For those of us who have siblings, we know the resentment we feel when they get away with the worst of deeds. Surprisingly enough, Hollywood has a little brother. His name is Mel Brooks, and he gets away with absolutely everything. Most people seem to have some kind of innate limit to what they consider too much but not Mel Brooks, and his outrageously hilarious comedy *Blazing Saddles* is exhibit A. He weaves a story bringing together the weirdest combination of people from black railroad workers and the strongest man ever to German prostitutes and stupid cowboys. On the surface, this movie is just witty slapstick comedy, parodying the old Westerns of the thirties and forties. If we look a little deeper though, we see an insightful message that satirizes racism itself, bringing to light how it is a product of ignorance, not evil.

The Civil Rights movement really stirred up race relations in the fifties and sixties, and while many moved on and accepted black culture, racism was all but gone. According to “Film and the Black Experience” by Victor Bondi, unlike the thirties when black actors were traditionally portrayed in subservient roles, the seventies brought upon a wave of films made by blacks. Many white producers, however, exploited the new surge of black moviegoers by creating films such as *Blacula (1972)* and *Black the Ripper(1973)* to lure them into the theaters. The films continued to portray black people as “pimps, dope pushers, gangsters and super males with vast physical prowess but no cognitive skills,” said Junius Griffin, head of the NAACP’s Hollywood branch. It’s at this time that Mel Brooks created this unorthodox film to disprove the attitude about blacks.

The movie opens with black railroad workers doing backbreaking work, one of whom is Bart, the main character of this movie. The white supervisors at the site taunt the workers and ask them to sing a song claiming that “When you was slaves, you sang like birds.” Bart and the other workers, insulted but ready to take this opportunity, begin to sing an acapella spin on Frank Sinatra’s “I get a kick out of you.” The lead supervisor, Taggart, dismisses their incredible rendition, and begins to appallingly chant “De Camp Town Ladies.” Within the first ten minutes of the movie, Brooks shows us how foolish the white westerners are as well as how smart Bart is, something completely against the popular opinion of the time. These reverse-stereotypes are put forth in many ways throughout this film. At one point, a westerner tries to convince the residents to continue to live there in the face of danger with his flawless logic, “There aint no way that nobody is gonna leave this town. Hell I was born here, and I was raised here, and goddamit I’m gonna die here! Ain’t no sidewinding, bushwhacking, hornswoggling crucker-croaker is going to ruin my biscuit-cutter!” This dialect however, only applies to the white men. Bart, always has perfect grammar. By reversing the roles, Mel Brooks shows the viewer that the stereotypes are simply incorrect.

The real point of this story, however, is how the racism of the white westerners is just a result of ignorance about what black people are like than an evil nature. After the singing fiasco, the railroad workers discover a pool of quicksand in the way, and Bart gets stuck. Taggart ignores Bart completely and Bart, out of revenge, hits Taggart in the back of the head with a shovel and is sentenced to death. Meanwhile, Taggart reports their finding to Hedley Lamar, a conceited businessman, who realized that they must buy a small town named Rock Ridge to pass the railroad through. Lamar launches a series of schemes designed to drive out the residents of Rock Ridge. First, he tries to drive them out by sending a bunch of hooligans to wreck the town and in the process, the sheriff dies. Rather than leave, however, the residents simply ask the governor, a drunk sex-addicted halfwit, for a new sheriff. Lamar catches wind of this request and decides that the people of Rock Ridge would surely leave if they were to have a black sheriff. Thus, Bart, who is just about to be hung across the street, is promoted to Sheriff of Rock Ridge. This is when things start to go bad for Lamar. At first, the people of Rock Ridge try to murder Bart, but he uses his wit to get away. In response, Lamar sends the animal-like Mongo, so strong he could kill a horse with a single punch, to wreak havoc on the town. Knowing that simply shooting him would accomplish nothing, Bart hides a bomb in a candygram. He goes on to charm over the German prostitute sent to break his heart and finally gets the other railroad workers to help him build a life size replica of Rock Ridge to fool the next band of criminals sent to destroy the city. By the end of the film, the residents of Rock Ridge absolutely love Bart, showing that people can be changed. Mel Brook’s inspiration for this message, I believe, is his upbringing. In Ivor Davis’s article, “A conversation with Mel Brooks,” Brooks reveals that he was from a family of poor Jews in Brooklyn, a condition from which success is difficult to achieve. Brooks undoubtedly faced anti-Semitism in his journey to fame, but his victory as well as this movie show that hope should not be lost.

The over the top exaggeration, reversal of roles, and inconsistencies in the plot all play a big role in developing the satire present in this movie, but the most important part is connecting this directly to the occurrences of today. To prevent people from dismissing the racist ideals of white men portrayed in the movie as occurrences of the past, Brooks introduces many historical anachronisms. For example, when Bart rides into Rock Ridge for the first time, there is a band playing blues, yet the story is set in 1874. When Bart gets caught impersonating someone from the KKK, he says, “And my next impression, Jesse Owens!” Jesse Owens was born 46 years after 1847. The anachronisms show both that the movie’s plot is not meant to be taken literally and also shows that the problems presented here still exist.

Personally, I really enjoyed this movie just because of its sheer outrageousness. The actors do a great job of being enjoyable and as always, Mel Brooks knock our shoes off with the obvious as well as the sometimes subtle satire. My favorite scene was the interaction between Lamar and the governor. I found it hilarious that the governor is portrayed in such a way, since it is seems impossible, but in the recent turn of events, we may never know. I also really enjoyed the original music that went into the movie. The opening song praised a hero named Bart, who we came to know as the main character. The lyrics of the song playing in the first attack on Rock Ridge matches perfectly with what was going on and it ends in a as a church hymn that, ironically, has a last line of “Now it’s a time of great decision \ Are we to stay or up and quit? \ There’s no avoiding this conclusion \ Our town it turning into shit.”

Aside from my personal feelings, this movie was strong in many facets. The actors really took great efforts to make the movie light-hearted, and they genuinely seem to be having fun. When Bart sings “I get a belt out of you,” we can see the giant grin on his face, and it truly makes the movie worth watching. Some critics seem to take issue with the amount of racist words used in this movie, but I think it is perfectly okay. The way they are used represent how they would have been used in the 1800’s and they aren’t meant to be taken seriously anyway. The whole movie is satirizing racism, showing how it is foolish endeavor. While the characters are very over the top with this movie, I must say the characterization was very well done. One of Hedley Lamar’s very first lines, “My mind is aglow with whirling, transient nodes of thought careening through a cosmic vapor of invention,” captures perfectly the self-indulged businessman he is. Meanwhile, Mel Brooks performance as Governor Lepetomane is incredible just because of its attention to detail. The way his eyes are hazed, the way he twitches his mouth, and his obvious ADHD perfectly show the ineptitude of government that One thing I do wish Brooks did differently was change the ending. It was honestly very confusing. Why did he feel the need to break the fourth wall? What was even worse though, was the ridicule of the gays in Hollywood. Brooks creates an entire movie to show racists their ideals are flawed and then brings in an unnecessary element of homophobia at the very end. While at the time, it was commonly known that the average westerner was not that dumb, the stereotypes against gays were still very real, so reducing their masculinity was simply unnecessary.

All in all, *Blazing Saddles* was incredible in all senses of the word. The social commentary produces by these actors is truly extraordinary, and the flamboyant exaggeration just make it a gem to watch. The way my little brother acts annoys me, but Hollywood’s little brother has done a heck of a job. While there are a few places where Brooks crosses the line, this evergreen movie is simply irreplaceable.