Unimaginative Love Field never rises above mediocrity

LOVE FIELD
Directed by Jonathan Kaplan.
Written by Don Roos.
Starring Michelle Pfeiffer, Dennis Haysbert, and Brian Kerwin.
Lewis Copley Place
By Chris Roberge

After sitting on a shelf somewhere in the vaults of the financially strapped Orion Pictures, Love Field, a film made three years ago, is finally undergoing a theatrical release. When the studio entered into bankruptcy proceedings early last year, this Michelle Pfeiffer vehicle was among many movies thrust into some sort of limbo状态 with no clear end in sight. As the 1993 Oscar season rolls around, however, Orion decided to give the film a chance primarily because it was believed that Pfeiffer stood a good chance of receiving one of the best actress nominations to be named this morning.

Unfortunately, Pfeiffer fanatics are probably the only people with an adequate reason to see this disappointing drama. With a story that is both predictable and dated, Love Field is a technically well-made and well-meaning movie that nonetheless fails to rise above mediocrity.

In the film, Michelle Pfeiffer plays Laurene, a Dallas beautician who is obsessed with the lives of the current president, John Kennedy, and his wife, Jackie. When the couple arrive in Dallas in late November of 1963, Laurene even convinces her invalid neighbor to accompany her to the airport so that she can see the woman's injury as an excuse to push to the front of the eager crowd. Of course, that afternoon Kennedy is assassinated, and Laurene is devastated. The already frail woman has all of the energy instantly sucked out of her and she is left pale and stunned, staggering slowly into nearby restaurants and shops to tell everyone else the tragic news and to stare shocked at the television as the news of the president's death is told to the nation by a visibly shaken Walter Cronkite.

When she returns home, Laurene tells her husband (Brian Kerwin) that she feels obligated to attend the public funeral and pay respect to the man whom she says was "the only one I ever voted for." Her husband strongly rejects the idea as frivolous and silly, but Laurene sneaks out at night and heads east on a bus.

Along the way, she gets to know a black man, Paul Cater (Dennis Haysbert), and his daughter, who are going home to be reunited with the rest of their family. Laurene is drawn to the two, in part because the young girl reminds her of the daughter whom she lost.

This is a problem that all films which deal with the bigotry of the past deal with. Few movies attempt to provide audiences as much as, for example, Malcolm X, in which Malcolm X, in which Malcolm X refers to the Kennedy assassination as a time for "chickens coming home to roost," bringing the white man's violence back to him in a fatal backlash. Sometimes, as was the case with Love Field, the idea of a movie like this only becomes little else than an excuse for audiences to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

This is a problem that all films which deal with the bigotry of the past deal with. Few movies attempt to provide audiences as much as, for example, Malcolm X, in which Malcolm X refers to the Kennedy assassination as a time for "chickens coming home to roost," bringing the white man's violence back to him in a fatal backlash. Sometimes, as was the case with Love Field, the idea of a movie like this only becomes little else than an excuse for audiences to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

But the biggest disappointment of the film is the unimaginative way with which the film deals with the personal lives of Laurene and Paul, and the racism that he is subjected to. Paul is a quiet and soft-spoken black man, and Laurene's husband is a rude and insensitive white man. Which one do you think she will find more attractive? The movie removes any challenge to Laurene, or the audience, by distilling the man to the poles of stilted and stereotyped, which still exist. As one ironic point Laurene stands in the middle of a deceptively smooth and says about Kennedy to Paul and another black man, "He does a lot for you people." And the visceral blow the film delivers with the assassination is small relative to that of a scene in which Paul is savagely beaten in front of his daughter by some good old boys. But who wouldn't react strongly to those scenes? At times the movie becomes little else than an excuse for audience members to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

The relationship between Laurene and Paul offers few surprises as well. When the two begin to get to know each other, they act occasionally throwing subtle insults into their conversations which reveal the unease they feel. After noticing Laurene's vacuousness, Paul offers her his magazine, commenting, "You want this? I'm finished. It's got lots of pictures." And in one ridiculous moment, as Paul tries to wake Laurene up she jumps upon seeing him, saying, "Hey, you scared me. Just like the bogeyman." All of these apprehensions have left, though, in time for "chickens coming home to roost," bringing the white man's violence back to him in a fatal backlash. Sometimes, as was the case with Love Field, the idea of a movie like this only becomes little else than an excuse for audiences to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

Although it is far from being a bad film, it never becomes a truly good one, and it ultimately has little to offer. But the biggest disappointment of the film is the unimaginative way with which the film deals with the personal lives of Laurene and Paul, and the racism that he is subjected to. Paul is a quiet and soft-spoken black man, and Laurene's husband is a rude and insensitive white man. Which one do you think she will find more attractive? The movie removes any challenge to Laurene, or the audience, by distilling the man to the poles of stilted and stereotyped, which still exist. As one ironic point Laurene stands in the middle of a deceptively smooth and says about Kennedy to Paul and another black man, "He does a lot for you people." And the visceral blow the film delivers with the assassination is small relative to that of a scene in which Paul is savagely beaten in front of his daughter by some good old boys. But who wouldn't react strongly to those scenes? At times the movie becomes little else than an excuse for audience members to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

But the biggest disappointment of the film is the unimaginative way with which the film deals with the personal lives of Laurene and Paul, and the racism that he is subjected to. Paul is a quiet and soft-spoken black man, and Laurene's husband is a rude and insensitive white man. Which one do you think she will find more attractive? The movie removes any challenge to Laurene, or the audience, by distilling the man to the poles of stilted and stereotyped, which still exist. As one ironic point Laurene stands in the middle of a deceptively smooth and says about Kennedy to Paul and another black man, "He does a lot for you people." And the visceral blow the film delivers with the assassination is small relative to that of a scene in which Paul is savagely beaten in front of his daughter by some good old boys. But who wouldn't react strongly to those scenes? At times the movie becomes little else than an excuse for audience members to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.

The relationship between Laurene and Paul offers few surprises as well. When the two begin to get to know each other, they act occasionally throwing subtle insults into their conversations which reveal the unease they feel. After noticing Laurene's vacuousness, Paul offers her his magazine, commenting, "You want this? I'm finished. It's got lots of pictures." And in one ridiculous moment, as Paul tries to wake Laurene up she jumps upon seeing him, saying, "Hey, you scared me. Just like the bogeyman." All of these apprehensions have left, though, in time for "chickens coming home to roost," bringing the white man's violence back to him in a fatal backlash. Sometimes, as was the case with Love Field, the idea of a movie like this only becomes little else than an excuse for audiences to pat themselves on the backs for not being racists.