

# BLAXPLOITATION

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IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING study of 1970s American cinema, James Monaco (1979: 187) declared:

[t]he birth of the Black film of the late sixties and early seventies – with Blacks, by Blacks, and for Blacks; written, directed, and acted by Blacks (and sometimes even produced and financed by Blacks) – was the major success of the Hollywood Renaissance of 1968–1970

and Black film's "virtual disappearance" by mid-decade the "greatest failure of the American film business". At the commercial and, some would argue, cultural centre of this black film wave was the "blaxploitation" (or black action) cycle. From 1970 to 1975, over 100 films were released (the number varies depending on the parameters used) that featured mainly black casts performing action-adventure narratives in the ghetto. These low-budget action films, some of which were written and directed by African Americans, catered primarily to black urban, working-class audiences – filmgoers who had previously been neglected by Hollywood and who demonstrated a vast appetite for dramas about black private eyes, vigilante heroes, cops, gangsters, drug dealers, and so on, getting even with the system and sometimes also "getting over" (making big money). As we shall see, the term "blaxploitation" is charged and contentious, embracing a set of films with very different meanings, messages, and production contexts. Nonetheless, taken together, this cycle held an

immense cultural and commercial significance that outran its short shelf-life by some distance.

Blaxploitation departed dramatically from the race images and themes that scaled the box-office charts in the late 1960s. After all, one of the highest grossing films of the 1967–9 period was the re-release of *Gone with the Wind* (1967/68, earning \$29 million in rentals), in which the most prominent black character is the subservient "mammy", played by Hattie McDaniel (Steinberg 1982: 25). Moreover, Sidney Poitier became the first black performer to be voted by theatre owners onto the top ten list of Hollywood's biggest stars, after starring in three hit movies released in 1967 (Steinberg 1982: 60). His major-league success sent an important signal to Hollywood about the commercial potential of black personnel. In his 1967 hit *In the Heat of the Night* (a white-directed film targeting primarily a white liberal audience), Poitier plays an assertive black detective in a role that somewhat foreshadows blaxploitation heroes. However, Poitier's assimilationist roles in films like *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967 – another of the period's top-grossing films, with rentals of \$25 million) and *To Sir with Love* (1967), were widely seen as sexless, non-threatening (for white audiences), and even subservient (to the interests of white society) (for an influential critique, see Neal 1969: 13, 18; figures from Steinberg 1982: 25). So how can we account for the emergence of blaxploitation's gritty ghetto narratives in the context of a film

culture characterized by *Gone with the Wind's* nostalgic images of old-South race relations and Poitier's integrationist screen persona?

Of all film production trends, perhaps none has been more directly shaped by social and political forces than black action films. The late 1960s was a period of social turbulence in America. The major civil rights gains of the mid-1960s (the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts) worked to improve the prospects for some black people, but urban neighbourhoods with large black populations actually started losing ground in the late 1960s, creating a sense of frustration and disillusion. Riots erupted in major cities, as protest strategies shifted away from liberal integrationism and towards the militancy of the Black Power youth (see Carson 1981; Van Deburg 1992, 1997; Winant 2001: 147–76). With this mood of insurgency came a proud new attitude towards blackness, as black culture scholar S. Craig Watkins (1998: 94) describes: "The new assertive political posturing also gave birth to new style politics (the Afro) and conceptions of self ('black is beautiful') that began to transform the social production of black popular and expressive cultures." Black moviegoers were ready to see screen portrayals that reflected these new sensibilities and Hollywood, once it grasped the market potential, quickly responded.

While blacks made up about 11 per cent of the American population in 1967, the film industry's leading trade paper *Variety* estimated that they bought about a third of all tickets in first-run, urban theatres (Beaupré 1967: 3). Added to this, Hollywood had been under increasing pressure from civil rights organizations to improve the quantity and quality of its representations of African Americans, and to employ more blacks both in front of and behind the camera (see Leab

1976: 233; Guerrero 1993: 84–5). Thus both commercial imperatives and the threat of legal action and boycotts pushed Hollywood towards black subject-matter, the employment of more black personnel, and the recognition of the specific expectations of African-American audiences. Residential and demographic shifts – the youthfulness of the "baby boom" populace and the "white-flight" exodus to the suburbs – coalesced to generate new industry interest in young black urban filmgoers (see Stanfield 2004).

