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Blaxploitation

A big source of entertainment in our society is story telling. Everyone likes a good story. Whether it is an action story, or heart throbbing story, people enjoy it. Blaxploitation is the exploitation of black stories and lives by non-black directors, producers, and writers. The main reason for this is that they know how much black people have suffered. And while they do not sympathize with black people, they sympathize with their struggles. The difference being, if you take away the black aspect of it, there is still the struggle that they will feel some type of way about. If you take away the struggle, you are left with black people which they will disregard swiftly. Black peoples’ stories have been told in movies for a long time now, but the storytelling has gotten better. We are seeing more and more black people involved in the storytelling which results in better ways of telling black stories. Some of the movies which show this are *Home of the Brave*, *No Way out*, and *Shaft*.

In *Home of the Brave*, we see Private Moss, a black soldier, and several other white soldiers sent on a mission which requires the utmost trust on your fellow soldier. This movie does a good job showing the dynamic between Private Moss and his fellow soldiers. Many black people experience racism with no reason. Now racism in general is a horrible act that has no justifiable reason, but unfortunately black people deal with it a tremendous amount more than white people. Private Moss is no exception. In his squad, he has arguably the most important role. Yet, the other soldiers belittle him and have no respect for him or his job. This, unfortunately, is accurate to black people in real life. It is tragic and hurtful just knowing that people experience this. That fact that it is tragic and hurtful just makes people want to see this experience told on the big screen. That is the main reason we see stories like this. A lot of the time, movies are made with the notion that they aim to bring awareness to certain issues. The problem is people are already aware of the issue, they just prefer watching it in movies than to stand up and advocate for change. They would rather tear up about it in a movie theater, than stand up for their black neighbor getting harassed just for being black. *Home of the Brave* does an excellent job in depicting this. In the movie, Private Finch defends Private Moss endlessly from the racist remarks of their fellow soldiers. Halfway during the movie, Private Finch lets slip a racist comment towards Private Moss. He stops himself from completing the sentence, but the damage had been done. This just goes to show that even though people may act like they care, they do not. Just as the makers and fans of Blaxploitation movies.

When racism was not enough, the Blaxploitation of more personal dilemmas was their next target. *Now Way Out* follows Dr. Luther Brooks who faces great hardship from several white people. The whole movie shows Dr. Brooks deal with an inner struggle. The brother tells everyone that Dr. Brooks murdered his brother, and it starts eating him up inside. Dr. Brooks tries to not let it get to him, but he struggles. He eventually succeeds in getting an autopsy done to prove he did not kill him. Dr. Brooks spends the whole movie trying to prove his he did not kill him. The directors, writers, and producers of the time jumped at the chance to tell this story. They knew how much people would like this story, seeing a black man struggle. They knew this was a story they needed to tell, even if it was not their story to tell. Sure, black people want these stories told, hoping others can see how messed up society is. But others want these stories told because they find it amusing. And it is this difference in reasoning which is what is hurting the progress of society. The progress being our dismantlement of racism. Unfortunately, the Blaxploitation of these stories slows our progress.

When we get to 1971, we get to *Shaft*. *Shaft* is a perfect example of how great a black movie can be when black people are involved in the production. This movie strays from the typical narrative of a black person facing racism. This movie throws into the mix a kidnapping by gangsters. Even in the fight scenes, you can feel the tension. There is no over the top dramatic fights. It is simple and clean. This movie shows that you do not need to exploit the black struggle to tell a good story of a black man overcoming something difficult. Gordon Parks, the director, gives black people in opportunity to help tell the stories of their people. He helps show us the good that black people do without shoving blatant racism in our face. *Shaft* was ahead of its time for changing the direction of Blaxploitation films and the many possibilities this new direction of Blaxploitation can go.

Blaxploitation has been around for quite some time. It became popular in the 70s, but people have been doing it for much longer. And the longer it has been going on, the harder it is to break the habit. This will prove to be difficult because people love to profit off others’ sufferings. And black people have suffered more than any other group of people in the world. Hopefully, this Blaxploitation will stop some day and stories will be told to actually bring awareness towards issues, instead of just telling black people’s stories for money. Hopefully, the increasing involvement of black people in the production of these movies can help bring proper awareness to the issues faced by black people and help bring an end to racism.

Works Cited

Home of the Brave. Directed by Mark Robson. Performances by Lloyd Bridges, James Edwards, Frank Lovejoy. Stanley Kramer Productions, 1949.

No Way Out. Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Performances by Linda Darnell, Sydney Poitier, and Richard Wildmark. 20th Century Fox, 1950.

Shaft. Directed by Gordon Parks. Performances by Richard Roundtree, Moises Gunn, Charles Cioffi, and Christopher St. John. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1971.