

A Direct 'Spook'

By Adrienne Manns

✓ "The Spook Who Sat by the Door" provoked cross-fire reactions when it appeared on bookstands in 1966. Packed with dramatic action scenes, it seemed like a natural movie subject for black audiences; but it took Sam Greenlee, its author, seven years to get the financial backing for the conversion.

Now that Greenlee has made it—he wrote the screenplay and co-produced the movie, which premiered in Chicago and opens here Friday at RKO Keiths and the Lincoln—reactions will no doubt be the same as they were to the book; that it's impossible, it's outrageous, it's a jive gimmick, or it's the righteous truth.

Whatever it is, "The Spook" is direct. Like its creator, it says what it has to say; then braces for the predictable reactions.

"This movie is not about a pimp and it's not a ghost story," said Greenlee from the momentary comfort of his hotel suite. "It's about a third-world revolution.

"You see, we are not and never have been citizens of this country, second-class or otherwise. We have advanced, if you want to call it that, from slavery to colonialism."

Greenlee, 43, has himself advanced, "if you want to call it that," from the Woodlawn neighborhood of southside Chicago, to the campuses of Wisconsin and Chicago to a job with the United States Information Agency in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Greece, to an island sanctuary, and then back to Woodlawn.

"I was a professional propagandist for the United States government. I worked for the USIA . . . then I quit and sat down on an island," he said, "and wrote for three years." He created "The Spook."

"The book is based on my experiences as a token nigger in the USIA. My experiences were identical to those of Freeman in the CIA. Everything in that book is an actual quote. If I heard it," he says,

Dan Freeman, the hero of the story, is the first black man hired by the CIA. After suffering years of racial threats and abuse inside the agency, he quits and moves back to Chicago where he rents a plush apartment "for cover" and organizes a revolutionary army out of the tough street gangs on the South Side.

His army primes for action after "riots" break out during the summer. While Freeman struggles to maintain his guise as an "establishment Negro" the authorities, represented by his childhood friend-turned-policeman, begin to close in.

Greenlee says he believes that the story demonstrates the connection between black people in the United States and people in colo-

onial territories all over the world: The third world.

He says that his movie is unrelated to the bulk of current flicks about black people, and that the others "ain't black."

"A black movie is a movie owned by black folks. The content ain't got nothin' to do with it. . . . The movie industry realized that black people wanted to see themselves on the screen . . . so what we've been seeing are white movies about us." But . . . "The criterion is, who owns it."

Bokari Productions, a film company created by actor Ivan Dixon, owns 80 per cent of "The Spook." United Artists owns the rest, Greenlee says. He raised half a million dollars from private black investors in Los Angeles, Detroit and Cleveland to finance most of the production.

A large portion of it was shot in Gary—"the ghetto in Gary looks just like the ghetto in Chicago, especially with those grey painted back porches"—and it took a year to complete it because of money problems.

"There was a great deal of controversy that developed within United Artists about the film," he said. "They know it's gonna make some bread but they don't like what it's sayin' . . ."