The result of these social and industrial developments was a string of highly profitable black movies (on the emergence of blaxploitation film, see Bogle 1973: Chapter 8; Leab 1976: Chapter 10; Guerrero 1993: Chapter 3; Van Deburg 1997: Chapter 4; Cook 2000: 259–66). As film scholar Rick Altman (1999) and others demonstrate, film genres and cycles have no stable or singular point of origin, and blaxploitation is no exception. Early indicators include sport star Jim Brown's butch performance in *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), which was foregrounded in publicity for the film, and the extraordinary success of Poitier (to which blaxploitation was both response and rebuttal). However, three fairly diverse, black-directed films launched the black action movie cycle. First came *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970, United Artists), Ossie Davis' adaptation of black crime writer Chester Himes' novel about two tough black detectives, which became the first-ever black-directed film produced by a major studio to turn a significant profit (earning \$5.1 million in rentals, off a budget of \$1.2 million) (Leab 1976: 241; Cohn 1993: C76). The film first presented many of blaxploitation's recurring themes: the colourful ghetto setting; the unabashed black styles, sensibilities, and humour (crystallized in

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the scene-stealing performance of stand-up comedian Redd Foxx); the proud and effective detectives mediating between black and white worlds; the charismatic black hustler (played by acclaimed actor Calvin Lockhart); the, by turns, vindictive, corrupt, and comic white characters; and the pointed social commentary. Pressure had been exerted by the studio to downplay the film's black themes in an effort to attract white patrons. However, this film's success, recouped from an overwhelmingly black audience, showed that, as Daniel Leab (1976: Chapter 10) put it in his book chapter title, "black is boxoffice".

Then came *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* the following year, a stark portrayal of a hip black sex worker who challenges the system and wins. This X-rated film, directed by Melvin van Peebles, was a mixture of experimental and independently produced cinema, pornography, political essay and crime thriller, featuring sex, fights, and an extended chase after Sweetback attacks two police officers to defend a young black militant (see Cripps 1990; Guerrero 1993: 86–91). At the film's end, Sweetback evades punishment, with the closing caution: "A BAADASSSSS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES" – an ending that thrilled many black viewers long accustomed

to narrative closures that see unruly black protagonists coming to no good. The movie earned \$4.1 million in rentals and, because it was cheaply made, most of this was profit. *Sweetback* became a lightning rod for debate about shifting black sensibilities, its cultural meanings and political messages hotly debated in the black community and beyond (see Cripps 1990; Hartmann 1994). Huey Newton (1971: A–L), leader of the Black Panther Party, hailed it as "the first truly revolutionary Black film". James Monaco (1979: 201) captures something of the movie's event status in the black power years: "the film succeeds as a *cri de cœur*, an announcement that black militancy has reached your neighbourhood movie screen and that things will never be the same". However, many other critics – black, white, feminist, leftist, conservative – criticized the film (see especially Bennett 1971).

The second big black hit of 1971 was *Shaft*, a studio picture directed by Gordon Parks Sr., about a stylish black private-eye. It was among the twenty highest grossing films of the year with rentals of \$6.1 million, and was accompanied by an award-winning, best-selling soundtrack (Cook 2000: 498). While *Shaft* (adapted from a white-authored detective novel) was far less experimental and political than *Sweetback*, it did feature black militants and talk of urban riots as well as a considerable

amount of sex and violence. Like *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, the success of *Sweetback* and *Shaft* was mainly due to their popularity with black audiences, especially black urban youth. Sex, action, fashion, music, and storylines about beating “whitey” (as in the climactic battle with the mafia goons in *Shaft* – a film that elsewhere does, however, show cooperation between the black hero and the white police) were identified as the key ingredients for success with young black movie audiences. When these assumptions were confirmed by the box-office performance of *Super Fly* (1972) – a film about a drug dealer making one last big deal before he gets out of the business – the floodgates opened. Both Hollywood studios and independent production companies made large numbers of black-oriented films. It is estimated that between 1969 and 1971, the annual output of black-oriented films rose from six to 18; from 1972 to 1974, the output rose to 25–50 films per year (with 1973 as the peak year) (Cook 2000: 261, 263).

