friendship that lasted for the next twenty years, during which time he gave Hattie some much needed driving lessons in her old Chevrolet.

Hattie in turn took Wonderful under her tutelage and taught him that success should make him humble, and helped develop Wonderful’s considerable talent in singing and dancing. She became so much his confidante, advisor, and beloved friend that from time to time, newspapers hinted at romance between the two. It was Wonderful who escorted Hattie, many years later, to the crowning achievement of her film life—the night she won the Academy Award for playing Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*.

Smith somehow brought out Hattie’s deep streak of folksiness. Once, when Duke Ellington and his band came to Los Angeles, Wonderful, a student of drama, played for him in a musical revue at the Mayan Theatre called “Jump for Joy.” At the end of the engagement, Ellington offered Wonderful a seven-year contract, to travel with the band and, among other things, deliver a monologue, “Hello Mr. President.” Wonderful went to Hattie for advice on whether or not to accept Ellington’s offer, only to be put off for two days. Then Hattie told him that she had had a dream in which Duke Ellington, Hattie, and a number of other people were out ‘possum hunting. They caught a ‘possum, and put him in a large tow sack. As they carried the ‘possum in the tow sack, Ellington held one end, while Hattie secured the other. While the old ‘possum struggled to escape, the Duke put out one hand and pushed it on top of the ‘possum’s head. When Hattie saw that ‘possum in the tow sack, it looked exactly like Wonderful Smith. Her advice: don’t sign the contract. He didn’t.

Another black Californian of the early thirties who became Hattie’s best friend, secretary, confidante, and “right arm” was a young journalist from Du Quoin, Illinois, Ruby Berkley Goodwin. Ruby was in San Diego in 1934 working for a black service, the Calvin News Syndicate, when the editor wrote her a note: “We hear there is a colored boy in Hollywood who arranges music for Paul Whiteman. Get a story on him.” The “colored boy” turned out to be William Grant Still, who became one of a small circle of successful black composer-arrangers. While on the Still assignment, Ruby went to the Universal Studios, where *Showboat* was being shot, hoping to get an interview with Paul Robeson, the movie’s black basso deckhand, Joe. On the *Showboat* set, Ruby saw a large, laughing, black woman surrounded by a crowd of black extras costumed as dancing girls and dockworkers. She wandered over, and recognized the woman as Hattie McDaniel, introduced herself, and instantly the two hit it off. The meeting led to some articles about Hattie, and eventually friendship and a job for Goodwin four years later as a secretary. Hattie played Queenie in this version of *Showboat*, a part that had been filled by Gertrude Howard in 1927. Critics did not single out either Howard or Hattie for their respective performances, but they hailed the movie casts as a whole for their wonderful music which filled in rather long periods of melodrama. A *New York Times* critic, Frank Nugent, said the 1936 *Showboat* should make the “world grateful to Hollywood for restoring such grand entertainment.” It really was “too good a piece to suffer neglect,” Nugent claimed.

McDaniel’s friendship with Goodwin marked her movement in earnest into black Hollywood circles and away from her older “non-professional” relationships. In late 1938, Hattie received a book of Ruby’s poems. She wrote back to Ruby, or “Goody,” as she called her, that “I am enjoying the poems immensely. I love I Dream Alone Again,” rather fitting because I just received my divorce. Smile.”

This reference to her divorce indicates that Hattie was married four times (instead of three usually mentioned in press books and film anthologies). Her second husband’s name was Howard Hickman, but she never explained when she married him, or why she divorced him.

By the mid-thirties, Hattie had become a respected, and recognized, but not particularly well-known actress. There were still
many times when she did not receive screen credit for her film appearances. She worked on a picture by picture basis without any permanent contract with a major studio. The “star system” was so entrenched in the minds of movie goers that lesser luminaries had little chance of any recognition. Hattie rarely went on location with the movies in which she played, even when going on location became fashionable. The overwhelming part of her work was in the studio, or “st-ujo,” as she tended to pronounce it. Sometimes she would not even leave town lest she get a precious call from the “stujo” to come in and do some work. Her usual workday in the “stujo” was 4 a.m. to 7:24 p.m.21

Her circle of film friends in the mid-thirties also expanded. In the black community, her closest friend was Ruby Goodwin. She was also close to Louise Beavers, Ethel Waters, Lillian Randolph, Frances Williams, Wonderful Smith, Carlton Moss, and Joel Fluellen. Included among the “big names” in Hollywood who knew her, and came to admire her work were Edward Arnold (a long-time friend, who got Hattie several movie parts), Joan Crawford, Olivia de Havilland, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, Shirley Temple (who lovingly called her “Mama Mac”), Walter Pidgeon, Henry Fonda, Ronald Reagan, and “the king,” Clark Gable. Still, Hattie must have sensed that she was just on the fringes of stardom. She kept waiting for her big break.

Hattie’s first movie of 1935 was The Little Colonel (Fox), starring Shirley Temple, Bill Robinson, and Lionel Barrymore. Her performance as Mom Beck caused a stir among some members of the black community. It was, as film historian Edward Campbell in The Celluloid South, put it, as though the lessons of the Civil War had never been learned. “Colonel Lloyd (Barrymore) ruled over a magnificent estate tended by devoted servants. Blacks still gathered on the front lawn to sing “Carry Me Back to Old Virginia,” and the Colonel still raised his glass to “the South and confusion to all its enemies.”22

Some black critics complained that in The Little Colonel, Hattie expressed the thought, written into the script, that the economic security of slavery was preferable to the vagaries of freedom. They believed the movie unfairly stereotyped blacks, and gave the world the impression that they wanted to be slaves. This movie marked the beginning of a fight by some black activists against racial casting that heated up in the years ahead until it reached a boiling point in the late forties.

Actually, however, in the mid-thirties, Hattie’s film image was not totally that of a servile, groveling menial. On the contrary, she became known to many movie audiences as an independently-minded, sometimes even sassy, operator of the household. A good example of this characterization was Alice Adams (RKO) in 1935, which starred Katharine Hepburn and Fred MacMurray. Directed by George Stevens, this adaptation of the Booth Tarkington novel concerned the social climbing antics of the Adams family. To impress a visitor (Fred MacMurray), Alice planned a sumptuous meal, prepared and served by a maid hired for the evening, but made to appear as a permanent employee. The maid was Malena Burns, played by Hattie McDaniel. Her “efforts” at advancing the Adams’ fortune that evening were quite disastrous. First, Malena told Alice the weather was “too hot” to serve soup as an appetizer, and then she brought in some caviar sandwiches. Each time she appeared at the table, Malena loudly chewed gum and popped it, which added to Alice’s consternation. Once while serving, Malena’s head scarf fell onto the table, and then she tripped down the cellar steps.

Altogether, Hattie’s performance in Alice Adams was a comic tour de force, a “Greek chorus” commenting on the Adamses. She was slow and bumbling like Stepin Fetchit, but beyond Stepin Fetchit, she was a cantankerous and, as one author put it, “talk back to whitey,” maid.23

This image of Hattie did not fare well with Southern movie goers. Alice Adams was the first picture many of them had seen in which a black showed bossiness or impertinence to whites.

