

Cultural Appropriation and Capitalism

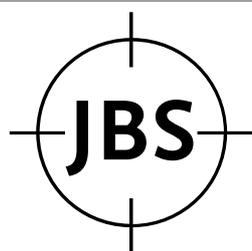
Co-opting Blaxploitation in the Filmic *Live and Let Die*

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In 1973 when United Artists released the eighth James Bond film, *Live and Let Die* (*LLD*), the film industry had changed considerably since the debut of the first film in the franchise, *Dr. No* (1962). The preview of *Dr. No* occurred during the Cold War when Kennedy was still president; the US Civil Rights Movement was active; immigration had become a national concern in the UK; and western black audiences were still marginally willing to pay to watch a film that either ignored their existence or fetishised them and their cultures. *LLD* debuted at the end of the Civil Rights Movement, during the Black Power Movement, and at the end of the Vietnam War, meaning that, if the Bond franchise was to survive, the films had to change with the times by appealing to a wider audience, which meant acknowledging black lives, cultures, and experiences – albeit in a comedic and outrageous way to avoid alienating mainstream, white audiences. The films also had to shift towards acknowledging black characters by incorporating them into the plotlines in primary roles. This alteration to the typical Bond narrative resulted in the co-optation of blaxploitation film elements within *LLD*.

In the film version of *LLD*, Bond works closely with the CIA to neutralise a criminal drugs trafficking organisation led by Dr. Kananga, known in the under-

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world by his alter ego, Mr. Big. Kananga is the president of a small, fictitious Caribbean island called San Monique. Played by Yaphet Kotto – who Donald Bogle contends “projected an assured yet never overstated brand of masculinity” (2008, 269) – Kananga was the image of the formerly colonised imperial subject, emphasising Bond’s role as the Empire’s international police officer and its white saviour. In the novel, Bond and various CIA operatives work to solve the case of resurfacing gold bars thought lost centuries before at the height of British and Spanish colonisation in the Caribbean. The sudden appearance of this treasure in the gold trade market gains the attention of both British and American Intelligence agencies. Profits from the sale of the gold in the novel fund communist endeavours, making this an international issue. Joyce Goggin contends that Fleming’s focus in the novel was on western conflicts – specifically the overall concern with the spread of communism. However, in the film, “the fear of communism [...] falls out entirely and Mr. Big’s evil plans turn out to have nothing to do with the Soviet Union and Cold War politics” (Goggin 2018, 146). In the film, Bond and the CIA work to neutralise a heroin ring initiated in San Monique by Kananga. As Mr. Big, Kananga’s goal is “to drive out the Mafia by providing free heroin, to increase the number of drug addicts, and then, having cornered the market, to push up prices” (Black 2017, 116). The timing of the film’s release reduced the impact of the Cold War and communism on western audiences, while the emphasis placed on the drugs trade in the film played “into American anxieties, although without threatening the future of the world” (ibid.). In the waning days of the Vietnam War, the film subliminally stokes “fears of black power, the cities, and crime” (ibid.) – all allegedly perpetuated by African Americans.

While the film alters the communist element of the novel’s original plotline, the inclusion of African Americans and, to a lesser extent, Afro-Caribbeans as members of Kananga’s crime syndicate remains critical to the story. Because the novel includes black characters, the filmmakers decided that the best way to situate these characters for the film’s audience was by co-opting elements of traditional blaxploitation narratives. *LLD* abandoned “the more serious tone of Fleming’s novels in favour of [...] motifs from the Blaxploitation tradition that shaped early 70s cinema” (Schwetman 2017, 95). The film, in “keeping with this borrowed blaxploitation narrative [...] indulged any number of archetypal genre clichés: from afro haircuts to wide-lapelled suits, anti-white sentiments and excessively-adorned Cadillac cars” (Semley 2010, 29). Stephane Dunn observes that the film’s “long opening sequence with the dancing nude silhouettes and profiles of black women strongly indicate” co-opting blaxploitation (2008, 88). *LLD*’s production era made the incorporation of some elements of blaxploitation critical to the

film's financial success. Melvin Van Peebles' film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) inaugurated the cinematic Blaxploitation genre, which can be classified as a subgenre of African American film distinctive for its emphasis on African American cultures and experiences. *LLD* co-opted blaxploitation largely because the genre was becoming more popular than mainstream films in the US in the early 1970s; therefore, incorporating elements of the genre, it was thought, would make the film more competitive at the box office.