#### **Black exploitation film**

The term “blaxploitation” was coined in the summer of 1972, following the release of *Super Fly*. Black activist Junius Griffin, the former leader of the Hollywood branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was quoted in *Variety* using the term and it quickly caught on (“NAACP blast super nigger trend”, 16 August 1972, cited in Martinez et al. 1998: 54). This neologism – an elision of black and exploitation – was very charged indeed, invoking both industry and racial meanings. The industry term “exploitation”, in usage since the 1950s, referred to films that, as film scholar Thomas Doherty (1988: 8) describes,

are “triply exploitative”: they exploit sensational happenings “for story value”, notoriety “for publicity value”, and audiences “for box office value” (see also Schaefer 1999). Most of these black crime films possessed all these attributes. First, they qualified as exploitation because they had low, substandard budgets, ranging in most cases from \$250,000 to \$1 million (in 1971, the average cost for a major studio release was \$1.75 million and in 1974 \$2.5 million) (Steinberg 1982: 50). Next, these films followed the exploitation logic by cashing in on topical issues and controversial trends, thus enabling sensational promotion. Many blaxploitation films, for instance, portrayed the timely figure of the black militant, capitalizing on the political energies of the period; they folded in fads like the kung fu craze (*Black Belt Jones*, 1974; *Dolemite*, 1975); and they fetishized the underground economy of pimping (*The Mack*, 1973; *Willie Dynamite*, 1974), and drug dealing (*Super Fly*, *Black Caesar*, 1973). Furthermore, like other exploitation fare, these black movies included explicit and stimulating subject matter. Witness blaxploitation’s interracial sex scenes; its objectification of the female and black male body; its brutal and comic violence and fast-paced action scenes; and its glamorous criminal activity. Finally, black action films catered to young black cinemagoers, thus following the exploitation tactic of targeting a niche market.

The turn of the 1970s was a “golden age” of exploitation cinema, extending well beyond the confines of black-oriented production. Cultural change and social ferment gave rise to Supreme Court rulings that relaxed the definitions of obscenity and, in the case of the film industry, the dropping of the strict Production Code in the late 1960s, opening the way for more explicit screen depictions of sex and violence (see Lewis 2000). As a consequence,



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Poster for *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*

mainstream filmmaking increasingly foregrounded exploitative elements. But this did not dampen demand for more full-blooded exploitation cycles: kung fu sagas, horror shockers, and, most plentiful of all, pornographic pictures. If exploitation elements were thus so widely deployed in this period, it raises the question of why black commentators were so deeply concerned about the import of black action films. When Griffin coined the term "blaxploitation", its industry meanings were clearly overlaid with racial meanings. It was not simply understood as exploitation cinema with a "racial twist". Instead, as Watkins (1998: 172) points out, "the association of the term *exploitation* with African Americans conjures up ideas of unfair, even racist, treatment". "Blaxploitation", remarks film scholar Ed Guerrero (1993: 69), "might as easily and accurately describe the cruel injustice of slavery or, for that matter, much of the historical sojourn of black folk in America." African Americans have faced an extraordinary history of race-based labour exploitation, as Guerrero suggests, and the charged term "blaxploitation" brought to mind long-standing and continuing racial experiences and injustices in times of new black self-awareness and pride.

The black critics who condemned these films as being racially exploitative did have a compelling point. First and foremost, though most of the creative energy and cultural labour came from blacks, the profits mostly ended up in white pockets (an age-old story in the US cultural industries). Two studies capture this racialized political economy: "Black films, white profits", by René Ward (1976), and *Black Film/White Money* by Jesse Rhines (1996: Chapter 4). Indeed, these white profits helped secure certain major and independent film companies through hard times when they were threatened with bankruptcy, including

MGM (which produced *Shaft* and *Shaft's Big Score* in 1972) and Cinemation (distributor of *Sweetback*). This inequitable state of affairs reflects the fact that black people (like women) were locked out of senior executive positions in Hollywood, owned a tiny proportion of movie theatres, and represented very few of the shareholders profiting from this film boom.