Ironically, by 1935, Hattie had two movie images. She was much too servile in The Little Colonel, for the liking of many blacks; she was much too independent in Alice Adams for numerous whites. Over the next several years she alternated in these characteristics.

In Another Face (RKO) she played Nellie, who was constantly told to “act more delicate,” but she was quick to reply that she was
Hattie: The Life of Hattie McDaniel

a maid, and “I ain’t no cook.” In Gentle Julia (Fox) the story was the same: flippan Hattie acted the role of Kitty Silvers. When Julia wanted Kitty to wash the dog, Kettle responded, “No Ma’am, Miss Julia. I say I’m no dog washerwoman for nobody. . . . My job is cooking victuals for you and your pa. And I ain’t playin’ nurse to no dog.” When Grandpa asked Kitty where the dog came from, she told him, “I don’t know, sir, who done it, no more than the lilies of the valley, what toil, neither do they spin.”

In Mad Miss Manton (RKO), Hattie played Hilda and put another twist on her evolving persona as the fierce protectress of Barbara Stanwyck. Once when the doorbell rang persistently, Hattie shouted, “I heard it. I heard it. I ain’t deaf. Sometimes I wish I wuz.” Audiences had mixed reactions as Hattie threw a pitcher of water into Henry Fonda’s face when he came with flowers in hand, calling on Barbara Stanwyck. Sure, Hattie was just “obeying orders,” but in the America of the mid-thirties both North and South, it was something different, to say the least, to see a black person act this aggressively toward whites. One line in the movie was to some extent prophetic. A character remarked, “when the revolution comes, our help will turn against us.” Hattie replied that she couldn’t handle a gun. “I’s a pacifist.”

Star For A Night, a 1936 Fox production (originally called The Holy Lie) created a new dimension for Hattie: sex appeal. She played the usual maid, who one night while the family was out let her boyfriend in.

“Come on in, big boy?”

“Look out sister, here I goes, and what I does nobody knows.”

“Nobody won’t be back ’til 11:30. . . . Come on, big boy, in the kitchen and we’ll make ourselves comfortable while I fixes us a drink.”

“Where you leads I got to follow, and I won’t stop for the red lights.”

“You’re telling me. Take a chair, big boy. Sure nuff. What a night!”

Hattie largely reverted to racial stereotypes as they were written for her roles in most of her other movies of the thirties. In Sinclair Lewis’ Babbit (RKO), Hattie was afraid of a toaster and other “new fangled” gadgets such as the telephone. In The Bride Walks Out (RKO), she exclaimed, “I don’t see why white men don’t want their wives to work. I went to work just as soon as I married.”

Through the decade, her roles lost the flavor she had given in earlier performances. In Warner’s Over the Goal, for example, as Hanna, throughout the movie, she was the superstitious, eye-rolling comic servant that so many black newspaper writers were coming to hate. The movie was, of course, about football and Hanna and her husband, William, were the caretakers at the college where football was so popular. The school’s mascot was a large black bear. To keep the bear safe, William brought it home with him. During the night, while Hanna was sleeping, she rolled over to find that the bear—not her husband William—was in the bed with her. The ensuing ruckus amused movie audiences from coast to coast.

Racing Lady (RKO) definitely put Hattie into a black stereotype. She constantly spoke about the importance of working for “quality folks,” and she used a rabbit’s foot and voodoo charms to try to affect the outcome of a horse race. Hattie played the overworked maid Abby in this movie, and her favorite expressions were “Lawsy me!” and “Bless my soul!” and “Two Shakes of a Lamb’s tail!” Her “chilluns” were sleepy-headed, lazy, and fawning. Her husband, Josephus Hezekiah, was almost as bad.

In Forty Five Fathers (Fox), Hattie played Beulah, who expressed pleasure at the departure from the household of two uppity English housekeepers. The head of the household rebuked Beulah to control her tongue, and she replied, “Yessir, but ah hopes you gets some real white folks this time.” Everybody’s Baby was a 1938 Fox production, in which a young black child wandered into a room where a group of white people were talking. Hattie, apologizing for the child’s entry, said, to the amusement of everyone present, “There was too much sun in the back where I’s hangin’ out clothes, and I figure she’s already tan enough.”
"A Woman's Gifts Will Make Room for Her"

In *Can This Be Dixie?* (Fox), Hattie played Lizzie, and sang in characteristic fashion:

*Don't quit pickin'*
*Else you don't get no chicken.*
*Never get a moment to play*
*Take pick, pick Pickaninny, pick that cotton*
*Yo Mammie and yo Pappy so old and gray*
*Now they's so tired and you all's required to pick away 'til judgement day.*

This song, plus other material in the movie caused many black editors to heap up their typewriters. One writer complained that Hattie, along with Louise Beavers, Clarence Muse, and Stepin Fetchit, repeated the same role endlessly—“devoted, dog-like servant, lazy, good for nothing, meek and happy.”

As the decade drew to a close, Hattie had become a conspicuous (as opposed to leading) actress. Her ascendency—once she did break into movies—was fairly rapid. In the thirties she played noticeable roles in forty different movies, averaging one movie a month in 1936 alone. True, each of her roles was as a domestic servant of some sort, but it was “being in the movies,” and that’s what she wanted. At this early stage of her movie career, Hattie came by her parts “pot-luck,” and was the creation of her scripts. She had no continuity of writers, directors, actors, or “white friends at court,” so to speak, to get parts for her. Later, after she became famous, producers such as David O. Selznick created parts specially tailored for her talents.

When a friend objected to her playing so many servant parts, or “handkerchief heads” as they came to be called, she replied “Hell, I’d rather play a maid than be one.” She certainly had had experience as a maid both in movies and real life, so she spoke authoritatively on the subject.

Her home on 31st Street, in a neighborhood of rambling bungalows in old white Los Angeles, became a magnet for aspiring young actors and actresses. She gave them board and lodging, sometimes for months on end, until they found work. Hattie loved children, and became godmother to the children of many friends. At one time Hattie had as many as thirty godchildren, perhaps compensating her for a lifelong dream to have a child of her own.

Hattie also became philosophical as the thirties drew to a close. She was glad, she said, that her father, Henry, had taught her early on to be an optimist about life. Through even her harshest times, she remembered his advice that if you want something badly enough, and are willing to work for it, you will be successful.

Henry had always been fond of quoting the biblical proverb that “A man’s gifts will make room for him,” which she adapted to suit her own purposes. She was positive that neither Henry nor God would mind. Also she came to feel obliged to pay back the world for its kindnesses. This tenet led her toward many acts of charity in the years ahead. She made generous contributions to charitable organizations and orphanages, and, busy as she was with the movies, found time to visit old people in nursing homes, and patients in hospitals, to cheer them up with her big, flashing smile and bubbling personality. (Her favorite charities were the Braille Institute, the Jewish Home for the Aged, the Home for Children in New York, and the Boys Home of the Los Angeles People’s Independent Church of Christ.) All these activities showed that Hattie had not forgotten the lessons of her simple upbringing that one should be kind to everyone, and that her circle of friends went beyond her film life.