One of Hollywood's major reasons for co-opting blaxploitation as a viable commodity was audience dissatisfaction. By the late 1960s, film revenues in the US had decreased, reflecting African American frustrations with films that either excluded or fetishised them. Films like *For Love of Ivy* (1968), a vehicle for Hollywood favourite Sidney Poitier, repeated old tropes that continued to frustrate African American audiences. Cinematic depictions of black men and women, such as those in *For Love of Ivy*, were limited to predictable plots promoting common stereotypes, which Coleman and Yochim note expose "the skewed treatment of blacks in the media" while pinpointing "imagery's social functions and forms" (2008, 1). The plot of this film revolves around Ivy Moore (Abbey Lincoln), an African American maid who decides to resign from her position and return to school (secretarial school instead of a university) to avoid living in ignorance. In a demonstration of white privilege, patriarchy, and toxic masculinity, her employers' son, Tim Austin (Beau Bridges) blackmails an African American trucking company executive named Jack Parks (Sidney Poitier), who also operates an illegal gambling club, to romance Ivy, hoping that she will remain the family's maid if she falls in love. Ivy and Jack do begin a relationship of sorts, but at the time of the film's release audiences had tired of the "black maid" and "black hustler" tropes. As a result, *For Love of Ivy* did not perform well at the box office, earning only \$390,000 with an initial budget of \$2,590,000 (United States Congress 1971, 6845). This poor profit margin was not expected of Poitier, who played the lead role in *To Sir with Love* (1967), which began with a budget of \$625,000 and earned \$42,432,803 in the domestic market (Thomas 2017). The poor box office performance of *For Love of Ivy* indicated an audience shift, reflecting social changes in the US; in particular, African Americans moved away from the influence of the more acquiescent Civil rights Movement to the radical Black Power Movement. The rejection of Hollywood's typical offerings was directly related to misrepresentations of black lives and experiences and the misappropriation of western black cultures in mainstream films.

Unlike typical Hollywood films, blaxploitation was hip and cool, reflecting the imagery – albeit occasionally misinterpreting the ideology – of the Black Power Movement. With intelligent, powerful black characters, who were neither the typical “toms” nor “coons” depicted in mainstream Hollywood films, blaxploitation had an appeal that was unmatched – much like the Bond films, themselves. To capitalise on the momentum of blaxploitation cinema, *LLD* incorporated several elements of the genre, such as the highly efficient network of African Americans led by Kananga, a suave, intelligent, super-criminal and diplomat with a secret identity only recognisable in the underworld. Kananga, in his tailored suits and clipped Oxbridge accent, was the type of criminal mastermind that producers hoped black audiences wanted to see, in conjunction with his neatly attired gang of henchmen, who outwit CIA agents and often best 007.

In addition, films had to evolve with changing global politics of the time. The Soviet organisation SMERSH in Fleming’s novels was becoming less relevant as the Cold War receded from the international political imagination. John D. Schwetman notes that “Bond emerged as an international film hero because he represented an aspirational, cosmopolitan ideal, offering viewers an opportunity to escape to an exciting international arena of adventure during the Cold War” (94). For this latest film to be marketable, Bond had to take his cosmopolitanism west to the US and to the Caribbean, shifting his focus from Cold War concerns to more pressing social issues and defending the Empire’s remnants in the Commonwealth. The Vietnam War had also altered the American consciousness, shifting the nation’s focus from the Cold War to an actual war. *LLD* does not delve into Vietnam; however, the film’s alteration of the novel’s plot – from illegal gold funding communism to heroin in the black community – hints at the war and its influence on western drug trafficking.