And if white executives and producers profited from these films, they also largely controlled the thematic and narrative course of this wave of cheaply made films. There is no question that blacks directed most of the aesthetically and politically significant (as well as most commercially successful) films in the cycle. Whites, however, directed and produced the vast majority of blaxploitation films, and, as the cycle developed, churned out films with increasingly stereotypical characterizations and formulaic plot lines, with portrayals of sexualized and racialized violence that were prurient and outlandish. There were "racial exceptions", for instance, white director Larry Cohen's excellent *Black Caesar* (1973). But for the most part, the distance between black creative personnel projecting images that freely satirized and sent up ghetto life for a black audience (even if these were also partly subject to external control) and white-devised stereotypical portrayals of blacks (that had long been a mainstay of Hollywood movies) was very considerable. The sudden demise of black-oriented filmmaking after 1974 crystallized the sense of disempowerment and resentment for many black personnel, when falling profits (probably due to excessive repetition and overfamiliarity with cheaply made blaxploitation formulas), campaigning pressure, and above all changing industry policies left black actors and directors out of work. The withdrawal of the major studios from blaxploitation production in 1975 was partly due to the

fact that they had realized that they could reach black audiences through their blockbusters. Once industry sources had noted that both *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Exorcist* (1973, Fig. 5 (see plate section)) were extremely popular with black audiences, Hollywood had responded by co-starring well-known black performers in several of its biggest productions to appeal specifically to blacks (see Krämer 2005). *Earthquake* (1974), for example, featured Richard Roundtree, and *The Towering Inferno* (1974) O.J. Simpson.

Shifting our focus from the politics of production to questions of audience raises further charges of exploitation. These films provoked controversy in the black community about their potentially harmful effect on the self-image and behaviour of black youth. Reflecting the polemical charge of these discussions, Conrad Smith (1972), Western Regional Director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), charged that the films have a “devastating and all encompassing impact on the life values, posterity and concepts of all black individuals”. Psychologist Alvin Pous-saint (1974) concurred with Griffin in his article subtitled “Cheap thrills that degrade blacks”. Growing concern about the potentially disempowering influence of these superheroic portrayals on black youth was encapsulated by Clayton Riley’s influential *New York Times* article (1972: 22), “Shaft can do everything, I can do nothing.” For many commentators, it was not simply that these film heroes were bad role models, but that blaxploitation symbolized the abrupt and ignoble end of the integrationist dream of Civil Rights and the attendant “respectable” portrayals of Sidney Poitier. As Ed Guerrero persuasively outlines in his illuminating chapter on blaxploitation film, these critics were engaged in an intensely felt debate – heavily

freighted with generational, racial, and class concerns – about the politics of black representation.

Of all blaxploitation films, *Super Fly* both generated the most controversy (provoking the launch of the Coalition Against Blaxploitation) and enjoyed the greatest hold over the black youth imagination. In his semi-autobiographical book on black film, critic Nelson George (1994: 54) states that “*Super Fly*’s cocaine dealer was a more romantic, conflicted figure whose slang and clothes cut deeper than *Shaft* into the black community’s psyche.” In his best-selling autobiography, black journalist Nathan McCall (1995: 102) describes how *Super Fly* influenced his own decision, as a young man, to start dealing drugs, observing that, “perhaps for the first time in this country’s history, young blacks were searching on a large scale for alternatives to the white mainstream. One option, glamorized by *Super Fly*, was the drug trade, the black urban answer to capitalism.” While integrationist voices were lambasting such movies for romanticizing criminal occupations and leading black youth (like McCall) astray, radical commentators lamented their containment of political energies. It must be remembered that this was a period of grassroots mobilization, when Marxist and black nationalist critiques of race and class exploitation were widely and intensely debated. In this context, blaxploitation films (after the contested radicalism of *Sweetback*), with their glamorization of lumpen lifestyles and trivializing portrayals of black militants, were seen as powerful tools of demobilization. Again, *Super Fly* is considered one of the most egregious: when the cocaine-dealing hero, Priest, has a standoff with black radicals, he emerges as the rhetorical victor and they run scared. Numerous scholarly articles have appeared,

stressing the depoliticizing impulse of blaxploitation (see Washington and Berlowitz 1975; James 1987; Davis 1998; Lyne 2000). Black Marxist scholar Cedric Robinson (1998), for instance, recently published "Blaxploitation and the misrepresentation of liberation", stressing the political significance of blaxploitation in light of the decline in black protest culture and rise of individualism in the post-civil rights period.

