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“Django Unchained’: Survive to Act Another Day”

“Django Unchained,” the recently released movie is proving to be quite troublesome for Black Americans. Actor Jamie Foxx, who stars in the movie, would love for you to go and see it because it places dollars in his pocket. Movie director Spike Lee, on the other hand, Twits that he will boycott the movie. In a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, noted scholar and social critic, Ishmael Reed, appears to join Spike Lee in his disapproval of “Django.” Prof. Boyce Watkins goes the other way and sides with Jamie Foxx, blogging that the movie meets with his approval.

Given all of this confusion at the top, what’s a brother or sister to do? Should you or should you not pay the price of admission to see the movie?

This is not the case of “crabs in a basket.” In fact, this scenario marks a critical point in Black American history. It wasn’t so long ago that we complained because there were so few Black images on the big screen. Now we have a few Black Academy Award winners to our credit. However, we are now torn between the perfect portrayal of Blacks, our history, and our culture in the movies (and the media in general), and accepting what the major movie studios throw our way as movies.

Movies are too powerful cultural statements to give the studios a pass when they get it completely or even partly wrong. It is important to have our story told properly and correctly because it tells the world who we were—and by extension, who we are today. In an ideal world, our movie portrayals would always be factually accurate, or the studios would make clear that a release was solely art with no attempt to imitate life. In such cases, we could take it or leave it.

To this point, I have stated the problem. What is the solution? Specifically in this case, the solution is to support our Black actors so that they can survive to act another day. In other words, knowing what you know about “Django Unchained,” make a decision to go or not to go see it, keeping in mind that, if you support the movie, then you make Jamie Foxx successful, which will cause studios to seek his skills in the future. Understanding the criticism that has been leveled at “Django Unchained,” maybe Foxx will play a role in ensuring that his future projects are more palatable to Black audiences.

In a world where Blacks control so little in the movie industry, this is the best strategy to pursue if we want to improve future outcomes. In a worst case scenario, boycotts lead to fewer future Black movie projects—something that we argued against in the past.

As for me, I plan to see the movie with the idea of scrutinizing every scene so that I can become better informed about its inaccuracies. I'll use this knowledge to judge future Jamie Foxx movie projects. If they don't improve, then I'll boycott his movies so that he does not survive to act another day.

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