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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [John Denvir](http://docs.google.com/articles/john_denvir.htm)         |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Internet Movie Database](http://www.us.imdb.com/Title?0120202)  [All Movie Guide](http://allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=A212230) |     **"**  It’s a Hollywood movie about **ethnic prejudice**.    **"**            **"**  That doesn’t mean that we can’t honor the contributions which **different groups** have made, but in the end we have to relate as **individuals**, not members of ethnic groups.  **"** | **Tribes** by John Denvir  "State and Main" is an intersection. It’s an intersection where a traffic accident takes place, but more importantly, an intersection of two cultures. You could say it’s a meeting of the Hollywood Slicks and the Vermont Hicks, and you wouldn’t be wrong. But I think that writer/director David Mamet goes out of his way to make the crucial intersection be between Jew and Gentile. It’s a Hollywood movie about ethnic prejudice.  The film chronicles what transpires when a Hollywood film crew invades a rural Vermont village to make a movie entitled "The Old Mill." But Mamet makes the moviemakers Jewish and the villagers Scot. Each group has its icon; the Jews are identified with matzos, the Scots by their tam ‘o shanters.  We see the two tribes meet on a public and a private level. On the public level, their meetings are tense. The Hollywoods are cynical, the locals suspicious. The worst traits of each group are represented by one member. Readers of Picturing Justice will not be surprised that each is a lawyer. The Jewish villain is Marty Rossen (David Paymer), who portrays a stereotypical, fast-talking Jewish Hollywood producer who is both hilarious and revolting in his no-holds-barred attempt to muscle adversaries to his will. Rossen is so overdrawn that viewers might wonder why Mamet, himself a Jew, would create him, but I think Mamet has his reasons. He really is setting Rossen up to be compared to the openly anti-Semitic Doug MacKenzie. MacKenzie is ambitious, devious, and corrupt. In fact, he’s a lot like Rossen. But Rossen at least is not a hypocrite. Rossen gets the last laugh when he greets the sanctimonious MacKenzie in Yiddish when he delivers a bribe to him. The message is clear: MacKenzie displays all the vices he attributes to Rossen. They are members of the same tribe.  But the comparison of MacKenzie and Rossen is only the first of Mamet’s Jew-gentile intersections. There is also a meeting on the private level. Here we see a romance ignite between Jewish playwright /screenwriter Joe White and gentile local book store owner Ann Black. Here the intersection is successful, not because the characters struggle to transcend ethnicity but because they are blissfully unaware of it. White is a sweet, shy, tongue-tied young writer. We only know he’s Jewish by the box of matzo in his room. When the sexy female star played by Sarah Jessica Parker notices the matzos, she attempts to flirt with him by saying, " I love Jewish men." White’s reply is the key to the movie. He asks "Why?" Why would you like or dislike anyone just because they were Jewish?  When Black spots the box of matzos, she asks if she can have a cracker. She has lots of reasons for loving White, none of them related to ethnicity. White (Jew) and Black (gentile) find they really belong to the same tribe: the one that likes books, amateur theatricals, small town papers, and quiet walks with lots of talk.  I think Mamet is telling us that the only possible future for America is assimilation. That doesn’t mean that we can’t honor the contributions which different groups have made, but in the end we have to relate as individuals, not members of ethnic groups. Mamet has introduced this same theme before in [*Homicide*](http://docs.google.com/articles/homicide.htm). In that movie Bobby Gold (Joe Mantegna) was haunted by the anti-semitism he perceived in the behavior of his police colleagues. His Irish partner Tim Sullivan ( William Macey) dismissed his accusations and told him they should get on with their job. But Gold became involved with a Jewish terrorist organization which played on his ethnic identity. They kept asking him why he wasn’t loyal to his own people. Eventually the Jewish group betrayed Gold, but not before causing him to miss an appointment with Sullivan which led to Sullivan’s death. Too late Gold discovered that his true "tribe" was Jewish, and Irish. Communities should be based on mutual affection, not ethnic identity.  The final scene in "State and Main" shows a judge donning his tam ‘o shanter to get in a few holes of golf after work. He’s an African-American. Like Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus, he knows he belongs to the greatest tribe of all -- the golfers.  August 2001  **Would you like to comment on this article? 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