### Reconsidering blaxploitation

However pointed and persuasive the critiques levelled against blaxploitation, the representational politics of this movie cycle remain highly complex and contradictory. One danger of emphasizing the racially exploitative features of the genre is that one ends up reproducing a narrative of black disempowerment, of young black people as "culture dupes" (to use Stuart Hall's 1981 phrase). In fact, black people, as crafters and consumers of this production trend were, in many important ways, very active agents. Although white executives, producers, and other personnel were involved in and profited most from of these films, blaxploitation did create considerable employment opportunities for African Americans, and in a considerable number of cases the film's content and style were largely controlled by black personnel (on the extent of black agency in blaxploitation, see Reid 1988; Rhines 1996, Chapter 4; Lott 1998). An acknowledgement of black agency underwrites many of the critical reinterpretations of the genre.

Some critics have examined the style politics of blaxploitation's flamboyant clothing, hair-styles, language, accessories, and so on. These key components of the genre's iconography, critics argue, serve to communicate a repudiation of the conservative styles and respectable

mores of both middle America and the black bourgeoisie. By celebrating marginal identities and underground activities, founded on a sense of social exclusion, the style politics of figures like the black "pusher man" and pimp hold charged class and race meanings (and pleasures) (see Mercer 1994; Bruzzi 1997; Quinn 2001; Neal 2002). Equally, the gender and sexual politics of these movies have come under critical scrutiny. Blaxploitation films were products of the "sexual revolution", with their explicit portrayals of nudity and sex. Most of the films present women in passive and sexually objectified roles or as untrustworthy and manipulative, in both cases giving powerful illustration of the black feminist edict that black women are doubly oppressed – by race and by gender (see Davis 1983; hooks 1990; Hill-Collins 1991). However, blaxploitation superheroines did emerge, notably Pam Grier in *Coffy* (1973, "the baddest one-chick hit-squad that ever hit town!" according to the poster's tagline) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), and Tamara Dobson in *Cleopatra Jones* (1973). These women portrayed active, sexualized, and victorious "black mamas", in roles that have been sharply debated. Recent critics have stressed the feminist potential, sexual transgression, and gendered ambivalence of blaxploitation heroines (and indeed, in some cases, heroes) (see Brody 1999; Hankin 2002; Wlodarz 2004).

While these scholars focus on gender transgression, others have explored *genre* transgression. Many blaxploitation films were genre remakes (*Black Caesar* reworked the gangster classic *Little Caesar*, 1931; *Blackenstein*, 1973 and *Dr. Black, Mr. Hyde*, 1976 remade classic horror stories, and so on). Recent scholarly articles have appeared, exploring the interesting racial implications of reworking genre films from a black



perspective, and, inversely, the genre implications of tracing race over established Hollywood stories. Harry Benshoff (2000: 37), for instance, has explored how blaxploitation horror films “reappropriated the mainstream cinema’s monstrous figures for black goals, turning vampires, Frankenstein monsters, and transformation monsters into agents of black pride and black power”. *Blacula* (1972) has provoked the most critical interest, offering, according to Benshoff (2000) and Leerom Medovoi (1998), a powerful, if ambivalent, racial critique, in which the “normal” racist society is cast as monstrous and the monstrous avenger as heroic, his actions justified by the cruelty of racial oppression (see also Lipsitz 1998).

While these critical departures focus on stylistic, thematic, and narrative features, it must be stressed that the representational politics of blaxploitation extend beyond film content to encompass the high-profile black personnel involved in these projects. Some of the most successful and critically acclaimed black musicians of the day (indeed, perhaps of all time) – Curtis Mayfield, Bobby Womack, James Brown, Isaac Hayes – produced chart-topping, highly acclaimed soundtracks. These soul and funk stars, some of whom made cameo appearances, were key components of the films’ success, capturing the exciting mood of the times and also often commenting, through the music, on narrative developments. For instance, the Curtis Mayfield tracks “Freddy’s Dead” and “Pusherman” from *Super Fly* provide ethical counterpoints to the hero’s glamorously individualist stance. As Greil Marcus (1977: 97) argues, the “songs were not background, but criticism”.

