

Gripping 'Q & A' unearths racism in judicial system

NEW YORK (CNS) — Sidney Lumet's gripping new crime drama, "Q & A" (Tri-Star), zeroes in on the divisive racial and ethnic power games at work in the New York judicial system in ways that will not increase the comfort level of its audience. The gritty drama, based on the novel by Edwin Torres, explosively reflects the overt racism that undermines even the most conscientious of public servants.

Torres, a New York State Supreme Court justice and a former assistant district attorney for the County of New York, was one of the first Hispanic judges in the New York judicial system.

Lt. Mike Brennan (Nick Nolte) is a heroic New York cop to most of his cronies. The first to arrive on a crime scene and the first to jump into the line of fire, Brennan apparently can do no wrong, or so his whitewashed record reports.

When he kills Hispanic hood Tony Vasquez outside a Harlem after-hours drug club, the cocky Brennan comes under investigation and assumes, as usual, that he'll get off the hook with a claim of self-defense. Instead of working against him, Brennan's blatant racism has become one of his more legendary and acceptable attributes as a cop with a mission to clean up the streets of New York.

His silent partner-in-arms, New York County District Attorney Kevin Quinn (Patrick O'Neal), aims to assure an open-and-shut case of justifiable homicide for Brennan, so he assigns young assistant district attorney Al Reilly (Timothy



Tri-Star Pictures
Assistant district attorney Al Reilly (Timothy Hutton, center) questions homicide witnesses with the help of detectives Sam Chapman (Charles Dutton, left) and Luis Valentin (Luis Guzman) in Sidney Lumet's "Q & A."

Hutton) to investigate. Quinn wants all of the evidence on the Q&A (the official record of what happened on the crime scene), and if it isn't on the Q&A, it didn't happen.

When a witness inadvertently reveals some surprising info during a Q&A interview, Reilly follows the tip into a line of corruption that leads right back to Quinn, a political hopeful with a secret past and a tie to Tony Vasquez.

The son of a highly regarded cop and once a Harlem cop himself for a brief period before law school, Reilly also comes face-to-face with the fruits of his

own past racism. His former fiancée Nancy Bosch (Jenny Lumet) is now the common-law wife of Hispanic gangster Bobby Texador (Armand Assante), a key witness in the case. Nancy forces Reilly to accept responsibility for their breakup, which stemmed from his shock at meeting her black father.

Veteran New York writer-director Lumet ("Serpico," "Prince of the City") keeps the pace quick and tight as he follows green, idealistic Reilly through a maze of sleazy witnesses, subterfuge and judicial corruption. Reilly is determined to do the right thing despite the stacked deck,

Quinn's powerful grip on the case and Brennan's grisly behind-the-scenes efforts to wipe his slate clean.

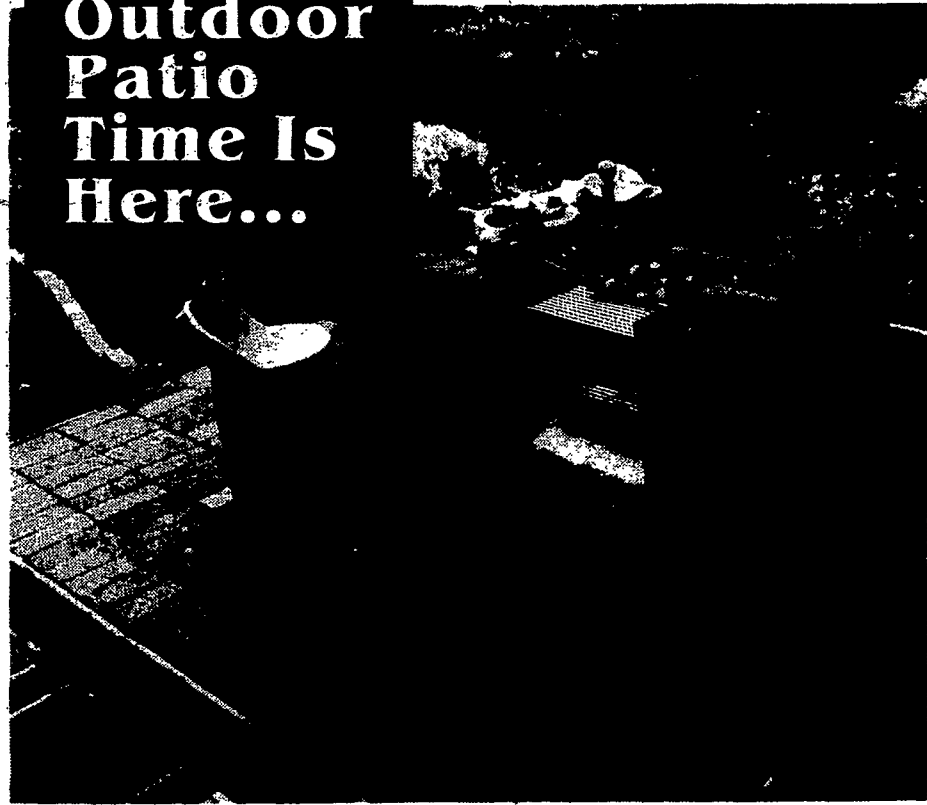
Reilly's only confidante is his former boss and mentor, Leo Bloomenfeld (Lee Richardson), an honest lawyer connected with the New York County district attorney's office who may or may not offer Reilly a chance to bring Quinn and Brennan to justice. Hutton is excellent as the fresh-faced whistle-blower who quickly must face the fact that his former heroes, including his deceased dad, are not what they've been cracked up to be. His struggles with his own bigotry also quietly clarify the moral crisis faced by law enforcement officers pressed to make daily choices between "them and us."

As Brennan, Nolte lets it all hang out while vividly depicting the most despicable, ugly-minded character of his career. Nothing holds Nolte back as he mouths off repugnant racial, ethnic and homosexual slurs and terrorizes those who stand in his way, including a Hispanic cop (Luis Guzman) who assists in Reilly's investigation, and various transvestites who lead him to a key witness.

Due to the explicit and intense nature of the profanity that includes racial and ethnic slurs and vulgar sexual references, much grisly violence and graphic scenes involving sexual come-ons and physical abuse of transvestites, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

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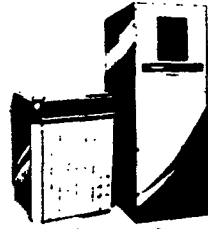
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