Hattie was not much of a reader, although she enjoyed poetry. Consequently Ruby Goodwin, a poet in addition to being a journalist, frequently sent her creations to Hattie, who enjoyed them immensely. Her favorite poet, however, was Paul Lawrence Dunbar. She found comfort and solace in words of poems like “We Wear the Mask,” which must have struck Hattie with some force, given her screen persona.

But there was one book making the rounds in the late thirties that all of Hattie’s friends recommended to her. There was a character in it, they believed, which was ready made for Hattie. Such a role might enable Hattie to merge her screen images. It would be fine, for example, for Hattie to be bossy, cantankerous, and sassy, if she could also be loveable about it, and “stay in her
place” in the context of a white society. After so much persuasion, Hattie yielded and read the book. Yes, she affirmed excitedly, there was a part for her, and she sensed that she would have an opportunity to test for it. To be ready to portray the role of Mammy, and do it right, she read the book three times. The book, of course, was Gone With the Wind.

CHAPTER THREE

“I Did My Best and God Did the Rest”

One of the most memorable episodes in movie history was David O. Selznick’s talent search for the film version of Gone With the Wind. When he acquired Margaret Mitchell’s novel, Selznick let it be known that the casting was to be competitive; thus, he and his staff traveled through much of the United States, visiting colleges and little theatre groups, looking for suitable talent to play the various parts in his upcoming epic.1 (Apparently the only part in the film that was not up for grabs was Rhett Butler. Though he reportedly did not want the role, Clark Gable was the unanimous choice.)

Many actresses and actors, famous and otherwise, tested for the roles of Melanie and Ashley Wilkes (Ann Sheridan, Margaret Sullivan, Lana Turner, Bruce Lister, Lew Ayres, Melvyn Douglas, Robert Young),2 and the other players at Tara and Twelve Oaks. The part of Scarlett was not actually chosen until the filming was underway. Selznick’s brother brought Vivien Leigh with him to view the first scene, and Selznick was entranced by her. The competition was quite keen for the black roles, and of these, that of Mammy received most of the attention.
The best Hollywood guesses pointed to the choice of Louise Beavers, who had gained fame in *Imitation of Life*. She and Hattie were long time friends, their careers and lives frequently crossing. (Many film anthologies even today list Hattie with roles that were actually played by Beavers, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and *Reap the Wild Wind*, to name two.)

In 1937, Beavers was better known than Hattie, and possessed a wider range of experience in such films as *Bullets or Ballots* and *Imitation of Life*. She was thus favored by many important people for Mammy. Sol Lindsfer, an official at RKO, wrote a strong letter for Beavers to George Cukor who later became the first director of *Gone With the Wind*. She had recently completed *Rainbow on the River* for RKO, and on her subsequent personal appearance tour, the public showed their immense fondness for her. As Lindsfer wrote: “It is our intention to publicize her name as being Hattie McDaniel, instead of ‘the colored woman who was in *Imitation of Life*’ She will be as well known to motion picture fans as Bert Williams was to theatre goers. We have a feeling that Louise Beavers, cast in important pictures, can do much to enhance their entertainment value.”

Lindsfer’s opinions were underscored by dozens of letters arriving each day at Selznick International supporting Beavers for the role of Mammy. According to reports, though, Beavers walked in for her first interview at Selznick elegantly dressed, wearing her finest furs, an appearance not suggesting the role of Mammy.

Not all the letters, however, were for Beavers. No less a personage than the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, a known champion of blacks, got in on the advice-giving, touting the White House cook, Elizabeth McDuffie (Mammy White House), as an excellent Mammy, saying she was “extremely capable and has a great deal of histrionic ability.” Selznick was uncomfortable with the White House connection because he feared the public would charge undue political influence if McDuffie got the role. Although McDuffie tested for the part, she did not, of course, get it. Mrs. Roosevelt was not alone in trying to get her cook into the movies. In Atlanta, it became commonplace for wealthy Georgians to show up with their servants at author Margaret Mitchell’s home, for an

“audition.” The frustrated Mitchell had to tell the would-be Mammys that she had little to do with the movie production of the novel.

Then there were the longshot applicants for the role. One letter to Selznick came from a Mississippian, Bessie Mack, who wrote: “I believe I am your Mammy. I am fat, black, aged 36, born, reared Mississippi.” Mack had toured the United States four times she said, singing black spirituals and reading dialect poems. Although she had two years of college behind her, she had fallen on hard times in the depression-ridden thirties. Mack wanted Selznick to send her a train ticket so she could come to Hollywood for a test. If such ticket were against Selznick’s policy (as indeed it was), Mack said she would borrow the money for the trip. There is no record that Mack ever received a screen test for Mammy.

Another candidate for Mammy was the veteran actress, Madame Sul-te-Wan, who had recently played the role of a slave in Frank Lloyd’s *Maid of Salem*. Still other possibilities were two somewhat obscure black actresses, Hattie Noel and Bertha Powell. Selznick interviewed them on December 5, and tested a few days later. Along with them was another black player who had numerous movies to her credit, but never the “big break.” Her name was Hattie McDaniel. As Louise Beavers had worn her finest clothes to be interviewed for the part of Mammy, Hattie showed up authentically dressed as a typical Old Southern Mammy. Selznick was so impressed, he said he could “smell the magnolias.” Her case was not hurt, either, by the fact that she was the favorite of leading man Clark Gable.

There is scant evidence that Hattie vigorously sought the role of Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, though it is true that she had acquired an agent, MCA Artists of Beverly Hills. Even as Hattie read the book, she had the instinctive feeling that she would be sought out for the part, but it was as much a case of Selznick finding Hattie as it was the other way around.

Hattie may never have known it, but one of her early supporters for the role of Mammy was Bing Crosby. On January 15, 1937, Crosby wrote to Selznick:
Being loath to go down in cinema history as the only citizen not on record for sticking my nose into the casting for GWTW, I would like to suggest a Mammy. The little lady I have in mind played opposite Robeson in Showboat, and to my mind would be a cinch. I don’t know her name, but your hirelings in the casting office could dig it up. Hoping you will pardon my guts.

The “little lady,” of course, was Hattie McDaniel. When they knew each other better Crosby gave Hattie a “morto” that she liked to repeat to her friends: “Always remember this; there are only eighteen inches between a pat on the back, and a kick in the rump.” In any case, Selznick whimsically thanked Crosby: “Dear Bing, Thanks for the suggestion. And also for not wanting to play Scarlett. DOS.”

