



## **PRESS ARTICLE**

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### **Why “Forgotten City” is so important**

By Bill Bradberry

Among my fondest memories of Old Falls Street, the Strand and Cataract movie theaters stand out like gleaming jewels.

The buildings and the films I saw there as well as my experiences as an usher in those incredibly splendid shrines, helped to shape my destiny; they still do.

It's too bad they're gone, because there is an incredible filmmaker in our midst, Addison Henderson, who deserves a venue like that, where the power of one of his latest productions, “The Forgotten City,” could have a serious impact on this community, any community for the matter, if it could be seen by those who could actually do something, and that's all of us. Sandwiched between Grant's restaurant and a string of souvenir and camera shops, the sparkling marquees and bright neon lights of Falls Street still shine and sparkle brightly in my mind.

An old picture I saw recently of Old Falls Street all lit up with Christmas decorations hanging all the way across the street at every corner from carefully decorated street lights reminded me of another time, a more prosperous time here.

But the memories also remind me that we don't have a single operating movie theater left here in the city, and that's truly a shame.

Sadly, most of the grand old buildings are gone, lost to urban renewal and the rush to the suburbs we witnessed during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Now, with the energy prices going through the roof spawning a renewed interest in central urban settings, there is a growing demand for movie theaters and other amenities back within walking distance of residential communities, just like it used to be way back when I was a kid, when my sisters and I could actually safely, with no fear, to and from the Strand.

I sat through an amazing presentation at the Niagara County Historical Society's 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner in Lockport two weeks ago where Karen Colizzi Noonan escorted the membership down memory lane for a look back at the golden era of movie theaters across America and especially upstate New York.

Ms. Noonan's Theater Historical Society of America, ([www.historicaltheaters.org](http://www.historicaltheaters.org)) “is the only organization in the United States which exclusively records and preserves the architectural, cultural and social history of American theaters. Through its archive and publications, THSA makes available information on more than 15,000 theaters, primarily in the United States, and encourages research in this often-neglected aspect of our popular culture and history.”

Located in Elmhurst, Ill., just 16 miles west of Chicago loop on the second floor of York Theater building, the Society also maintains the American Theater Architecture Archive and the American Movie Palace Museum which contains an extensive collection of artifacts, memorabilia, photographs, slides, negatives, books, blueprints, clippings, videotapes, programs, and other material on historic theaters.

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The opulent beauty of many of the old theaters, was intentionally designed by the architects to carry the patrons out their present reality, into another world where the pain and suffering of the outside world would disappear for just a while, just long enough to let the viewers feel they were as big and important, as rich and as successful, powerful and beautiful as the actors on the screens.

It was just enough escapism for many to recharge their spirits and go back out into the cold hard reality of their every day lives which some image of a better life, and the energy to change things. And many did.

But the theaters also served another purpose besides that; they also woke us up to things that were happening around us; things we often could not; or would not otherwise see. Henderson's "The Forgotten City" does exactly that. He shows us the obvious, but from perspectives we can not, or will not otherwise see.

In the tradition of a short list of other African American filmmakers going all the way back to Oscar Micheaux, born in Metropolis, Ill. in 1885, grandson of a slave, Henderson, like Micheaux produces his work independently, brainstorming across the country, going from town to town, venue to venue, screening and promoting his work, trying to reach the big screens, the ones in our living rooms where the new "golden age" is dawning HBO, Showtime, BET and all the others who control us through our "remotes," or "clickers" as we like to call them.

Micheaux's body of work includes a huge contribution of films going back to his 1920 the Brute, through his 1948 movie, Betrayal. An early voice against racism in the United States, he also introduced actor, lawyer, athlete and fellow crusader, Paul Robeson to the screen in his production of 1924 silent film, Body and Soul.

Henderson's Knuckle City Films production of "The Forgotten City," reminiscent of a Spike Lee, Gordon Parks inspired documentary, was screened here in Niagara Falls earlier this month to a grateful, and inspired audience at the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center, thanks primarily to the hard work, dedication and passion of NACC's Samika Sullivan and Lewiston's tireless Eva Nicholas.

Co-producers Korey Green and Addison Henderson of Knuckle City Films shared a vision to create a documentary about Buffalo and forged a partnership to create "The Forgotten City," a soul stirring documentary taking place in Buffalo, New York exploring race relations, segregation, crime, and politics, including some of Buffalo's most influential leaders.

*"The Forgotten City"* exposes the bitter truth about Buffalo and all inner cities. It challenges stereotypes, encourages change and shakes up the status quo.

Henderson's describes the film as, a personal journey of two young filmmakers who forged an unlikely partnership following a 2001 murder; one a friend of the victim and the other a friend of the murderer.

While the NAAC's old high school auditorium stage worked just fine for the screening, an actual theater venue would do the production more justice, and just as other great works eventually find their way into our living rooms, so too should this one, by way of a national market via cable's popular substitute for fine theaters, HBO.

*\*Bill Bradberry's columns appear Fridays in the Gazette.*

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