Equally, scholarly accounts often neglect the extratextual significance of black filmmakers, who, like the soul stars, themselves served as

symbols of the cycle’s brand of black empowerment. Importantly, those who first fashioned blaxploitation were highly esteemed black cultural professionals and communitarians. Before making *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, Ossie Davis was an acclaimed actor and theatre director, as well as a prominent socialist and civil rights activist who gave the memorable eulogy at Malcolm X’s funeral. Gordon Parks Sr. was an acclaimed *Life* photographer, novelist, and filmmaker, before he set his sights on *Shaft*. Melvin van Peebles was a bilingual writer and award-winning young filmmaker prior to *Sweetback*. In all three cases, aesthetic and cultural range extended well beyond the criminal yarns of black action films (for informative accounts of these black directors, see Patterson 1975; Monaco 1979; Donalson 2003).

Indeed, in some cases the movie narratives themselves worked as self-conscious allegories of black financial control and artistic prowess. Van Peebles understood that the image and fact of black creative self-determination were extremely important in these times of black cultural awakening. It could be argued that the success of *Sweetback* rested as much on his own publicity image as fêted and picaresque cultural producer as it did on the film itself. Van Peebles not only wrote, directed, and starred in the movie, but also controlled its advertising and marketing, driven by his status as extraordinarily resourceful and self-determined black cultural entrepreneur. The book he published about the film’s making consolidated his image of macho self-reliance (Van Peebles 1996). Through his one-man marketing campaign, he drew attention to the parallels between his own status as “baadassss” filmmaker and *Sweetback*’s sexual and racial prowess in the film. *Sweetback*’s sex hustles, which allow him to thwart the authorities and

regular sexual conventions, paralleled the business “hustles” surrounding the movie’s production and distribution, and its independent, “X-rated” status (for instance, he publicized the fact that he had pretended to make a porno film to avoid the unions and save money). Journalists picked up on the parallels, as one *New York Times* title put it: “The baadasssss success of Melvin van Peebles” (Gussow 1972).

Thus, the polar logic of “Shaft can do everything, I can do nothing” is interrupted by the wider sense of dawning black creativity and control surrounding these films. The tendency towards polemical critique also tends to over-emphasize blaxploitation’s role at the expense of other strands of early 1970s black-oriented filmmaking. Certainly, an extraordinary number of cheap black crime flicks were churned out during the period. But when James Monaco described the “birth of black film” (quoted at the beginning of this piece), he had in mind many different kinds of cinema. This period saw a mushrooming of independent and experimental black filmmaking, as well as more upmarket, black-themed films. For example, the bio-pic *Lady Sings the Blues* and the historical drama *Sounder* were both in the top ten films of 1972, appealing to older blacks as well as whites (Cook 2000: 498).

Nevertheless, early 1970s black-oriented filmmaking does tend to be subsumed under the banner of blaxploitation, not least because this cycle has proved to be very influential for the film industry and indeed for mainstream culturemaking since. Some of blaxploitation’s waning energies were diverted in the mid-1970s into black caper-comedies (which, ironically, reprised the spirit of the first blaxploitation film, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*). Along with black-directed hits like *Let’s Do It*

*Again* (1975, directed by Sidney Poitier) and *Car Wash* (1976), the astonishing success of the Western spoof *Blazing Saddles* (1974, earning rentals of \$48 million), with its interracial action-comedy team of Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder, offered the major studios a highly effective model for appealing to both black and white audiences, a model that would turn first Richard Pryor (co-writer of *Blazing Saddles*) and then Eddie Murphy into Hollywood superstars (Cook 2000; see Krämer 2005). We can also see blaxploitation’s legacy in the ghetto action films made by young black directors like John Singleton and Allen and Albert Hughes (see, above all, Watkins 1998); in the crime-caper movies of Quentin Tarantino (see Martinez et al. 1998), and in a string of recent neo-blaxploitation spoofs and remakes. Darius James’ recent journalistic account (1995) of the cycle gives a lively indication of its continuing relevance to African-American culture. More generally, blaxploitation’s rich afterlife persists in the hip-hop styles and sounds that have recently taken the mainstream by storm (see Boyd 1997; Neal 2002; Quinn 2005).

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