

A PLACE IN THE SUN

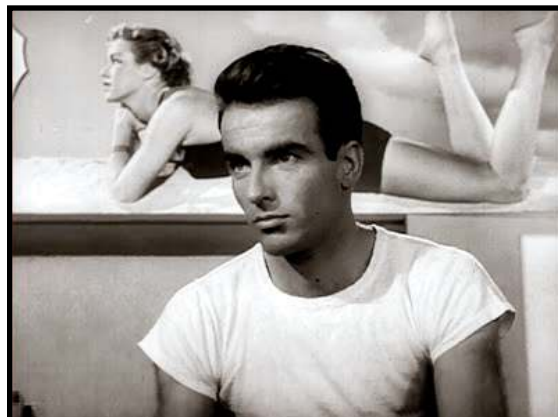


*"I love you. I've loved you since the first moment I saw you.
I guess maybe I've even loved you before I saw you."*

Visually ravishing on many levels, this 1951 adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's bestselling novel, *An American Tragedy*, pits a naive but ambitious indigent against a rigid social system that doesn't brook transgressions or grant pardons. Montgomery Clift plays the central character, George Eastman, who thumbs his way from an impoverished existence in Chicago to California where he hopes to find work at his uncle's swimsuit factory. Upon arrival, George leverages his unpolished brand of charm to ingratiate himself into his uncle's good graces and land an entry level job on the swimsuit assembly line. Although possessed with an unquenchable yearning for career advancement and acceptance into higher social circles, George lacks the life experience and insight necessary to move-up the ladder without facing tragic consequences.



Clift gives his character a stoop shouldered posture and a tentative gait that elicits sympathy from the audience. George's awkwardness in social settings is evident and that quality sets him apart in a favorable light at first. His deferential politeness is perceived as genuine humility and gratitude. Clift makes George's sense of being on the outside, a transfixed observer of the elite, both compelling and touching. His hesitations before speaking and inability to make eye contact are consistent with someone who has imagined but never experienced opulence. At the same time, he makes George's determination and drive clear from the opening scenes. What isn't immediately obvious is just how far in over his head he really is. One of the joys of watching this film is to marvel at the way ambition and denial co-exist within someone who wants something desperately, but is ill equipped to hold on to it.





Shelley Winters as factory worker Alice Tripp

It isn't long before George catches the eye of a mousy factory worker named Alice Tripp, who is played by Shelley Winters. Alice is several shades of ordinary but pretty enough to attract George's attention and their chance meeting at a movie theater leads to a courtship. The screenplay's delineation of a segregated class structure becomes evident when they share backstories over beers at a local joint that caters to working class people. The more Alice reveals, the more we realize just how far apart these two characters are in their capacity to imagine and actualize possibilities. Sadly, neither possesses the wisdom to recognize this. Mutual feelings of loneliness and desire for romance propel them into an overnight tryst that results in pregnancy and an intractable dependency. Before George can afford to buy his first tuxedo, he is saddled with his responsibilities to Alice and their unborn child.

At the opposite end of the social and physical spectrum is Angela Vickers (Elizabeth Taylor), who embodies the romantic ideal that George has fantasized about for years. Her lush beauty and charming manner capture him immediately, although she doesn't notice him at first. This changes when she walks in on him playing pool alone in his uncle's billiard room. Because George doesn't fit into her world, they are only able to connect in a space apart from everyone else. Later, when their romantic involvement intensifies, they constantly talk about "getting away from the others" and wanting to be alone together. The gap between his humble beginnings and her "to-the-manor born" pedigree eventually proves to be insurmountable. In this context, Angela represents the ultimate trophy that George covets but cannot claim.



Elizabeth Taylor as socialite Angela Vickers



A man caught between two women and two separate worlds:
the socially elite and the working class.



Director Fred Zinnemann on George Stevens:

“He portrayed human beings with a kind of truthfulness that was very involving. You became involved in what their troubles were.”

