



HARRY BELAFONTE: MOVIES RACE DEFIANCE

Buck and the Preacher

Buck and the Preacher

Director: Sidney Poitier
©: Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.
Production Companies: E. & R. Productions Corporation, Belafonte Enterprises
Producer: Joel Glickman
Associate Producer: Herb Wallerstein
Unit Production Manager: Sheldon Schrager
Production Consultant: Alfonso Sánchez Tello
Location Contact: José Haro
2nd Unit Director: Chuck Hayward
Assistant Directors: Sheldon Schrager, Jesús Marín
Script Supervisor: Malcolm Atterbury Jr
Casting: Billy Gordon
Screenplay: Ernest Kinoy
Story: Ernest Kinoy, Drake Walker
Director of Photography: Alex Phillips
Camera Operator: Manuel Santaella
Key Grip: Rafael Delong
Crane Grip: Salvador Serrano
Special Photography: Gilbert-Waugh Productions
Special Effects: León Ortega
Film Editor: Pembroke J. Herring
Assistant Editor: Garner M.J. Morris
Apprentice Editor: Jason Starks
Production Designer: Sydney Z. Litwack
Set Decorator: Ernesto Carrasco
Prop Master: Antonio Mata
Costume Designer: Guy Verhille
Wardrobe: Adolfo Ramírez, Ermon Sessions
Hairdresser: Harold Melvin
Titles: Maury Nemoj
Music: Benny Carter
Featuring: Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee
Music Editor: Else Blangsted
Sound Mixer: Tom Overton
Dubbing Mixer: Richard Portman
Sound Effects: Ltd. Edit International
Dialogue Coach: Alice Spivak
Wrangler: Jose Maria Hernandez
Cast:
Sidney Poitier (*Buck*)
Harry Belafonte (*Preacher*)
Ruby Dee (*Ruth*)
Cameron Mitchell (*Deshay*)
Denny Miller (*Floyd*)
Nita Talbot (*Madam Esther*)
James Mceachin (*Kingston*)
Clarence Muse (*Cudjo*)
Enrique Lucero (*indian chief*)
Julie Robinson (*Sinsie*)
John Kelly (*sheriff*)
Lynn Hamilton (*Sarah*)
Tony Brubaker (*headman*)
Bobby Johnson (*man who is shot*)
Doug Johnson (*Sam*)
Errol John (*Joshua*)
Ken Menard (*Little Henry*)
Pamela Jones (*Delilah*)
Drake Walker (*elder*)
Dennis Hines (*Little Toby*)
Fred M. Waugh (*Mizoo*)
Bill Shannon (*Tom*)
Phil Adams (*Frank*)
Walter Scott (*Earl*)
John Howard (*George*)
Shirleena Manchur (*Esther's girl*)
La Markova (*Esther's girl*)
Hannelore Richter (*Esther's girl*)
Valerie Heckman (*Esther's girl*)
Stephanie Lower (*Esther's girl*)
José Carlos Ruiz (*brave*)
Ron Fletcher (*Logan*)

Black American history is presented through the prism of a Western. Sidney Poitier's directorial debut, in which he stars opposite Belafonte, tells the story of a wagon master and con-man pastor who join forces to transport African Americans to safety. Belafonte initiated this project and his rascally preacher steals the film. Subverting his matinee idol image, his rousing, high-spirited performance energises the 'bro-chemistry' of his relationship with Poitier's morally upstanding yet fractious ally.

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Among the more successful elements of Jordan Peele's flawed, ambitious space-cowboy foray *Nope* (2022) is the film's intelligent engagement with cinema history and visual culture. A particularly significant reference is to Sidney Poitier's 1972 film *Buck and the Preacher*, the poster of which is seen displayed in the home of horse-wrangler protagonists OJ and Em Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya and Keke Palmer), as Peele places his film in the context of Black western forebears.

Rooted in 1970s western revisionism and burgeoning Blaxploitation, *Buck* casts Poitier alongside Harry Belafonte as cowboys in the late 1860s who end up uniting to lead a wagon train of Black settlers from Louisiana to Kansas, all the while trying to outwit the white raiders hired to either intimidate the travellers back to the plantations of the South, or murder them. With echoes of John Ford's *Wagon Master* (1950) and numerous westerns focused on the bonding of contrasting male characters (Poitier's wagonmaster Buck is a wily former soldier; Belafonte's 'Preacher' is really a hustler), *Buck and the Preacher* is highly allusive. But to view the film merely as a Black Butch and Sundance is to diminish it: Poitier's film goes deeper, supplementing shoot-outs, chases and comic high jinks with more serious intent, evident in its credit sequence and title-card preamble. This opening, with sepia-toned images of African American pioneers, not only lays out the film's post-Civil War context from a Black perspective but also announces its intention to challenge historical erasure: 'This picture is dedicated to those men, women, and children who lie in graves as unmarked as their place in history.'