By the early 1970s, the Vietnam War ceased to be a battle between good (democracy) and evil (communism), and African Americans were particularly frustrated by the ongoing conflict that had hit their communities the hardest. Having had their fill of an American idealism and exceptionalism that excluded African American cultures, a film defending these ideals was not destined to perform well at the box office among this demographic. *LLD*, produced nineteen years after the novel’s publication, moved away from the “Red Scare” of communism to a timelier fear: the American heroin epidemic. US involvement in Vietnam brought more opium products into the country from the Golden Triangle, in larger quantities and at lower prices. These low-priced products flooded American cities, affecting in particular impoverished, working-class blacks. Kananga’s decision to harvest the drug on San Monique and to glut the US drugs

market with his cheaper and stronger product is a stroke of genius on the character's part, as well as a timely reflection of the issues facing black communities in the US in the post-Civil Rights Movement and the era of Black Power. Despite *LLD*'s attempts at portraying facets of African American life, the film makes many a misstep by employing a culturally appropriative lens rather than one of intercultural competency or understanding – which Terry L. Cross defines as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or professional and enable that system, agency, or professional to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (2012, 83). In *LLD*, cultural appropriation, rather than cultural competence, presents Bond as a white saviour while marginalising black characters, cultures, and communities.

Incorporating blaxploitation elements into *LLD*'s plotline, while a brilliant move for the continued evolution of the Bond series in the 70s (and a sound economic decision), is also a form of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is defined as “a diverse and ubiquitous phenomenon” comprised of various occurrences, such as representing “cultural practices or experiences” or “the use of artistic styles distinctive of cultural groups by non-members” (Matthes 2016, 343). The definition of the term implies that this practice is neither beneficial to the group whose culture has been “borrowed” nor to the group borrowing from another culture. There are, however, some arguments that take a more congenial view of cultural appropriation. Young and Haley attempt to untangle “subject appropriation”, noting that this can occur “in the arts, when artists from one culture represent aspects of another culture, or people who belong to it” (2012, 268). Erich Hatala Matthes contends that Young and Brunk's 2012 collection of essays, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, defends cultural appropriation, noting that at its core, cultural appropriation can be harmful “particularly with respect to its power to oppress and silence” (344). But rather than simply defining cultural appropriation as right or wrong, it is, perhaps, more productive to focus on the outcomes of this practice, such as “misrepresentation, misuse, and theft of the stories, styles and material heritage of people who have been historically dominated and remain socially marginalized” (ibid., 343). Cultural appropriation implies a level of power and control in which marginalised groups continue to occupy a disempowered position. Ashley and Plesch posit that “[b]eyond the [...] acknowledgement of borrowing or influence” is “the motivation for the appropriation: to gain power over the represented subject” (2002, 3). While the intention behind co-opting blaxploitation for *LLD* may not have been to gain power or control over African Americans or Afro-Caribbeans, the film's appropriation of

both cultures is “harmful because of the way that it interacts with dominating systems [...] to silence and speak for individuals who are already socially marginalized” (Matthes, 347). In *LLD*, African American and Afro-Caribbean cultures are misrepresented, trivialised, and misinterpreted for entertainment purposes, making this film a classic example of cultural appropriation.

