



Extract from:  
***Sidney Poitier:  
Man, Actor,  
Icon***

Aram Goudsouzian ©

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“Then Batjac, a production company run by John Wayne, secured Poitier for William Wellman’s adaption of the James Street novel Goodbye, My Lady. Lauren Bacall had recommended him after watching Blackboard Jungle. In a reverse of tradition, Wellman scheduled studio filming before going on location. That plan allowed time to train the Basenji dog featured in the film.

“Location shooting in Georgia was gruelling. Crew and cast of *Goodbye, My Lady* trudged through swamps and peanut fields, roasting under the August sun. A prop man had to kill a six-foot-long rattlesnake just as it neared the actors. Out of these surroundings Wellman crafted a simple, charming story of a boy and his dog. An orphan names Skeeter (Brandon de Wilde) lives with his Uncle Jesse (Walter Brennan) in a rural Mississippi cabin. Skeeter finds and African Basenji, a rare hunting dog that sheds tears but does not bark. He bonds with the dog, which has remarkable hunting instincts. As the dog, named Lady, becomes a local legend, the town store-keeper discovers an advertisement for a lost Basenji in a hunting magazine. He tells Uncle Jesse, who with folksy wisdom lets Skeeter decide the proper course. Despite his love for the dog, Skeeter returns Lady to its rightful owner.

“Goodbye, My Lady could have descended into mawkishness. To Wellman’s credit, that never happens. On the strength of its family appeal and evocative message, the *Daughters of the American Revolution* deemed it the best children’s picture in 1956. But trade newspapers realized its commercial limitations. For every reason that *Blackboard Jungle* thrived, *Goodbye, My Lady* failed: no villains, no violence, no edgy allure, no problems with censor boards. Most major publications did not even review it. Wellman called it “a financial fiasco.”

“At least Poitier’s scorecard of virtuous, integrationist characters earned another tally. He plays Gates, chicken farmer and friend of Skeeter. In three brief scenes, Gates paints the black southern farmer in dramatically different shades than those of the typical Hollywood treatment. He speaks with authority, but he is sensitive to the boy’s predicament. Before anybody else, he understands the Basenji’s value and Skeeter’s dilemma. He knows about the advertisement but does not tell Skeeter. “I never saw anybody aching so hard,” he emphasizes. Uncle Jesse and Skeeter even need Gate’s help to send a telegram. Poitier’s farmer possesses more intelligence and dignity than anyone else in the film.



“GOODBYE, MY LADY” FROM WARNER HOME VIDEO  
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*Note: This photo did not appear in the book.*