Producer / director George Stevens had to lobby the executives at Paramount studios to obtain a green light for this film. The novel by Dreiser had been adapted to film previously in 1931, but it failed at the box-office. Studio leadership was therefore reluctant to entrust Stevens with a remake, but they finally capitulated because of his tenacity. Stevens changed the original setting from the 1920s to contemporary post-World War II America and tweaked the central theme of class struggle to suit that time and place. His version makes it clear that someone like George Eastman could ascend the social ladder more easily than he might have 25 years earlier, but he retained the high stakes and pitfalls inherent to upward mobility. His interpretation emphasizes the tragic consequences of unchecked ambition mixed with naiveté and a myopic sense of purpose.



George Stevens, Jr., on his father's directorial style:

"So often, the camera is a quiet observer."

One of Steven's hallmarks as a director is the way he uses the camera as an observer and lets the action speak for itself. His visual style reinforces the sense of separateness and longing that George Eastman feels. In several scenes, he records the action in one long take and the audience must form an opinion about George's motives without the benefit of close-ups or reaction shots. Stevens never manipulates the audience into siding with George or condemning him for his choices. His reliance on long, slow dissolves and overlaps between scenes conveys a heightened romanticism that is consistent with George Eastman's dogged pursuit of the American dream.



Stevens used one continuous long shot in this scene with Cliff and Winters. Once Winters moves from the bed to her place at the table, he keeps the camera on her back while George explains why he stood her up in favor of partying with the upper crust. Stevens' refusal to cut to close-ups of Winters' reactions adds to the tension of the scene. His willingness to abandon traditional storytelling conventions was admirable.



Director Alan Pakula on *A Place In The Sun*:

“The use of close-ups in the love scenes between Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift is the quintessential height of romantic filmmaking. I don’t think there are better kissing scenes in the history of film.”

Winters as Alice retaliates against George when he spends the weekend with Angela Vickers (Taylor) and her family. Her role was altered from the novel to make her character less passive and more spirited. Stevens hired Winters not only because she was a talented character actress, but because she was capable of playing someone who was determined to hold George accountable.





A crucial scene between Alice and George on “Loon Lake”

Shelley Winters thought she and **Montgomery Clift** were in agreement that they would not get into the water during this scene, which was filmed at **Lake Tahoe in November**. Both actors wanted stunt doubles to cover for them; however, Clift later changed his mind and with a protective wetsuit underneath his clothing, he agreed to fall into the cold water. Winters wasn't convinced until director **George Stevens** jumped fully clothed into the lake and swam around the boat to demonstrate that she could do it. Only then did she acquiesce and both actors went into the lake to finish the scene.



Elizabeth Taylor said that working with Clift made her take acting seriously for the first time. She watched him work in amazement and wanted to know “what is it in him to make the sweat literally come out of his body and to make his eyes actually fill with tears.”

