

## Interview: Omar Epps & D.C. Young Fly of ‘Almost Christmas’

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- [African American](#) [2]
- [Alabama](#) [3]
- [Almost Christmas](#) [4]
- [Birmingham](#) [5]
- [D.C. Young Fly](#) [6]
- [Danny Glover](#) [7]
- [Gabrielle Union](#) [8]
- [Holidays](#) [9]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [10]
- [House](#) [11]
- [Interview](#) [12]
- [J.B. Smoove](#) [13]
- [John Michael Higgins](#) [14]
- [Mo’Nique](#) [15]
- [Omar Epps](#) [16]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [17]
- [Romany Malco](#) [18]
- [Universal Pictures](#) [19]

CHICAGO – Every year, the “season” gets earlier and earlier, and the first out of the gate for the holidays is the new film, “Almost Christmas.” This warm-hearted comedy involves a large African American family gathering at the Yuletide, and features Danny Glover, Gabrielle Union, Omar Epps, and introducing D.C. Young Fly.

Walter (Danny Glover) is the father of a large brood, and he wants them all together at Christmas, months after the beloved mother of the family has passed away. Omar Epps portrays a neighbor who has his sights on one of Walter’s daughters, portrayed by Gabrielle Union. D.C. Young Fly is a family friend of the youngest child (a college football player), and has a comic attraction to an Aunt played by Mo’Nique. The family that holidays together, stays together.



Omar Epps and Gabrielle Union of ‘Almost Christmas’

*Photo credit: Universal Pictures*

Omar Epps is a veteran actor, with film credits including “Juice” (1992), “Love & Basketball” (2000) and “Alfie” (2004), and TV series regular roles in “E.R.” and “House.” He is currently on “Shooter.” D.C. Young Fly (John Whitfield) became a YouTube comic sensation, and “Almost Christmas” is his first major film role. Omar Epps and D.C. Young Fly came to Chicago recently to promote “Almost Christmas,” and engaged in a in-depth discussion that brought out the charm in both of them.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** This genre of film celebrates the family, but it almost celebrates a kind of African American history...the rise of the



AA middle class after World War 2. What do you both think is most positive about these types of movies for the general American melting pot culture?

**Omar Epps:** It's about coming together, unity and family, all those greater and broader themes, and it is a celebration of the American Dream. The parents worked hard when they were younger, had their kids, and moved up the ladder to a bigger home. Then the kids go out into the world and they become good citizens with their jobs and careers. The story of the movie is the personalities behind all of that.

**D.C. Young Fly:** It's a great movie because it moves beyond African American stereotypes, and it does show the world that our families can come together and put their differences aside, and what true love is all about for them.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Religion plays a part in the celebration of the holidays for this particular family. What are your feelings about the roots in religion of the African American journey in American society?

**Epps:** Most black families have roots, whether Christian, Muslim or other religions, and that journey is unique for each individual. The world is evolving, and there is an acceptance of all beliefs, in my observation.

**Fly:** It's okay to be different, and have beliefs, because in the end we all pray to one God, there are just different ways and different definitions in getting there. You might eat cereal with water, and I might eat it with milk, but at the end of the day we both had our cereal.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Omar, this is a purely romantic role for you. How to you approach a character like this, and how do you make it different from the typical romantic part?

**Epps:** Well, what was fun about it was how the dynamic was in the film's relationship. The man drives those couples in so many films, but in 'Almost Christmas' it was Gabrielle's character that was the driving force. She strung my character along, and that was fun to play. I've know Gabrielle for years, and it was fun for us to find that lightness, but as the backstory was revealed we saw that it came from somewhere that was genuine. The characters grew up together.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** D.C., this is your first major role. What was intimidating about stepping onto a major movie set, with major movie stars you had grown up with?

**Fly:** It really wasn't intimidating, because they welcomed me with open arms and embraced me. First of all, if you're on a movie set with [director] David Talbert and [producer] Will Packer, there is a reason. It was a blessing to be around these A-list actors, watching them do what they did. I was there to soak up the game, and not come in my nose up high.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Omar, what is the key to developing chemistry when you are playing roles where you're among a fictional family? How did David Talbert keep everyone loose in such a large cast?