Blaxploitation cinema popularised “the matriarchal image of black women and black masculine urban identities”, while often providing its audiences with an implicit (or sometimes explicit) critical analysis of race in America and racist social and governmental structures (Dunn, 46). The genre “contributed to the ongoing social construction of race” by depicting “a stronger, more militant image of African Americans who triumphed over (frequently racist) white antagonists” (Benshoff 2000, 33). However, *LLD* replaces the genre’s black male protagonist with an image of Bond as the traditional white saviour – a problematic move representative of the misuse and misrepresentation of blaxploitation elements for profit. Blaxploitation was initially created by black filmmakers to appeal to black audiences’ “desire to see black folk and black culture on the big screen” (Dunn, 46). These films, which *LLD* actress Gloria Hendry refers to as a “Renaissance” – a rebirth of black film focusing on contemporary black experiences – were appropriated by Hollywood, transforming them into “a group of films that were primarily subject to white Hollywood control” (ibid., 47). The producers of *LLD* capitalised on the popularity of early 1970’s Blaxploitation films, which influenced popular culture by seizing on “the black masculine persona associated with Malcolm’s [X] street hip image” (ibid., 46). Ed Guerrero notes that blaxploitation allowed Hollywood “to play on black people’s new-found identification with its increasingly politicized and militant underclass, while shifting the industry’s black imagery and stereotypes, in the words of the critic Daniel Leab, ‘from Sambo to Superspade’” (1993, 95). Stereotypical depictions of African Americans in the media are “quite adept at drawing our attention to how individuals and groups are presented” (Coleman and Yochim, 2). In *LLD*, several black characters take on the ‘Superspade’ persona; however, the great majority remain marginalised through depictions that reaffirm stereotypical views of black people, communities, and behaviours. For example, Tee Hee Johnson (Julius Harris) can be classified as a “black brute” – “a barbaric black out to raise havoc” (Bogle, 13). With his ever-present wide-toothed grin and giggling, Tee Hee, a member of Kananga’s inner circle, is reduced to a typical “coon”, whom Donald Bogle describes as an “amusement object and black buffoon” (7). This is particularly evident in the film’s final scene in which Tee Hee attempts to murder Bond and is,

instead, murdered himself by Bond, who commits this act using Tee Hee's weakness: his prosthetic arm with its electronic hooked hand.

African American communities were, at the time of the film's release, subject to the same stereotyping as individual black characters in *LLD*, transformed from rich and varied cultural areas with specific socio-economic needs to monolithic and stereotypical "hoods" laden with crime. The scenes in Harlem depicted in the film support this contention, as they portray an economically depressed area replete with abandoned and crumbling buildings, debris littering the ground, and businesses profiting from the occult or serving alcohol. In other words, blackness in *LLD* is "characterized by seventies Afros, black power slogans, and a deeply segregated metropolis" (Regis 2001, 752). New Orleans' French Quarter, an addition to the film that was not included in the novel, fares no better than Harlem as it is the scene of two murders – both of CIA agents, one white and the other black – and home of the Fillet of Soul restaurant, where Bond is kidnapped. There is no reference to the Quarter's other businesses, vibrant culture, or rich history. Helen A. Regis observes that "the French Quarter is portrayed as a culturally black public sphere, enlivened by exotic funerary rituals and inexpertly policed by redneck sheriffs" (752-753). Similarly, in homage to the effectiveness and efficiency of the British Empire's bureaucratic control over its Caribbean colonies and their swift decline since independence, the fictional San Monique is depicted as a nation either consumed with tourism and tourist dollars or plagued with very un-British superstitions. The newly independent island nation "is steeped in primitive, violent, and sexualized voodoo rituals, dramatized in Broadwayesque stage shows for the tourist trade" (ibid., 753). Thus, San Monique signifies "the most extreme forms of blackness as Otherness" (ibid.).

African Americans are also portrayed within the film in stereotypical ways, functioning solely as members of Kananga's multi-national criminal organization. Afro-Caribbeans are subject to white Hollywood's reductionism as the purveyors of voodoo superstition and participants in cult-like ceremonies, distancing them from European Christianity, logic, and sanity. *LLD* promotes a false narrative of western black lives, and it is Bond's duty, as a representative of the Empire, to right the former colonies, using his license to kill when required. The film implies that African Americans are exclusively tied to criminal activities by only depicting blacks as active participants in Kananga's drugs trafficking empire. Afro-Caribbeans, however, are depicted as Kananga's superstitious pawns who require Bond's assistance to be brought back under the Empire's control. In both its US and Caribbean contexts, *LLD* appropriates elements of western black cul-

tures, using Bond as the tool to rectify the socio-cultural decline precipitated by independence of former colonies from the Empire.