McDaniel tested for Mammy on December 6, 1938 with the scene from the beginning of GWTW where Mammy is laying a corset onto Scarlett, and fussing because Scarlett had been “gobbling like a hawk,” running the risk of gaining unwanted weight. Mammy also counselled the young Southern lass against making a fool of herself over Ashley Wilkes, object of her infatuation, at the upcoming barbecue at Twelve Oaks Plantation. “Mr. Ashley” was betrothed to Melanie Hamilton and Scarlett should, Mammy warned, resign herself to that fact. Hattie outshone the other contestants as she emoted with her voice, shuffles, and a loud thick Georgian accent which she acquired for the occasion. As she said later, she just opened her heart and let the words flow. When she finished her audition that day, Selznick cancelled all others. He had found his Mammy in Hattie who exemplified all those characteristics Selznick wanted for the role, a Mammy who was more than a servant: “a confidante, counselor, and manager of the O’Hara household.” (Later reviews of GWTW referred to Mammy as the “Emily Post of the O’Haras”.) Besides, Hattie was now far ahead in the public polling for Mammy. The tally for December 8 showed 106 letters for Hattie, one for Louise Beavers, and one for another black actress named Helen Wesley.

Not all the Selznick personnel, however, were enamored with Hattie. At the beginning of production, Selznick brought in a dialect expert from Macon, Georgia, Susan Myrick, a reporter on

the Macon Telegraph. Though she and Hattie ultimately became the best of friends, Myrick did not at first favor Hattie for the role, confiding in a letter to Margaret Mitchell, January 15, 1939, that in her view,

Hattie McDaniel . . . is not the right Mammy . . . [S]he lacks dignity, age, nobility and . . . she hasn’t the right face for it.

Fortunately, not many people listened to Miss Myrick’s opinion on who should play Mammy.

Selznick offered Hattie a contract on January 27, 1939, borrowing her from Warner Brothers, with whom she had been affiliated for quite some time, though most of her movies in the thirties had been made for Fox. Her services to Selznick were to begin on February 1, and run for renewable fifteen-week periods at $450 a week for her work with Selznick International.

Hattie promised to give her entire time, attention, and best talents to Selznick productions. The producer had the right to dub Hattie’s appearance, acts and voice. If for any reason her face were disfigured, or her voice impaired, or if her “present unique and unusual value as an actress” changed, the agreement with Selznick would become null and void. In emphasis of this requirement, the contract obliged Hattie to submit to any medical examinations the producer might want.

There was a “morals” clause in the contract Hattie signed. If she committed an offense under federal, state, or local laws, or if her manners “offended decency, morality, or social propriety,” to the point that it caused a public scandal, the agreement could be terminated.

If Hattie had to travel (such as on promotional tours or to shooting locations), Selznick would pay for it. Otherwise, while working on Gone With the Wind, she would wait each day for the studio car to pick her up. One limousine was used to transport all the black players in GWTW, while the principal whites had his/her own private service, furnished by Selznick, a reflection of the “star system” that dominated Hollywood at that time, not racism.

If Selznick wanted to lend out Hattie to another studio, he and that studio would negotiate a price. No matter how high the
amount, Hattie would still receive only her contractual fee of $450 a week. (This was common practice; Warner did it when Hattie worked for Fox.) Selznick, who was infamous for penning memos to his staff, wrote many about filling up any of the "off-time" of Hattie and the other "colored" players. He suggested in a memo on March 29, 1939, right in the middle of filming GWTW that his assistant, Henry Ginsberg, hire an agent to see that Hattie, Butterfly McQueen, and the rest of the black players be hired out for other pictures, because such a practice "could save us a substantial amount of money."\footnote{15}

Of course, it could be asserted that this system of hiring out to other studios, aside from giving Hattie gainful employment, also offered her a widespread fame. Also, it is true that the movie industry was far ahead of the rest of the country in giving opportunities to blacks. After GWTW, Hattie signed another Selznick contract which started at $500 a week and, if she worked steadily with Selznick three or four years, could rise to $1,500 a week.\footnote{16}

When the news spread that Selznick would produce GWTW, two dialect problems relevant to blacks cropped up. One had to do with Southern accents in general, and with black dialects specifically.

As early as October 1936, there were some misgivings about dialect. Carl Strange, Atlanta office manager of Macmillan, Mitchell's publisher, told Selznick that regardless of the stars for GWTW, the whole production could be ruined if a wrong selection were made for the black cast. He said, "If the parts of Pork, Mammy, Uncle Peter, and Prissy, are given to some of our bright Harlem products with harsh voices or to Negroes who know no better than to accept some director's word for it, that they are to use 'you all' in the singular, you will have missed by that much having a good picture, regardless of who plays the parts of Scarlett, Ashley, Melanie, and the others of the leading characters."\footnote{17}

Strange went on to complain about the recent stage version of Green Pastures, saying that it was an "absurdity." Marc Connelly, he said, imposed Pennsylvania Dutch accents on "Harlem harshness." (The angels, for example, wished De Lawd would leave them clean up his office.) Strange admitted that he did not know very many available black actors. He thought, however, that Stepin Fetchit would be "100 percent all right." He believed, too, that the characters in a recent movie, The Gorgeous Hussy, would be acceptable except for John Randolph's butler who spoke to him and used "you-all" with no-one else in mind. Strange begged Selznick "not to spoil what may be the greatest picture of the century" by the travesty of false dialect.\footnote{18}

Selznick assured Strange\footnote{19} that he and his production crews would be as faithful as possible to the original material, including dialects; and suggested that two people who had not read either the book or the script be placed on the stage to hear the rehearsals to make sure that "the Negroes" were "completely understandable." He wanted special attention paid to Pork's and Prissy's lines, as well as to Uncle Peter's and even Mammy's. Selznick thought it important that one of the two listeners be an Englishman, apparently believing that if someone from England understood Southern accents and black dialects, anyone could.\footnote{20}

The dialect problem did not cause as much public frenzy as had the casting contests. Nevertheless, there was some attention given to the matter. Birmingham, Alabama's morning newspaper, The Post, conducted a search over radio station WAPI, for one man and one woman with "true Southern accents." Tapes of the winners were to be sent to the Selznick studios, so that no one there would needlessly be misinformed.\footnote{21}

The United Daughters of the Confederacy also got into the dialect act. Mrs. E. Dolly Blount Lamar of the Alabama UDC urged Selznick to put more emphasis on naturalness than local color. "The Southern intonations cannot—never have been—successfully reproduced by one not native to the section." If the dialect were false in GWTW, the movie would exasperate Southerners and be unconvincing to the general public.\footnote{22} Mrs. Lamar also wrote to Clark Gable in June 1938, imploring him not to try to imitate "so-called Southernisms. If you will speak naturally, guided by your own good judgment and flair for portrayal previously proven, you will present a satisfactory result."\footnote{23} Gable refused to take any dialect lessons, believing that his many fans would not notice whether he
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had a Southern accent or not, and wouldn't care. As it turned out, accent and dialect were not that big of an issue on the sets of GWTW. Whenever difficulties did arise, Susan Myrick was on hand, with her colleague, Will Price, to set things straight. As Myrick pointed out, all the black actresses and actors in GWTW "fell easily into the Negro dialect as it was written by Margaret Mitchell and carefully preserved in the script.”

A far larger problem than dialect dealt with race and GWTW. As the publicity for the movie widened, many black leaders feared extensive demeaning portrayals of their people. The argument raged from 1936, when Selznick first announced his purchase of Gone With the Wind until after its release.

