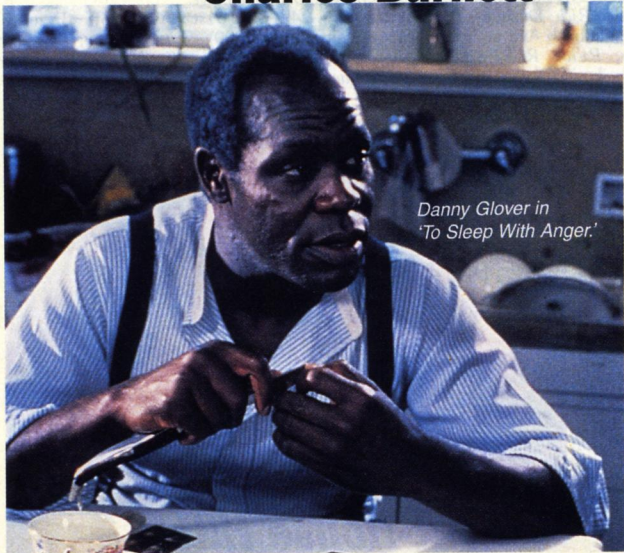


Retrospective

Charles Burnett



Danny Glover in
'To Sleep With Anger.'

It would be comforting to view the less-than-prolific career of director **Charles Burnett** as the result of his uncompromising reach for truth in depicting the African-American experience. But that isn't the whole story. Burnett's lack of credits is also a frustrating case of talent underutilized by an industry always uncomfortable with depicting hard reality, which is why

he's written and directed only four features in the past eighteen years. The current retrospective at the American Museum of the Moving Image (January 7 and 8; see "Museums, Societies, Etc.") is a rare chance to view his dignified, quiet work. (Though 1990's *To Sleep With Anger* brought renewed attention to Burnett's gifts, his other two features—1977's *Killer of Sheep* and 1985's *My Brother's Wedding*—still aren't available on video and are rarely screened anywhere.) Born in 1944, Burnett has lived in South-Central Los Angeles since the age of 3. After studying at UCLA, he produced, wrote, photographed, edited, and directed *Sheep*—an exceptionally bleak portrayal of urban poverty and stasis that was, in 1990, one of a handful of films added to the Library of Congress's National Film Registry. But Burnett may not be obscure for long: He should gain a higher profile than ever with *The Glass Shield*, a look at corruption and racism in the LAPD that is being released by Miramax in the spring. Things are moving forward for Burnett, even though the obstacles to unvarnished storytelling remain stubbornly in place.

MICHAEL GILTZ