LLD centres on Bond, paying little attention to or capturing the nuances of African American or Afro-Caribbean cultures. The most obvious example of this misappropriation is the inclusion of “pseudo-vooodoo” (Alexander 2019, 849). Pseudo-vooodoo is a misrepresentation of voodoo, and many blaxploitation horror films “draw heavily on voodoo as a ‘more authentic’ expression of the African American supernatural” (Benshoff, 37). *LLD* is notable for failing to grasp the importance of this religious practice or to distinguish between the African-influenced religious practices of the American South – specifically Louisiana – and of the Caribbean. Voodoo, which is a derivative of Haitian *vodou*, was brought to Louisiana (then a part of France’s western colonies) from Haiti by the colonists’ chattel slaves. While Louisiana voodoo bears some resemblance to Haitian *vodou*, the two remain distinct religious practices. Voodoo is a non-syncretic religion whereas *vodou* incorporates elements of Roman Catholicism, which can be seen in the figure of the *loa* (such as Baron Samedi), who are intermediaries between the living and the dead bearing some resemblance to Roman Catholic saints. In *LLD*, voodoo and *vodou* are seen as interchangeable. San Monique, which Joyce Goggin claims represents Jamaica (156), provides an example of this cultural misinformation, as the cultural practices on San Monique do not bear the slightest resemblance to Jamaican culture. Goggin’s contention can be challenged as Jamaica has no cultural attachment to voodoo or *vodou* but to *obeah*, which is more prevalent in the Anglophone Caribbean. Bilby and Handler describe *obeah* as a “catch-all term” encompassing “a wide variety and range of beliefs and practices related to control or channelling of supernatural/spiritual forces by [...] individuals or groups for their own needs, or on behalf of clients who come for help” (2004, 154). While *obeah* practices vary throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, it has certain essential characteristics: manipulating and controlling supernatural forces using “material objects” or by reciting “spells”, as well as “divination”, “foretelling”, and “healing and bringing good fortune” (ibid.). Bilby and Handler also note that, in Dutch historical records and among the Ndyuka Maroons of Suriname, the term *obeah* “rarely if ever denotes malevolent sorcery meant to inflict harm” (ibid., 155).

If, in *LLD*, San Monique is meant to symbolise Jamaica, the novel’s Caribbean setting, the use of an island with a French influenced name is a prime example of misinterpretation because, in former French colonies like Haiti, *vodou* was the common religious practice – whereas, in the Anglophone Caribbean, including Jamaica, *obeah* was practiced. The use of tarot cards as divination tools in

LLD is also inaccurate; divination is indicative of *obeah* not voodoo, which does not use such tools. Yet, in the film, residents of San Monique are depicted practicing voodoo in ceremonies invoking Baron Samedi, the *vodou loa*. While Leah Gordon has an overall positive view of the Baron in *LLD*, actor Geoffrey Holder's portrayal of the tall, grinning black man, muttering indecipherably, tells another story (2012, 102). This depiction of Baron Samedi contributes to stereotypes of black men as "coons" and dishonours the *loa*. Although the inclination among those unfamiliar with voodoo, *vodou*, or *obeah* would be to assume that they are all "black magic" and the same, neither contention is accurate and *LLD*'s use of pseudo-voodoo contributes to stereotypes about the region and the religion's practitioners.