When the book first appeared, not all of its reviews were favorable. In The Daily Worker, David Platt charged that GWTW glorified the Ku Klux Klan, the old Southern "slaveocracy," and lynch laws. Just as the NAACP had objected to Thomas Dixon's novel and play The Clansman in 1906 and to its filming in 1915 by D. W. Griffith, as The Birth of a Nation, the contemporary generation of blacks rejected the racism and incorrect historical accounts to be found in Gone With the Wind.

Dona Popel reviewed the book for the Journal of Negro Life. She said, "In [Miss Mitchell's] array of Mammiss, Cookies, Porkies, and Samms, one sees only ebony black Negroes. One or two may be described as leather colored. The term of 'mulatto' is used disparagingly.” L. D. Reddick's review for The Journal Of Negro History ascribed honesty to Miss Mitchell's efforts, though limited by her "passion and sectional and racial bias.”

As the casting arrangements for the film continued, much of the Jewish community joined with blacks in expressing their misgivings. With Hitler's Germany looming in Europe, Cleveland's Rabbi Barnett Brickner told Selznick that "surely at this time you would want to do nothing that might tend even in the slightest way to arouse anti-racist feelings.” The Rabbi mentioned that many of the cast officials for filming GWTW were Jewish, including Selznick, and they would be upset if the racial slurs and historical inaccuracies of the book were perpetuated by the movie.

The black press scorché the book, and soon-to-be movie, as did indeed some of the white press. Lewis Gannett, for example, of the New York Herald Tribune wrote to Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association of Colored People, that "I planned my vacation so that I wouldn't have to read that book. And then when it sold a million, I had to anyway. I've slurred it on every possible occasion since, but never reviewed it.” Earl Morris of the Pittsburgh Courier, alarmed at the prospect of having black stereotyping broadcast throughout the country and the world, campaigned against the book's adaptation into a movie. His most prominent article was a pamphlet, "Sailing With the Breeze," in which he urged his readers to contact the Selznick legal department in an effort to stifle if not rid the upcoming movie of the word, "nigger.” Ironically he seemed to go out of his way to give favorable publicity to Hattie McDaniel and ultimately was invited to California to see some of the filming, an invitation he readily accepted.

The major black objection toward GWTW was its portrayal of slaves and the idea that for some slaves like Mammy and Pork, servility was preferable to freedom.

In the book, Scarlett had been attacked by a black (in the movie, it was by a white), and the Ku Klux Klan had gone off to "save" her honor. Big Sam, a gang boss, again in the book, had referred to "trashy niggers," and when Mammy herself set foot in Atlanta, one of her first utterances had to do with "no-good niggers." It was these slurs against the black race that activated so many people in late 1938 and early 1939, as filming moved ahead. One of the strongest participants in the matter was the National Association of Colored People, whose executive secretary, Walter White, suggested that Selznick employ a black person to view the filming of GWTW. There is no evidence that Selznick ever took this action, although he brought columnist Morris out to Hollywood for extended periods. Noted civil rights activist, Arthur Spingarn, suggested Professor Charles Wesley of Howard University as black advisor for the film, but this suggestion apparently never materialized. Also, White believed that all those in decisive positions on the film (screenwriting, directing, producing, etc.)
should be required to read W. E. B. Du Bois’ Black Reconstruction as a source of knowledge to avoid numerous errors.25

At first the Selznick people claimed that they would not “dignify”26 black newspaper criticisms with replies. One of their representatives, Marcella Rabwin, however, wanted to send special portraits of the black characters to the leading black newspapers of the day, “treating these actors as stars of the picture. In other words, we would let our actors in GWTW do our work for us in the colored newspapers across the country.”27 As time passed, though, the race question became increasingly important to Selznick and his associates. For instance, they began to take Walter White seriously because, said Selznick, he was a “very important man,” and “his ill will could rouse a swarm of bad editorials in Negro journals throughout the country.”28 Selznick suggested that White be brought to the GWTW sets and given a red-carpet tour of the place.

Certainly, the black protests had their impact. Hattie herself objected to the word “nigger” and ultimately, all references to this slur were eliminated, although the word “darky” was used. While it was true that many of Hattie’s film roles in the past had been of a servile nature, she did not carry her obsequiousness into real life. She was justly proud of her race and of her career, and would not lightly view slanders against either. Her opinions on the matter, along with the thoughts of her secretary, Ruby Berkley Goodwin, led to an extensive dialogue among the actors and writers connected with GWTW about usage of the word.

Margaret Mitchell did not object to removing the word “nigger” from the script,29 despite her equal scorn for liberal “professional Negroes,” and conservative “professional Southerners.”30 Nevertheless there was a widespread belief on the GWTW sets that it was common for black people to call each other “nigger,” in either an affectionate or contemptuous manner; they objected only when a white person referred to them by that name. Was it not all right for Mammy, Pork, Prissy, Sam, and Uncle Peter to call each other “niggers?” Much was also made of the fact that several recent movies had used the word “wop” to refer to Italians, and that no widespread protest had occurred as a result.

All of these justifications and rationalizations notwithstanding, Selznick ultimately yielded on the word “nigger,” and wrote to Walter White that he had gone farther than the removal of “nigger” from the script. He had “left no stone unturned in our efforts to eliminate from our picture any possible objections which the Negroes of America may have had to portions of the novel, GWTW.”31 The important black characters in the movie, Selznick proclaimed, would be cast as “lovable, faithful, high-minded people . . . [who] . . . would leave no impression but a very nice one.” In the movie, Mammy could not refer, as she had in the book, to “De Lawd,” and could not exclaim, “Praise de Lawd!”32

Selznick continued that “Mammy is treated very loveably” (in the movie) and with great dignity. The only liberties, he said, that the movie took from the book were to “improve the Negro position . . . .” He asserted further that “We have the greatest friendship toward . . . [blacks] and their cause. We are not portraying Negroes as either mean or bad.” The movie, exclaimed Selznick, was “free of anti-Negro propaganda.”33 He summed up his feelings by saying that “I think these are no times in which to offend any race or people.”34 He added that “I feel so keenly about what is happening to the Jews of the world that I cannot help but sympathize with the Negroes and their fears, however unjustified they may be about material which they regard as insulting or damaging.”35

Principal photography of Gone With the Wind finally started on January 26, 1939, the first scene (actually shot on December 10, 1938) being the burning of Atlanta. On the sets, Hattie quickly became the informal entertainer. Typically one day at the noon hour, Vivien Leigh walked over to Hattie, and said, “Mammy, may I go to lunch?” Hattie replied in her Mammy-like manner, “Wheat yo goin’?” And then they both laughed, as they remembered they were not playing a scene.36 One of Hattie’s favorite scenes from the movie was of the defeated homeward bound Confederate soldiers stopping by Tara for rest and food. Everything on the set was authentic, right down to the food: real Southern corn pone, turnip greens, dry salt pork, and sweet potatoes. When the studio commissary sent out box lunches that day of chicken and turkey sand-
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wiches, the delivery man found the entire cast of GWTW dining on "soul food." Technical advisors Susan Myrick, Will Price, and Wilbur Kurtz joined Hattie, Vivien Leigh, and Clark Gable in the feast. Hattie exclaimed, "The old Southern standby had won out over a Hollywood diet and many of the box lunches were returned to the cafeteria unopened."  