A subversive streak is evident in numerous aspects, from the film's nuanced depiction of the relations between African-American and Native American characters to the space given to the character of Buck's wife Ruth (invested with strength and complexity by the vital Ruby Dee). Poitier's own performance is compelling, but the film's wild card is Belafonte's turn as the wisecracking Preacher, who packs a pistol between the pages of his Good Book.

Jerry Gatlin (*deputy*)
Ivan Scott (*express agent*)
Bill Cook (*man in express office*)
John Kennedy (*bank teller*)
USA 1972
102 mins
Digital 4K

HARRY BELAFONTE: MOVIES RACE DEFIANCE

Buck and the Preacher

Sun 10 Dec 18:20; Sat 23 Dec 15:50; Wed 27 Dec 20:40

Seniors' Free Talk: Harry Belafonte – A Veces Miro Mi Vida (Sometimes I Look at My Life) + intro by season curator Burt Caesar and post-screening Q&A

Wed 13 Dec 11:00

Seniors' Free Archive Matinee: Island in the Sun + intro by film historian Marcus Powell

Wed 13 Dec 14:00

BlackKlansman

Thu 14 Dec 18:00; Fri 22 Dec 20:20; Thu 28 Dec 17:50

Odds Against Tomorrow

Thu 14 Dec 20:45

Harry Belafonte in Concert and Conversation

Sat 16 Dec 15:00

Kansas City

Sun 17 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by actor Miranda Richardson and season curator Burt Caesar)

The World, the Flesh and the Devil

Tue 19 Dec 20:45

Carmen Jones

Wed 20 Dec 20:50; Fri 22 Dec 18:00

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Introduced during some enthusiastic al fresco ablutions, Belafonte's pleasure in roughing up his image and persona – yellowed teeth, wild eyes – is palpable; he also has the film's strongest character arc. Despite some heavy-handed elements (Benny Carter's score, performed by bluesmen Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee and Don Frank Brooks, is over-insistently employed in the film's opening stages), Poitier – replacing Joseph Sargent as director – shows great assurance for a first-time filmmaker in modulating shifts from action and comedy to more reflective, emotional moments, bringing out the strengths of Ernest Kinoy's screenplay. Poitier's career as a director would encompass both worthy efforts (the 1973 romance *A Warm December*) and woeful ones (the 1990 Bill Cosby comedy *Ghost Dad*); this film, undervalued on release, remains a highlight, and richly rewards rediscovery.

Alex Ramon, *Sight and Sound*, November 2022

CHRISTMAS FILMS

The Muppet Christmas Carol

Thu 7 Dec 18:25; Sat 23 Dec 12:00

Tangerine

Fri 8 Dec 21:00; Fri 15 Dec 20:40; Fri 22 Dec 18:10

Tokyo Godfathers (Tokyo goddofazazu)

Sat 9 Dec 20:45; Thu 14 Dec 18:30 BFI IMAX (+ intro by Ghibliothèque podcast creators Michael Leader and Jake Cunningham); Wed 20 Dec 18:15; Sat 23 Dec 21:00

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas

Sun 10 Dec 13:30; Wed 13 Dec 20:45 BFI IMAX

The Polar Express 3D

Sat 16 Dec 10:00; Sun 17 Dec 10:00; Sun 24 Dec 11:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Miracle on 34th Street

Sat 16 Dec 12:40; Sat 23 Dec 15:30

Die Hard

Sat 16 Dec 20:45 BFI IMAX

Carol

Thu 21 Dec 20:40; Sat 30 Dec 17:20

The Bishop's Wife

Fri 22 Dec 14:40; Sat 23 Dec 18:20

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BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

After Life (Wandafuru Raifu)

Tue 12 Dec 17:15; Wed 27 Dec 14:40; Sat 30 Dec 20:20

It's a Wonderful Life

Wed 13 Dec 18:10; Sat 16 Dec 20:25; Mon 18 Dec 20:25; Wed 20 Dec 18:10; Fri 22 Dec 14:30, 20:25; Sat 23 Dec 18:10

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)

Wed 13 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sun 17 Dec 18:45; Wed 20 Dec 20:55

My Night with Maud (Ma Nuit chez Maud)

Thu 14 Dec 20:50; Thu 28 Dec 18:15

The Shop around the Corner

Fri 15 Dec 18:20; Mon 18 Dec 14:30; Thu 21 Dec 20:45; Sat 30 Dec 12:20

Boyz n the Hood

Sat 16 Dec 18:15; Sat 23 Dec 20:40

Remember the Night

Sun 17 Dec 12:15; Tue 19 Dec 20:40

Five Easy Pieces

Tue 19 Dec 18:15; Fri 29 Dec 18:20

Meet Me in St Louis

Wed 20 Dec 14:30; Thu 21 Dec 18:10; Sat 23 Dec 11:50

Fanny and Alexander (Fanny och Alexander)

Sat 23 Dec 14:20; Fri 29 Dec 13:30; Sat 30 Dec 13:00

The Passenger

Wed 27 Dec 17:50

White Material

Fri 29 Dec 20:45

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