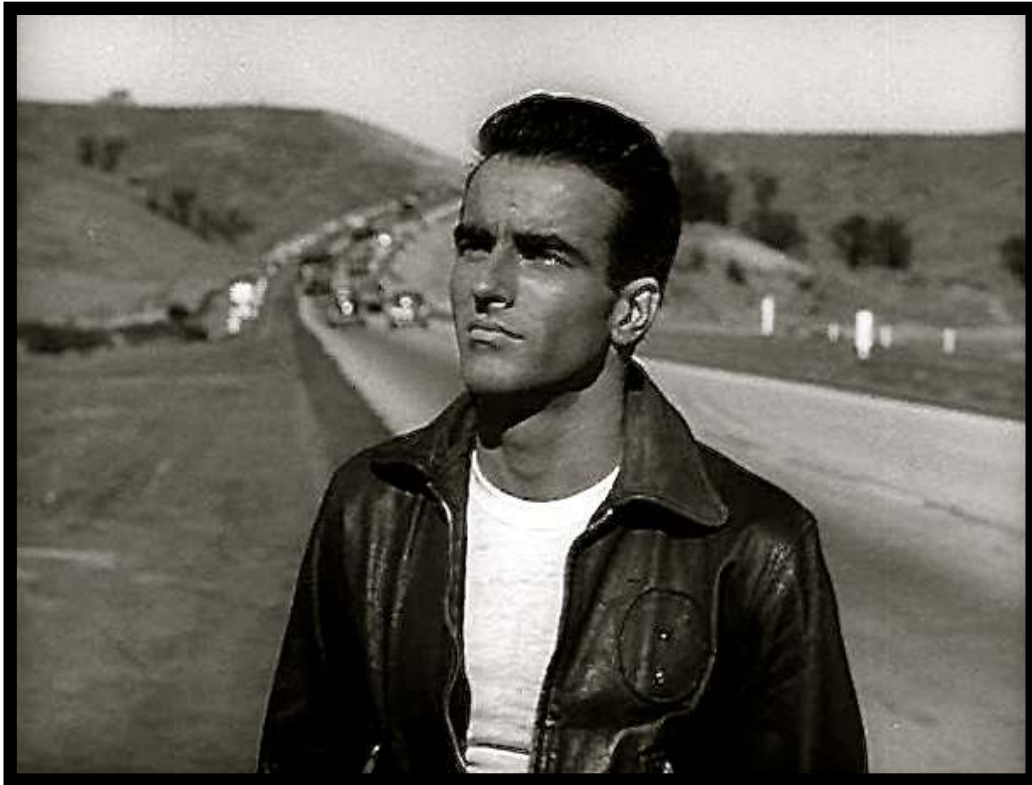


"Seems like we always spend the best part of our time just saying goodbye."



*"Every time you leave me for a minute, it's like goodbye.
I like to believe it means you can't live without me."*

The Cast



Montgomery Clift as George Eastman

Montgomery Clift was considered one of the major acting talents in Hollywood films during the 1950s. His Actors Studio credentials, brooding good looks and intense acting style placed him along side Marlon Brando as one of the handsomest and most riveting leading men at the time. His personal life was less sanguine and he struggled with his sexual orientation, alcoholism and chronic intestinal issues throughout most of his adult life. He was involved in a near fatal car crash in the mid 1950s and suffered facial disfigurement as a result of the accident. This caused him to undergo multiple plastic surgeries to restore his face and he became addicted to prescription medication. While he went on to appear in a number of well received films (most notably, *Judgement At Nuremberg*, *Freud and Suddenly*, *Last Summer*), he never fully recovered from the car accident and died from a heart attack at the age of 45.



