



Vers le Sud Heading South

Laurent Cantet

FRANCE/CANADA, 2005
French, Creole, English

105 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Haut et Court/
Les Films Séville**

Producer: **Caroline Benjo, Carole Scotta,
Simon Arnal, David Reckziegal,
John Hamilton**

Screenplay: **Laurent Cantet,
Robin Campillo, based on three short
stories by Dany Laferrière**

Cinematographer: **Pierre Milon**

Editor: **Robin Campillo**

Production Designer: **Frankie Diago**

Sound: **Claude Lahaye**

Principal Cast: **Charlotte Rampling,
Karen Young, Louise Portal,
Ménothy Cesar, Lys Ambroise**

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Perhaps the most exciting new figure in French cinema over the last decade has been Laurent Cantet. His provocative meditations on work and family, *Ressources humaines* and *L'Emploi du temps*, have had an enormous impact in intellectual circles throughout the world, as well as art-house audiences drawn to his emotionally fragile characters. He is that rarest of filmmakers: an artist completely immersed in ideas who nonetheless creates perfectly formed protagonists and authentic human drama.

Vers le Sud sees Cantet explore a different kind of dynamic, that between three women and their young lover. Sounds like more familiar French cinema, except in this case the three women are all North American sex tourists in eighties Haiti and the young man in question is a local Adonis: teenaged, gorgeous, wily – and accidentally mixed up in the cruel political world of “Baby Doc” Duvalier’s murderous regime.

The three women approach their vacation and part-time paramour in very different ways. Ellen (a chilling, haunting Charlotte Rampling) is every bit the Boston Brahman: bossy, haughty and affected. Brenda (Karen Young) is the Midwestern innocent, with an underlying vicious, masochistic streak. Earthy, joyous Sue (the wonderful Louise Portal from *Les Invasions barbares*) loves sex and play and tries to keep everyone in good spirits. The Sirkian tug-of-war between the women is epic and fraught with revenge and betrayal – but also tenderness.

Legba (Ménothy Cesar), the object of their

affection, is a different matter. His allegiances unclear, he exists in a rarefied world – first bouncing from bed to bed, exuberantly proclaiming his freedom to do as he pleases, then terrified by the Tonton Macoutes. The women’s world is aptly mirrored in the dispassionate economic calculations of the resort’s young gigolos, trading stories and tips on their days off.

Cantet, holding true to Dany Laferrière’s short stories, has no interest in stigmatizing the women or Legba. He seeks instead to rethink the entire political economy of sex, class and prostitution – to imagine that, in this coldest example of globalized trade, an entirely new catalogue of emotions might reside.

■ Noah Cowan



Laurent Cantet was born in France. He directed the short films *Tous à la Manif* (94) and *Jeux de plage* (95). *Ressources humaines* (99) won the César Award for best first feature in 2001. His other films include *Les Sanguinaires* (98), *L'Emploi du temps* (01) and *Vers le Sud* (05).

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