In addition to Hollywood's interpretation of voodoo, Solitaire, Kananga's tarot card-reading associate and captive (Jane Seymour), is also included in the plot of both the film and novel to facilitate the black magic narrative and to emphasise Caribbean belief in the occult. In the novel, Solitaire believes that Mr. Big is a Zombie, noting, "I come from Haiti. My brain tells me I could kill him, but [...] my instinct tells me I couldn't" (Fleming 1980, 334). Immediately, the connection is made between Haiti and its practice of *vodou*, erroneously referred to as "voodoo", in the person of Mr. Big. Fleming emphasises Mr. Big's initiation "into Voodoo as a child" and that the "rumour had started that he was the Zombie or living corpse of Baron Samedi", which "was accepted through all the lower strata of the negro world" (*ibid.*, 286). Hollywood voodoo – replete with tarot cards, voodoo rituals that involve murdering people with poisonous snakes, and top hats symbolising Baron Samedi – plays a large role in the film as in the novel. However, in the novel, there is an attempt to take the practice seriously, which is demonstrated by Bond's reading of *The Travellers Tree* by Patrick Leigh Fermor (*ibid.*, 288). Fermor's text, published in 1950 and 2011, was reviewed by the *New York Review of Books*, which observes that Fermor gives "his own vivid, idiosyncratic impressions of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, Barbados, Trinidad, and Haiti, among other islands" (2011). The review does *not* state, however, that Fermor's account is accurate. Both Fermor and Fleming were subject to their own prejudices and cultural misinterpretations when travelling throughout the Caribbean region. By the 1970s, when the filmic *LLD* was released, voodoo was reduced to a farce – a practice only black people and foolish whites seemed to take seriously, and a belief system to be minimised on screen for entertainment. Despite the confusion between voodoo, *vodou*, and *obeah* in the film, *LLD* still manages to emphasise the practice as more occult than religious, demonstrated

by the jokes that Bond makes at the expense of anyone in the film who takes voodoo seriously – such as Solitaire. Bond eventually seduces the unwilling Solitaire by convincing her that the tarot cards, which she relies on to tell the future, states that they will be lovers. Joyce Goggin observes that Bond “reads the cards, instilling white Englishness in the place of mixed ethnicity and voodoo”. Later, he slips “off his role as the Tarot reader” and assumes the “role [of] a seducer, insisting that, if Solitaire truly believes in the augury power of the Tarot, she will have to capitulate” (156).

In both the film and the novel, Solitaire is Kananga’s employee, but he also exerts an undue amount of control over her physical person and her psychic abilities. Focusing on Solitaire and her psychic abilities is a troubling plot device for blaxploitation, placing too much value on a white character in a genre meant to focus on black characters. While Bond has a sexual encounter with Rosie Carver (Gloria Hendry), an African American double agent, he seems fixated on Solitaire. Although it could be argued that white women in blaxploitation films are typically used as sexualised objects rather than as fully realised characters, in *LLD* Solitaire is critical to the narrative – not solely as Bond’s sexual conquest but also as a woman whom Bond cares for in some way. The novel ends with Bond recuperating after his final battle with Mr. Big with Solitaire by his side, suggesting that their relationship will go beyond the physical. However, the film ends with Bond and Solitaire moving towards a continued sexual liaison, leaving some doubts about the emotional permanence of their relationship. *LLD* also makes a misstep, mimicking Fleming’s error in the novel, in attempting to portray Solitaire as racially or ethnically ambiguous, intimating, with her assumed difference, that she is a viable blaxploitation character. Goggin, for one, contends that “Solitaire’s ethnicity is given a considerably more fluid and polyphonic twist”. This is supported by the character’s “exotic” clothing “while her hair and makeup signal the Orient” (150). In the novel, she is described as having “blue-black” hair, “high cheekbones and a wide sensual mouth” (Fleming, 312). None of these physical characteristics mark Solitaire as multiracial. While Fleming hints at Solitaire’s “otherness”, there is little information included in the novel to confirm without doubt that she is anything other than a descendant of the white, European plantocracy.