Another favorite scene had Mammy and Rhett Butler having a drink together right after Bonnie Butler's birth. In the scene they were drinking only colored water. As the takes multiplied, Hattie remarked, "I sure am tired of drinking this colored tea." Soon after she said this, Gable's valet left the set. He returned a while later, and since everyone was smiling at him, Hattie smiled too. When it was time for the next take of the drinking scene, the director yelled, "Lights, camera, action!" and Hattie took a big swig of her drink. Instead of tea, she had just swallowed a large quantity of scotch, bringing "whoops of laughter, and breaking up the scene entirely."  

Hattie said of the incident, "It was the real stuff, so they say, and they tell me it was good, but I don't know because it was burning my mouth so. The idea of him playing that kind of a trick on poor ol' Mammy! I'm telling you, it was the hottest afternoon I had seen in many a day, and the sun wasn't shining either. The next morning, he had the audacity to whiz past me and holler, 'Mammy, how's the hang-over?"  

In the same scene, Mammy wore the red silk petticoat Rhett had bought for her but which she heretofore refused to wear because she disapproved of "Mr. Rhett's mean ways." But Bonnie's birth was a joyful time, and Mammy buried her old antagonisms. In the scene, her petticoat was supposed to swish loudly, and Rhett was to say, "What is that rustling noise I hear, Mammy?" Perhaps it was the mix-up in drinks but, inexplicably, Hattie forgot her lines. She stood still as the camera ground on. Finally, Gable, realizing what had happened, grinned and said, "What is that rustling noise I was supposed to hear if you had walked away, Mammy?"  

One day Susan Myrick found Hattie on the set with a pencil and paper, moving her lips, jiggling her feet, and laughing to herself. "What on earth are you up to, Mammy?" she asked. Hattie replied that she was writing an act for the time that she might go on a personal appearance tour for GWTW. Then, as Susan Myrick explained, Hattie "eased herself out of the chair and began demonstrating an act she did in vaudeville. . . . It was fine entertainment, too, I can tell you. . . . Mammy went into a tap dance, humming in her lush contralto voice, 'Way down upon de Swance River.' She turned and she kicked, and she did limping steps and she rolled her eyes, and she demonstrated the ways in which a male chorus does its stuff in a dance routine."  

One day many of the cast came to work with colds. Myrick said she felt happier about her malady than she otherwise would because she was in such "good company" with Clark Gable and Hattie McDaniel, who were also suffering. Myrick thought that Hattie had played Mammy for so long in GWTW that she now wanted to play Mammy in real life, worrying about Myrick and Gable's coughing, and made them take a big dose of cough syrup every hour or so, which, said Myrick, was "made up according to an old formula which Hattie got from her mother." The medicine contained "linseed oil, lemon juice, and some of the best bourbon." Under the circumstances, the cast suffered numerous "re-lapses."  

While many viewers agreed that Hattie was excellent throughout the movie as Mammy, her fans acknowledged that there was one scene that cinched the Oscar for her. Even while the movie was still in production, it became known as The Scene. It came after Bonnie Butler's death. Everyone was trying to get her father, Rhett, to agree to her burial. Rhett was so upset that he refused to have the body moved. Finally, Melanie Wilkes came to the Butler household, and there she confronted a wildly emotional Mammy. Though, according to Carroll Nye (who played Frank Kennedy in the movie), Hattie kept forgetting her lines for the scene, she finally did choke out these words:

"Mistuh Rhett done los' his min' since Bonnie was killed trying to make her pony take a high jump. Den dis evenin' Miss Scarlett holler th' du do' dat de funel set fer termerrin' mawnin' and he says 'Try
dat an' Ah kills yer tenderers. Does you think Ah'm gwine put mah chile in de dark when she so skeered of it? Yessum, it's de Gawd's trust. He ain't gwine let us bury dat chile.49

All the while she poured this out to Melanie, Mammy wiped her big eyes and wept profusely. It was perhaps the movie's most touching moment.

Many people on the set the day the scene was shot realized that it would come close to winning an Oscar for Hattie. One person who was particularly impressed was Olivia de Havilland, who had visions of getting the best supporting actress award for her portrayal of Melanie. She knew, though, when the scene ended, that “Mammy McDaniel” had it. Olivia said afterwards, “That scene probably won Hattie her Oscar and that almost broke my heart too—at least at the time.”50 Later, too, Variety, the show business journal, also predicted that “Time will set a mark on this moment in the picture as one of those inspirational bits of histrionics long remembered.”51

The movie was finished in the fall of 1939, and ready for the industry’s censor, the “Hays Office.” Will H. Hays, an attorney, former congressman, and one of President Warren G. Harding’s postmaster generals, “ran herd” on all the movies put out in the thirties and on into the forties. He was chosen by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to “codify and enforce” movie morality. In GWTW, of course, the most debated line was “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn!” an innocent oath by Rhett Butler which violated the producers’ self-imposed code.

Other minor offenses caught the eye of the Hays Office, and the words “diaper” and “belch” were stricken from the movie, (but later restored), though the phrase “wipe yo nose,” was left in.52 In addition to the Hays Office in Hollywood, GWTW, like all other movies, had to get clearance from many state censor boards and from numerous foreign governments before it could be shown in cinemas. It was a time consuming, often frustrating, process.

When the movie was finished, Selznick knew he had a racially touchy product on his hands and sought to avert controversy. Nevertheless, he praised Hattie: “I should like at this time to congratulate and thank you for your brilliant performance as Mammy in GWTW. I think you will find it is universally acclaimed as one of the finest performances of this or any other year.”53 Margaret Mitchell also recognized Hattie and sent her a set of Wedgewood cups and saucers, each saucer hand painted with an Atlanta landmark of the Civil War era.

Selznick soon found himself confronted with two problems of racial etiquette in relation to Hattie McDaniel and the role of Mammy. One was the program to be used in the showings and major advertisements for GWTW. On the back of the program was a montage of all the movie’s major players, with, of course, Hattie included as Mammy. Although Selznick himself responded that he would like to see the matter of “black and white” put aside, the staff worried about the inclusion of Hattie in the programs that would be distributed throughout the South. He argued that Southerners were more fond of blacks “in their place” than the much-vaulted Northern affection for them, and therefore begged the program makers to include the blacks, or at least Hattie, because “she really gives a performance that if merit alone ruled, would entitle her practically to co-starring.”54

In the end the sales department recognized Selznick’s protests about the program and compromised. When they were printed, Hattie’s visage was included on the programs distributed in New York and Los Angeles, while the program in Atlanta and other Southern cities, featured Tara and only the white players.

