

vagueness, Burr forced the issue by demanding an apology for any derogatory rumors that any remarks by Hamilton might have inspired during their long rivalry. Refusing, Hamilton accepted Burr's challenge, thus complying with what he called the "public prejudice" regarding honor and preserving his "ability to

be in future useful" in public affairs. At the same time, however, he resolved to adhere to his principles and withhold his fire in the field. Though Hamilton was mortally wounded in the duel, Freeman writes, Burr lost the subsequent battle for public approval. He became "a failed duelist."

Congress on the Big Screen

"Hollywood Goes to Congress" by Tom Rosenstiel, in *Media Studies Journal* (Winter 1996), Columbia Univ., 2950 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027.

The conviction that there is something rotten in Congress is nothing new. Consider Hollywood's first major movie about the institution, Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), in which a Boy Scout leader (Jimmy Stewart) is named to fill a vacancy in the Senate and finds mostly corruption and greed there. Although usually remembered as a celebration of naive idealism, notes Rosenstiel, a congressional correspondent for *Newsweek*, the film endures "because it depicts the subtle and credible humanity of the hack reporters, the bad senator, the overly partisan opposition leader, and the taciturn vice president." Capra's Senate is corrupt, but it also is finally honorable, and the film is "an appeal for people to aim high and not compromise too easily." In the decades since, Rosenstiel contends, the "take" on Congress in this most American of popular art forms has changed, tracing a disturbing arc from hope to despair.

The Senator Was Indiscreet (1948), written by Charles MacArthur (co-author of *The Front Page*) and George S. Kaufman, is a sophisticated farce in which a senator is undone by his diary, filled with Senate secrets. The film "describes a political world filled by hacks and phonies rather than bright but misled men," Rosenstiel notes. But it's all harmless fun: politics "doesn't much matter in people's lives."

The Cold War changed that. Otto Preminger's *Advise and Consent* (1962), based on

the Allen Drury novel, portrays the Senate as it grapples with the controversial nomination of a liberal intellectual for secretary of state. For all the film's melodramatics, Rosenstiel says, it "celebrates the subtle, cold pragmatism of the Kennedy age. . . . The film admires the subtle and complex dimensions of Congress—the friendships between political enemies, men who lead with their minds rather than their emotions."

Fast-forward to the post-Watergate era. Hollywood provided *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (1979), "a cautionary tale about what happens to a decent senator when he begins to become a national figure," Rosenstiel says. Power (and a beautiful civil rights lawyer) seduce a senator played by Alan Alda. But ultimately, the senator's private sins are forgiven. His country needs him.

That is definitely not the outlook of the most recent film about Congress, *Distinguished Gentleman* (1992), in which a smalltime Florida con man, played by comedian Eddie Murphy, is elected to Congress, where his crooked skills serve him well. The corruption, Rosenstiel points out, now involves not ideology or power but money: "The whole system is rigged, voters are idiots, and campaign rhetoric is laughable. . . . The film is pure anger against a system that seems unredeemable." What is new, in both the public mood and the films that reflect it, Rosenstiel laments, is this sense of "utter hopelessness."

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

The Limits of Global Compassion

"Distant Compassion" by Clifford Orwin, in *The National Interest* (Spring 1996), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Ever since the United States sent 28,000 soldiers to Somalia in 1992 to avert mass starvation in that unhappy African country,

there has been talk about the "CNN factor" in foreign policy—that is, the influence of TV images of the suffering of distant inno-