Elizabeth Taylor as Angela Vickers

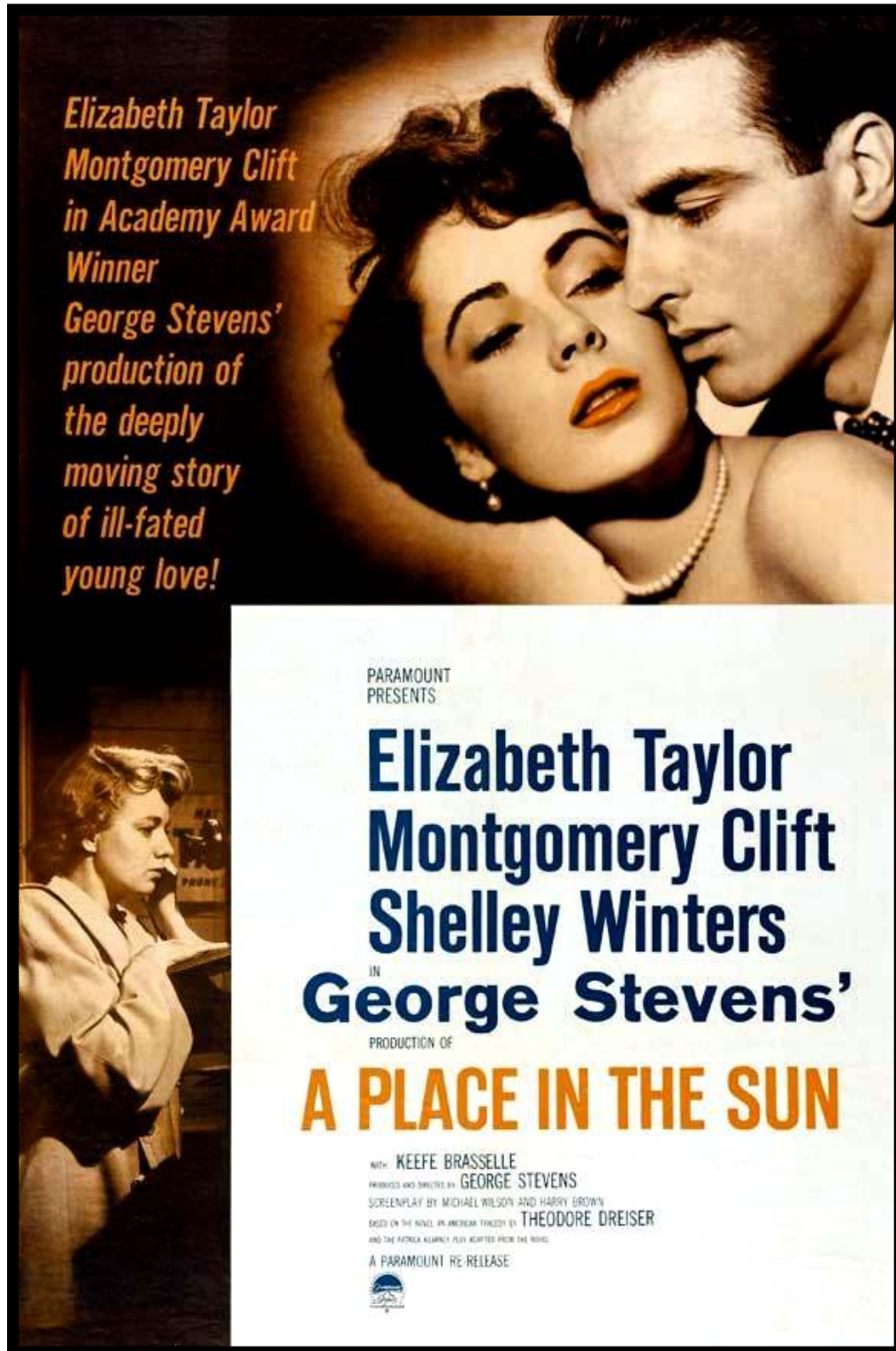
Elizabeth Taylor was arguably one of the most beautiful female stars in Hollywood history. She also managed to garner two Best Actress Academy Awards for her performances in *Butterfield 8* and *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Wolf?* along with starring roles in such major films as *National Velvet*, *Giant*, *Cleopatra*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* and *The Taming Of The Shrew*. Her tumultuous personal life and multiple marriages may have been responsible for most of her fame and notoriety, but Taylor developed from a charismatic child star into an accomplished screen actress. She proved that she could be compelling in any role as long as the production, script and direction were top drawer. Unfortunately, her private life often eclipsed her undeniable acting talent, and her singular championship of AIDS victims from the mid-1980s' until her death in 2011 became her greatest legacy.



Shelley Winters as Alice Tripp

Shelley Winters began her film career as a blonde bombshell but knew that she possessed the talent and savvy to be taken seriously as an actress. When the opportunity to play against type in ***A Place In The Sun*** came along, she abandoned her sexy image and dressed down before she met director George Stevens. They had agreed to meet at a restaurant, but Stevens did not recognize her at first. Winters dyed her hair a mousey brown color and wore a drab outfit to the appointment. Once Stevens recognized her, he quickly realized that she would be wonderful as tragic factory worker Alice Tripp.