Goggin claims that “Solitaire [...] embodies a variety of forms of Otherness”, but relying on her dark hair, clothes, or makeup do not “other” the character (144). Instead, the film’s intersection of race and gender is more appropriately embodied through the character of Rosie Carver. Rosie was added to the film to promote the blaxploitation themes within the narrative; she does not appear in

Fleming's original novel. Rosie is sent to San Monique to help Bond solve MI6 agent Baines' voodoo ritual murder; she is apparently a fully trained CIA agent, but she appears inept and foolish, and is easily intimidated by Kananga's voodoo symbols. In addition to her general ineptitude, her duplicity becomes a major plot element in the film. As the author has noted elsewhere, "blaxploitation films used female protagonists to promote unique, more dignified images of black women while deconstructing familiar, stereotypical tropes" (Alexander, 839). This view is not evident in the bumbling, duplicitous Rosie, who cannot shoot a gun, for instance, forgetting to release the safety catch. Rosie commits treason by working as a double agent and, ultimately, is killed by Kananga for her ineptitude. The image of black womanhood portrayed by Rosie, then, reflects Hollywood's interpretation of black women rather than the image of "strong, independent women focused on improving their communities always using intellect and occasionally force, if required" typically depicted in blaxploitation films (ibid., 841). These images are counterproductive to societies touting gender equality, which remains an issue to any woman with aspirations that challenge gender-biased social structures. Rosie's inclusion in the film promotes a false narrative that *LLD* is more closely aligned with blaxploitation than it actually is, as her characterisation contributes to inaccurate, unsubstantiated, and marginalising notions about black women that it supposedly challenges. In an actual blaxploitation narrative, Rosie would have used her job with the CIA to aid and support black communities at home and abroad by combating drugs trafficking; she would have been the heroine. Indeed, Gloria Hendry was, herself, already a blaxploitation star and the co-star of *Black Caesar* (1973), which was released in February, four months before *LLD*.

Except for Kananga, Rosie is the only other high-profile black character in the film, but the character remains a troubling depiction of black womanhood. Rosie's lovemaking scene with Bond is ground-breaking as it is one of the first interracial love scenes in western cinematic history; however, this scene does nothing to empower black women as it is only included to reaffirm the narrative myth of Bond's sexual prowess. As such, Rosie might be considered a "ghetto sex goddess", a sexual and racialised depiction of the urban black woman replete with large Afro, chunky jewellery, and 70's fashion (Dunn, 109). Stephane Dunn notes that this image was popularised in the 1970s by blaxploitation actress Pam Grier, with whom Rosie can be said to share some similarities. There is considerable emphasis placed on Rosie's body – particularly when Bond notes that while she may not be an adequate CIA agent, she does possess other assets, as he

drapes his arm around her midriff suggestively. In this scene, Rosie is wearing a very small, multicoloured bikini, which she has just changed into from a more appropriate casual dress. The image of Rosie standing next to Bond with his arm draped casually around her midriff engenders a shift in this scene's focus from Rosie's professional function to her sexual function. Later, when Rosie attempts to lead Bond to his own death, he distracts her under the guise of stopping for a picnic; his goal is to use their sexual encounter as a ruse to elicit a confession from her. In this particular scene, Rosie is wearing Bond's white undershirt and nothing else, eroticising the character, emphasising her body, and drawing attention to the fact that the two have just had a sexual encounter. Rosie, who could have been a truly ground-breaking character had she been crafted as Bond's partner, becomes "merely" the first black female (as an eroticised "Other") to have an interracial sexual relationship with Bond.

In blaxploitation films, interracial sexual encounters are minimal and typically only between black men and white women. Interracial relationships are often limited to avoid de-emphasising black narratives and to draw attention away from white characters. In Gordon Parks' *Shaft* (1971), an interracial love scene occurs between the title character, John Shaft, and a random white woman. At the end of the scene, Shaft essentially throws the woman out of his apartment, reducing her importance in the film and emphasising Shaft as the film's focus. The reduction of white lives and narratives in blaxploitation – while also limiting their appearances in the genre as addendums to black lives and narratives – shifts the focus from the reality of western societies to those images that black audiences needed to see of themselves at the time. Thus, *Shaft* and other blaxploitation films like *Cleopatra Jones* (1973) diminish the importance of white characters, depicting them as vehicles to tell stories about black characters – whereas in *LLD*, the focus is entirely on Bond as the white saviour. The inclusion of a typical blaxploitation theme – drugs in the black community – is also misappropriated in *LLD*, transforming the usual plotline in which blacks combat the proliferation of drugs in their communities into one in which black characters control the drugs trade. *LLD* was also competing at the box office with *Cleopatra Jones*, a Warner Brothers contribution to blaxploitation starring model Tamara Dobson in the title role. Dobson was attractive and a well-known model, making her an ideal match for Moore. A CIA agent working directly for the US President, Cleo has more social capital than Bond, who consistently finds himself at odds with his immediate superior, M. Both Bond's and Cleo's narratives converge in blaxploitation, casting both agents – representatives of their respective governments – in antagonistic positions of power against the bad guys, who work consistently