This fear of alienating white Southerners continued far beyond the program, the most glaring example being the Atlanta premiere of the movie in December 1939. Selznick’s initial reaction to the question was not to jump to any conclusions. It had not yet been shown, he said in November, that whites would object to the black stars’ presence, especially Mammy, at the Atlanta premiere. Besides, he argued, the “colored” actors could circulate through the black sections of town, generating publicity for the movie and giving interviews to black newspapers. He reasoned that a short personal appearance at the premiere, would justify bringing the black players to Atlanta.55

Selznick’s representative in Atlanta, Legare Davis, disagreed,
arguing that if the black players appeared in the Atlanta premiere, especially Hattie, they would be obliged to stay in sub-standard rooms in the segregated section of town. Moreover, he said, their inclusion “might cause some comment and might be a handle that someone could seize and use as a club.” Therefore, “while it was unfortunate to exclude Mammy,” Davis thought it was the “wisest policy, to keep any opportunities from arising that would allow someone to cause trouble.” Selznick regretted the situation, for he really believed that Hattie’s performance in GWTW would cause her to be hailed as the “greatest Negro performer of this decade.”76

As with the programs, he did not push the matter, and he acquiesced in the decision not to bring any of the black players to Atlanta. Selznick was probably relieved when Hattie said that she could not go to Atlanta, because she was “otherwise committed.” She wrote to Selznick just as he was leaving for the Southern city:

I am writing to thank you . . . for the opportunity given me to play the part of Mammy in the epochal drama of the Old South. I have nothing but the highest praise for the cooperation extended by my fellow players and the entire studio staff. I am sure that the picture will live up to every expectation of the producer and preview critics, and I hope that Mammy when viewed by the masses, will be the exact replica of what Miss Mitchell intended her to be.77

Nonetheless, Hattie’s diffidence notwithstanding, as Atlanta and America thrilled to the opening of Gone With the Wind, one of its principal stars was missing from the festivities. In late 1940, at a second grand showing of GWTW in Atlanta; the so-called “Second Premiere,” Hattie did show up for a brief personal appearance and in Denver, Hattie’s hometown, the Five Points cinema marquee read Gone With the Wind, starring HATTIE MCDANIEL and vivien leigh.

Did Hattie mind being shunned in 1939 by the Atlanta premiere? Of course she did. She was proud of her accomplishments without being “prideful.” She also loved her race, and was loved by them, but felt that sudden jolts to the white community were not the way to change things. One of her favorite sayings was that in her life God came first and work came second.78 Through hard work and gentle example, Hattie believed she could make life better, not only for blacks, but for whites as well. Probably her favorite saying was “Faith is the black person’s federal reserve system.”79

As soon as GWTW began to fill the cinemas, black and ultra-liberal reactions proliferated. The Daily Worker’s first attempt to get a review was not successful. A $25.00 per week reporter, Howard Rushmore, was told even before he saw the picture to “blister it.” Rushmore’s review spoke of the “technical achievement” and “themetic sweep” of GWTW; however, he called the picture a “magnificent bore,” and criticized what he thought were anti-black sequences.80

The Daily Worker editors rejected Rushmore’s review as a “shameless glorification of white chauvinism and an affront to the Negro people.” When Rushmore quit his job at the paper, he stated that its editorial policies were controlled in Moscow rather than New York, and that was why he had no choice in the content of the review he was assigned to write.81

The paper got what it wanted with freelance reviewer Carlton Moss. On January 9, 1940, he wrote, “Whereas The Birth of a Nation was a frontal attack on American history and the Negro people, Gone With the Wind, arriving twenty years later is a rear attack on the same. Sugar-smeared and blurred by a boresome Hollywood love story and under the guise of presenting the South as it is in the ‘eyes of the Southerner,’ the message of Gone With the Wind emerges in its final entity as a nostalgic plea for sympathy for a still living cause of Southern reaction.”82 Moss erroneously stated that in the movie, Scarlett was attacked by a black man. She was not; in the movie, she was saved by a black man, her gang boss, Big Sam. He described Mammy as “doting on every wish” of Scarlett as though Mammy loved her degrading position “in the service of a family that has helped to keep her people enchained for centuries.”

The Daily Worker attacks angered Selznick, to the point of wanting to seek litigation in the courts. Its statements, Selznick said, showed a “clear, organized attempt to damage the picture.” He pointed out that the Communists repeatedly claimed that the
movie was a slander against Abraham Lincoln. Yet, there was only one direct reference in the movie to Lincoln; that was when Scarlett was at the Atlanta benefit for the Confederacy and she said she would not mind “dancing tonight with Lincoln himself.”

Selznick compared his travails with D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*. Even though in subsequent pictures, Griffith unsuccessfully tried to prove that he was not anti-black, a quarter of a century later such charges were still being leveled. Selznick repeated his oft-made claim that he “cleaned up” the script of *GWTW* and presented no insults whatever to the black race. Yet he forecast that twenty-five years hence, the radical and Communist attacks against the epic would still be heard. If he were silent now in the face of these attacks, he “might give the appearance of truth to the slanders,” so even if he lost a suit against the *Daily Worker*, “we cannot help but gain with the publicity through at least having defended ourselves.”

Selznick was ultimately dissuaded from pursuing the matter in the courts. His friend, attorney John F. Wharton, told him that any suit, no matter how worthy, would give Selznick the appearance of trying to strangle freedom of opinion. This would not be an auspicious image to acquire, given the political situation of the world at that time. Better, Wharton said, to count your friends rather than your enemies. Selznick took this advice, and tended largely to ignore future negative comments.

Other protests came into the Selznick offices. Such political complaints issued from a variety of leftist sources, typified by an American Labor Party resolution that charged:

> Whereas the motion picture *Gone With the Wind* represents a falsification of U.S. history, and is an insult to President Abraham Lincoln and the Negro people, be it resolved that we go on record as condemning the picture, and urge our members and friends not to attend performances of it.

The Washington District Council of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, said the movie was “anti-labor” because it glorified the Ku Klux Klan, slandered the black people in the United States, and violated the spirit and intent of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. A branch of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War protested the “false and injurious presentations of the union soldier as bestial,” and misrepresented the burning of Atlanta.

On and on the complaints ran, but after his first outburst at the *Daily Worker*, Selznick ignored them. Numerous black newspapers wrote initial negative reviews, but as time passed, they took a second look at the artistry of the black players, especially Hattie McDaniel. In early 1940 stories in the three leading black papers in the country, The Chicago Defender, the Pittsburgh Courier, and the Baltimore Afro-American, concentrated on the real possibility that Hattie might win an Oscar rather than any negative aspects of the movie.

If these black newspapers became obsessed with an Oscar for Hattie, they had much of the country as company. In early February 1940, for example, Sigma Gamma Rho, a black sorority, endorsed Hattie for an award, writing to Selznick that “We trust that discrimination and prejudice will be wiped away in the selection of the winner of this award, for without Miss McDaniel, there would be no *Gone With the Wind*.” Selznick wrote back in full agreement about Hattie’s talents, but advised the sorority that “... there is nothing that this studio can do about an Academy Award, since this is voted on by the entire industry. Naturally, we hope, as you do, that Miss McDaniel may be the recipient of an award.”

When in February the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that Hattie had been nominated as the best supporting actress, the *Amsterdam News* joined the campaign with much of the black population in rejoicing over this turn of events.