Winters maintained a successful acting career for over 50 years and won two Academy Awards (Best Supporting Actress for ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** and ***A Patch of Blue***), in addition to a Best Actress nomination for this role and a Best Supporting Actress nomination for ***The Poseidon Adventure***. She was also the recipient of multiple Golden Globe, New York Film Critics, BAFTA and Emmy acting nominations and awards.



"A work of beauty, tenderness, power, and insight."

The New York Times

Awards For "A Place In The Sun"

Academy Awards, USA 1952

Best Director: George Stevens
Best Writing, Screenplay: Michael Wilson and Harry Brown
Best Cinematography, Black-and-White: William C. Mellor
Best Costume Design, Black-and-White: Edith Head
Best Film Editing: William Hornbeck
Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture: Franz Waxman

Nominations

Best Picture: George Stevens
Best Actor in a Leading Role: Montgomery Clift
Best Actress in a Leading Role: Shelley Winters

Golden Globes, USA 1952

Best Motion Picture, Drama
Best Director: George Stevens
Best Motion Picture Actress, Drama: Shelley Winters
Best Cinematography, Black and White: William C. Mellor

Cannes Film Festival 1951

Nominated: Grand Prize of the Festival, George Stevens

Directors Guild of America, USA 1952

DGA Award, Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Motion Pictures: George Stevens
Charles C. Coleman (assistant director)

Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists 1952

Silver Ribbon, Best Foreign Director (Regista del Miglior Film Straniero):
George Stevens

National Board of Review, USA 1951

NBR Award, Best Film: Top Ten Films

Awards For "A Place In The Sun"