to increase drugs trafficking. But whereas Cleo works to uplift and empower the black community, Bond is detached from this group, working instead to neutralise a powerful black man who, whether for nefarious ends or not, is a major employer of black men and women.

In co-opting blaxploitation, *LLD*'s writers failed to grasp the importance of the genre to western blacks. Blaxploitation was not simply about bringing down the bad guys; this genre was specifically focused on demonstrating that western blacks could not only survive but thrive in racially hostile – and, by extension, economically inequitable – societies. *LLD* includes black characters, but Bond's goal of subduing a black man who also happens to be a criminal mastermind places Kananga in the predictable mainstream film role of the "evil black man" and as an addendum to the films' overarching white saviour narrative. In films like *Cleopatra Jones*, blacks are not addendums to white narratives but, rather, are to be found at the narratives' centre. The struggle in *Cleopatra Jones* is not necessarily between good (black) and evil (white) but delves more deeply into socio-economic justice and social mobility. Cleo's antagonist is an American white female criminal mastermind named "Mommy", and the plot revolves around the conflict between Cleo and Mommy for control of a black neighbourhood. *LLD* takes a different approach with its inclusion of drug trafficking in black communities; the film strays significantly from the typical black empowerment narrative that was central to many blaxploitation films, like *Cleopatra Jones*. Further problematising the film's attempt at mimicking blaxploitation is the typecasting of black characters who "are evil or foolish"; of the black characters in the film, "only two are good, and one is murdered by the agents of Mr. Big" (Black, 118). In *LLD* black characters must be portrayed in this way to provide antagonists for Bond, the white saviour. As a result, black characters in *LLD* are one-dimensional – monochromatic cinematic depictions of people who could exist in real life but, in all likelihood, do not.

LLD, which essentially pits a British white, male secret agent against a powerful black man, misappropriates blaxploitation without fully understanding its nuances or purpose. Larissa Behrendt observes that in narratives promoting "the white redeemer" as the hero, the "black cannot survive the white world – hence his need to be saved – but the white can cross the cultural divide" (1998, 259). Blacks cannot triumph in Bond's universe, even though Bond himself can move in and out of their worlds. Therefore, Kananga's death is a foregone conclusion, and not just in the narrative conventions of the Bond formula. In the ideal blaxploitation film, Kananga would be the saviour and Bond would have

been his less intelligent, comedic antagonist. In addition to the negative depictions of black characters, the fluidity of Solitaire's ethnicity, as well as the film's failure to recognise the importance of race in western societies of the time continue to present problematic interpretations of blaxploitation. In *Cleopatra Jones*, Cleo repeatedly references her role as a black woman working to help the black community; this narrative is consistent with blaxploitation tropes. However, Bond works against a black man and black communities at large. While to some viewers the inclusion of black characters within *LLD* may seem like an important breakthrough in the 007 films, these characters are neither fully developed nor entirely incorporated into the plot; rather, they are addendums to a storyline geared towards Bond's success and, by extension, dominance. The use of black characters as props rather than fully realised personalities represents a failure to engage in blaxploitation while also co-opting elements of the genre for mass public consumption. Ultimately, the film avoids the racial politics plaguing the US in the early 1970s, stoking the fears and anxieties of many white viewers and ignoring the ethnic and cultural differences between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. While the film can be credited with placing black characters in major roles in a mainstream Hollywood film, it can also be criticised for minimising black people and misrepresenting western black communities and cultures.

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