On the big night, February 29, 1940, the Academy Award presentations were held in the Coconut Grove ballroom of Hollywood’s Ambassador Hotel, before an audience of 12,000 people. As Hattie arrived late at the ballroom on the arm of Wonderful Smith many people jumped to their feet to applaud her. Hattie wore an aqua blue evening dress, an ermine wrap, and wore gardenias in her hair with a diamond clasp, her purse dappled with rhinestones. She sat through most of the ceremonies at David O. Selznick’s table.

After a seemingly interminable wait, Hattie’s name was called.
as the winner of the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. When Frank Capra and Faye Bainter made the announcement, the crowd went wild. As one observer noted, "The ovation that . . . [Hattie] . . . received will go down in history as one of the greatest ever accorded any performer in the annals of the industry. En masse, the entire audience, stars in every place, stood and cheered their beloved Hattie McDaniel. Tears came to Mammy's eyes as she made her way to the stage to accept the award."771

Accepting the award, she said, "Fellow members of the motion picture industry, guests, this is one of the happiest moments of my life, and I want to thank each of you who had a part in selecting me for one of the awards for your kindness. It makes me feel very humble, and I shall always hold it as a beacon for anything that I may be able to do in the future. I sincerely hope that I shall always be a credit to my race, and to the motion picture industry. My heart is too full to express just how I feel, so may I say to each and everyone of you, Thank You and God Bless You."772 She was barely able to finish her speech before she was overcome with emotion at being the first black performer ever to win an Academy Award. As she walked back to her seat, the crowd rose again, giving her another standing ovation. Gossip columnist Louella Parsons caught her by the arm and exclaimed, "See Hattie, you've made me cry!" That she was black had no bearing on their cheering. As one person put it, "Here was a tremendous actress, an outstanding personality, an American, and they were happy to have an opportunity to fully respond as they wished." Many in the audience, like Hattie, were weeping for joy. Olivia de Havilland, who herself had been nominated as the best supporting actress for portraying Melanie Wilkes, attributed Hattie's success to The Scene. She said later that "Hattie was entitled to that award . . . I realized that . . . But on Academy Awards night, I found I couldn't stay at the table another minute. I had to be alone; so I wandered out to the kitchen at the Ambassador Hotel and cried."773

For two weeks after the Academy Awards, de Havilland later asserted, she was "convincéd there was no God." Then she changed her mind: "One morning I woke up in more ways than one, filled with delight that I lived in a world where God was certainly present, and where justice had indeed been done . . . I suddenly felt very proud . . . that I belonged to a profession which honored a black woman who merited this [the Academy Award], in a time when other groups had neither the honesty nor the courage to do the same sort of thing."774

When Hattie got back to her seat, she was greeted by an exuberant Vivien Leigh (who won the Best Actress award for her role as Scarlett). Clark Cable, who lost out on the Best Actor award to Robert Donat for Goodbye Mr. Chips, vigorously shook one of Hattie's hands, while David O. Selznick kissed the other. Later, on her way out of the Ambassador Hotel, Hattie told Louella Parsons, "I love Mammy. I think I understood her because my own grandmother worked on a plantation not unlike Tara."775 When she got home that night, Hattie was deluged with huge bouquets, telegrams, letters, long distance telephone calls, reporters, neighbors and friends. It was an evening that she thoroughly savored.

Hattie's award was hailed as an example of "democracy in action," because while much of the world was yielding to tyranny, it was asserted that the United States set an example of the dignity of all peoples. While this idealistic stance might not have been as true as some believed, it nevertheless created a marvelou image for the United States as the place where dreams came true. This thought was very powerful in Hitler-infested 1940.

The award showed, according to optimists, just how liberal and broadminded Americans were becoming. One person, exclaimed, "Ten years ago no one would have dared to think about giving a colored person such high honor." (In 1935, for her stéril performance in Imitation of Life, Louise Beavers received an "honorable mention" from the Academy. That was as high at that time as any black performer had gone). "Today, it's a matter of merit and merit alone. Miss McDaniel deserved every honor she has received for her splendid performance in Gone With the Wind."

The liberal Atlanta Constitution said Hattie's award delighted "all genuine Southern people . . ." She is, the paper asserted, the "Southern Mammy," and her characterization was true to fact and to tradition. "She was, in short, a grand Mammy, and, the South, first to recognize this fact will be first to tell how much she deserves
Hattie: The Life of Hattie McDaniel

the honor she has won.”76 A few days after the honor, Hattie told a
newspaper: “I hope that my winning the award will be inspiration
for the youth of my race, that it will encourage them to aim high
and work hard, and take the bitter with the sweet.”77 She was
proud, she said later, to have played the role of a black woman
“who was fearless, who cringed before no one, who did not talk in
whispers, walk on tiptoe, who criticized a white woman’s morals,
and who showed real emotion.”

What was her ambition now, after winning an Oscar? To win
another one, of course. So she went back to work just as quickly as
she could. (Later, she willed her cherished Oscar to Howard
University in Washington, D.C. It turned up “missing” during the
civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s and has not yet been
found.)

Another result of Hattie’s Oscar was that it temporarily amelio-
rated much black anger over the movie itself. Though some urged
her to reject the award on the grounds that GWTW was racist,
mist blacks rejoiced in her triumph. A new round of showings of
GWTW began in April 1940, and, if anything, the film enjoyed
greater popularity than the presentations of the year before, in part,
because it had lower ticket prices than during its first run. One
notable absence in 1940, almost directly attributable to Hattie’s
award, was black picket lines wherever the movie was shown.

Although it was a quick jump from late 1938—when Hattie
was a well respected, but not widely known movie actress—to early
1940, when she became a world renowned celebrity, she did not
let her fame go to her head; indeed, she simply kept repeating one
of her favorite phrases: “I did my best, and God did the rest.”78

CHAPTER FOUR

Life After Gone With the Wind

Hattie was now permanently and irrevocably known as Mammy,
much to her lifelong delight. When the cast and crew finished
Gone With the Wind, Hattie wrote into Susan Myrick’s diary: to
lovely Miss Myrick whom I have been so happy to know. I trust
we can get out for our Southern dinner—before she says adieu.” She
signed her message, “Mammy,” Hattie McDaniel.

Even members of the general public now called her Mammy.
As long as it was clear that the reference was to her role in the
movie, and not to any past or present condition of servility, Hattie
not only liked it; she reveled in it. In fact, whenever people
discussed the movie, Hattie McDaniel’s part often got more atten-
tion than some of the players who had been billed as “stars.”

In a proposed sequel to GWTW, much of the action was to
revolve around the character of Mammy. Selznick wanted Margaret
Mitchell to write the sequel, and thought a good title for it would
be The Daughter of Scarlett O’Hara.7 Mitchell, however, balked and
would sell no right to a sequel, either to Selznick or to anyone else.
Not even the Mother Country’s wishes in the matter convinced the
Atlanta author. Selznick, to no avail, told Mitchell that he had
hundreds of letters from England demanding a sequel to the