National Film Preservation Board, USA 1991

National Film Registry

New York Film Critics Circle Awards 1951

2nd place: NYFCC Award

Best Actress: Shelley Winters

Best Director: George Stevens

PGA (Producers Guild Awards) 1997

PGA Hall of Fame, Motion Pictures

Writers Guild of America, USA 1952

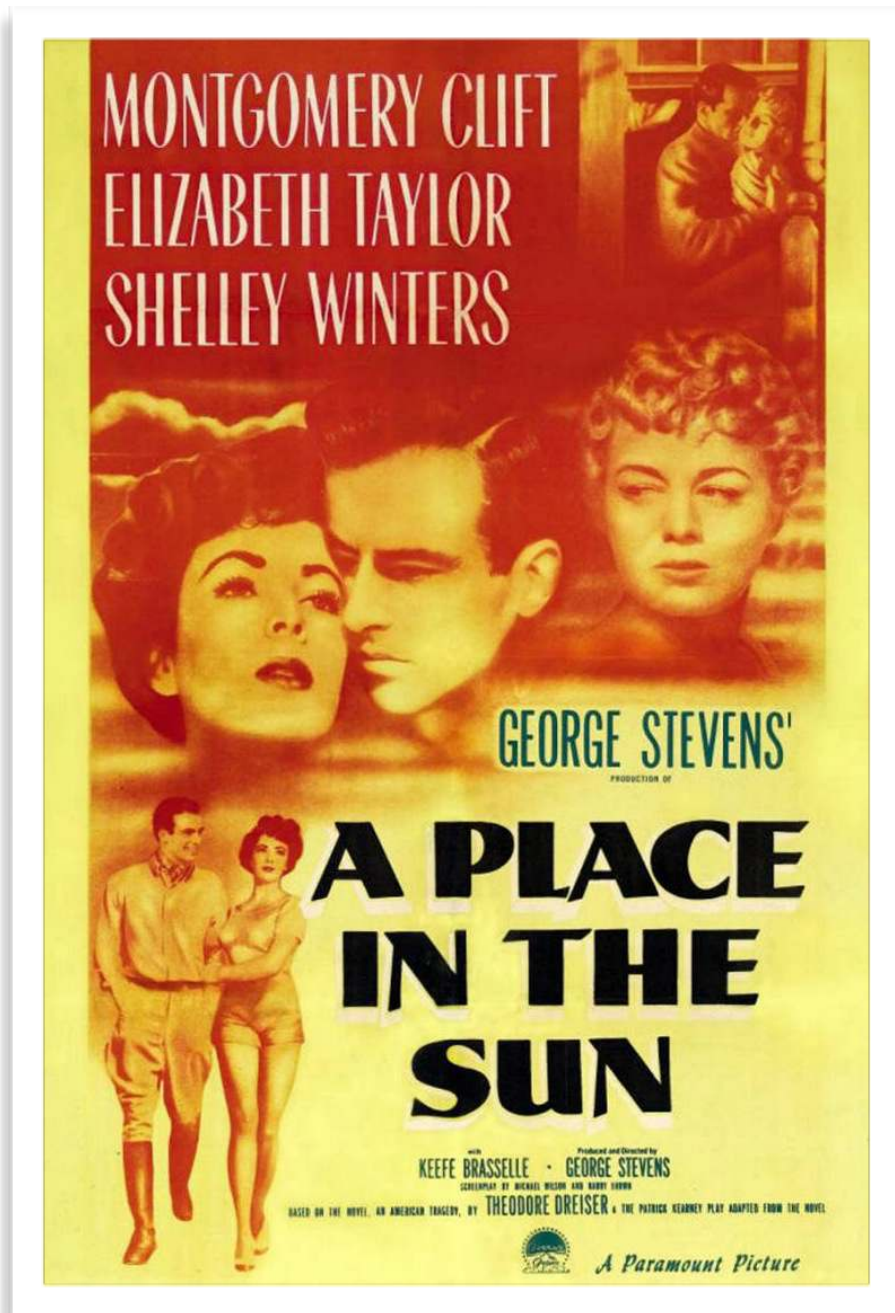
WGA Award (Screen), Best Written American Drama: Michael Wilson & Harry Brown

Nominated

WGA Award (Screen)The Robert Meltzer Award (Screenplay Dealing Most Ably with Problems of the American Scene): Michael Wilson and Harry Brown



Alice's threat to expose George to the Vickers family and her insistence on marriage result in tragic outcomes for both characters.



From Book to Screen

On the DVD audio commentary, Associate Producer Ivan Moffett said that the film's title came from a statement attributed to General Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1911, who was quoted as saying: "Germany demands its place in the sun." Moffett said he was daydreaming and nearly dozed off when he suddenly thought of this quote and suggested it to George Stevens. The rest, as they say, is history.

Sources / References

Page 5. Fred Zinnemann quote re: Stevens's directorial style. *A Place In the Sun* DVD audio commentary.

Page 5. George Stevens's and Paramount Studios. *A Place In The Sun* DVD audio commentary.

Page 6. George Stevens Jr., on his father's directorial style and observations about his camera placement and use of slow overlaps and dissolves. *A Place In The Sun* DVD audio commentary and interview.

Page 7. Alan Pakula quote on Steven's directorial style. *A Place In The Sun* DVD audio commentary.

Page 7. Shelley Winter's role in the film. *A Place In The Sun* DVD audio commentary and interview.

Page 8. Winters and Clift "Loon Lake" scene and use of stunt doubles. *A Place In The Sun* DVD interview with Shelley Winters.

Page 8. Elizabeth Taylor quote on Montgomery Clift. *A Place In The Sun DVD* interview.

Page 10. Montgomery Clift bio. **Wikipedia**, **IMDB** and **The New York Times**.

Page 11. Elizabeth Taylor bio. **Wikipedia** and **IMDB**.

Page 12. Shelley Winters bio. *A Place In The Sun* DVD interview, **Wikipedia** and **IMDB**.

Page 14 - 15. Awards. **IMDB** and **Wikipedia**.

Page 16. Title change from the book to the movie. *A Place In The Sun* DVD audio commentary.

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