**Epps:** To be honest, we've known each other through the years, some more than others, but that made it easier. David is a great skipper, he's able to give attention to the individual, while at the same time keeping the boundaries for the group. And the energy that is felt coming from the screen was exactly the energy that was on the set. We weren't reaching for anything, it was a good time, and a natural flow. For example, Danny Glover is a legend to both of us, but on set he was 'Pops.'



Mo'Nique and D.C. Young Fly of 'Almost Christmas'  
Photo credit: Universal Pictures

**HollywoodChicago.com:** D.C., so you made your biggest splash on YouTube roasting people. What was the origin of that comedy bit, and when did you know it started making an impact?

**Fly:** I'm originally from Atlanta, the 'hood on the west side, so that comedy is how it is around all the 'hoods. It's a roasting, a ribbing, a making fun of the struggle in those places. This is how we cope with things.

If you're lights are out when we come to your house, we're gonna roast your ass. [laughs] But it's okay, because our lights have been off before. It was unique when I put it up on YouTube, because no one else was doing it. The comedy came from where I came from, and people around the world liked it because it gave them a look into my world. When I put it on the web, it blew up from there.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Omar, you were a guy that actually worked with Tupac Shakur [1992's 'Juice']. What is your observation regarding his legend versus the real guy that you knew?

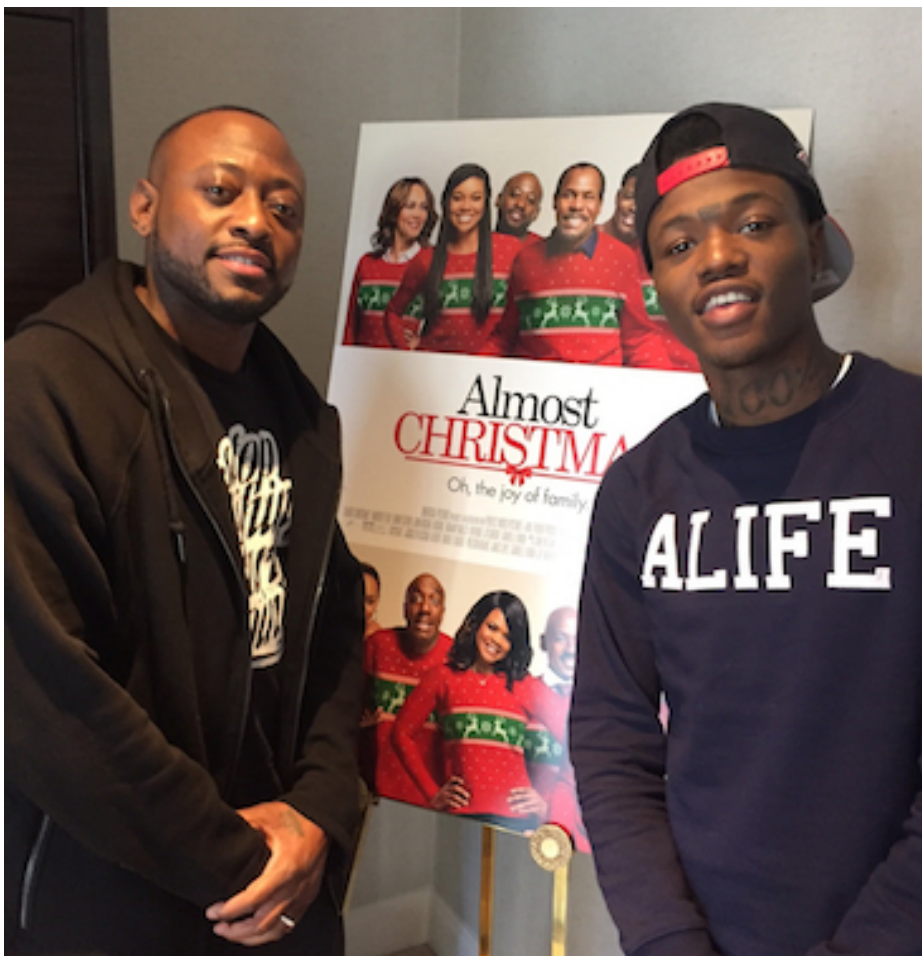
**Epps:** Everybody probably knows everything now, because so much has been written, but 'Pac was a highly intelligent person. If he didn't know something, he would find it out. He was a seeker. I think the world experienced his passion, but the dude was really smart, and he did things by design. What may have seemed reckless was being constructed, and his movement had something behind it..nothing was by mistake.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** For both of you, Birmingham has such a deep and interesting history in the African American culture. What do you think setting the film in that city does from creating a better image regarding its legacy?

**Epps:** It was interesting, because when we were first gathering for the film, we were surprised to find ourselves in Birmingham, Alabama. But what it once represented to the civil rights movement, with the bloodshed and chaos in the past, it also became the epicenter for the peace that came afterward. That's all on David Talbert, because it's a subtle wink to American society that this place, so historic in the civil rights movement, could also spawn a generation of success.

**Fly:** It was about overcoming the past legacy. Because like Omar said, it was amazing, because of the origins of the civil rights movement being there. It showed how real black love can be meaningful, in the 'house.' We learned to overcome, it gave that message within the movie.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** D.C. when you changed your name in 2009 to something you identity with, that you made up, do you think you leave John Whitfield behind, or will he always be with you?



Omar Epps & D.C. Young Fly in Chicago  
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**Fly:** D.C. Young Fly is John Whitfield. When somebody does call me by my real name, then they really know me. [laughs] I don't like being called by my last name, because that might mean I'm incarcerated, or something bad has happened. 'Whitfield!' 'What?' [laughs] What did I do now? Bottom line, with D.C. Young Fly, you never have to see the personal issues John Whitfield goes through. D.C. is the guy you want to be around.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Omar, you portrayed one character for eight years on the TV series 'House.' Since it was a supporting role, were you satisfied with the way the character evolved, or do you feel there was more to explore regarding him?

**Epps:** I was thoroughly satisfied, I think [series creator] David Shore and the writing team wrote for all the characters very well, we at least had opportunities to arc in our roles and explore different stories. We had fun on the set, and Hugh and I had the opportunity to riff on these vignettes that were created, and as the seasons progressed the writers would actually go toward those vignettes more. David and I have talked about how it all evolved, and how they watched us on set and would move situations toward what we were doing.



**HollywoodChicago.com:** D.C., since you're new to the acting game, have you taken classes or are you just going with your instincts?

**Fly:** I've taken acting classes. They're okay, but they tend to knock me off my groove, and I like a more natural ability approach. Some directors like the classes, others just want me to read and practice on my own – instead of listening to an acting coach who has never been in a movie. [laughs] I've mixed both the classes and the natural stuff.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Omar, one of your notable films is 'Love and Basketball' [2000]. which for a lot of people transcends a normal romance picture into something more, something that they really love and attach themselves to. Since you were one of the leads that had to carry the film, how have people to it over the years when they talk about it to you?

**Epps:** It's interesting, it had a greater life after it was in the theaters. I remember when it opened, it did okay box office, but beyond that there is just a ravenous following for the film, people just love it.

**Fly:** It's a classic.

**Epps:** In a sense, it was different in a way, over and above being just a love story, which is timeless. I think it was every girl's dream to have that type of romance, where you grew up with someone, knew their family, and became friends. It started platonic, but as both characters grew up, they were waiting for each other around that corner. Personally, it was one of those things that has been amazing for me. Different generations now are into it, and it's passed along. 'My mama told me to watch it, and now it's my favorite movie,' is what I hear all the time.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** We're about to end the eight years of President Obama. Since you both are in different generations, what did his election personally mean to you, and how do you think he will continue to inspire Americans after he leaves office?

**Epps:** For me, Obama represents grace, respect, betterment and community. In this world we live in now, with a 24/7 news cycle, perception can sometimes be more powerful than reality. He represents an American tradition – to progress we must do the work as individuals, but then we must come together and work together. Even if we don't agree, we should agree to work together. I think he's an amazing man and president. His legacy is ongoing.

**Fly:** I think all people see that. He opened my eyes when he started out in the community. When I see him sit down with the hierarchy of world leaders, I see a man killing our past bad vibes and getting those folks to work together. I don't people in general see that, and he doesn't get recognition for it.

*“Almost Christmas” opens everywhere on November 11th. Featuring Omar Epps, DJ Young Fly, Gabrielle Union, Danny Glover, Mo’Nique, J.B. Smoove, Romany Malco and John Michael Higgins. Written and directed by David E. Talbert. Rated PG-13.*



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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/almost-christmas>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/birmingham>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dc-young-fly>
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