



## BLACK RODEO: A HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WESTERN

# The Harder They Fall

### The Harder They Fall

Directed by: Jeymes Samuel

©: Netflix US LLC

Production Company: Overbrook Films

Executive Producer: G. Mac Brown

Produced by: James Carter, James Lassiter,

Lawrence Bender, Jeymes Samuel

Casting by: Victoria Thomas

Screenplay by: Jeymes Samuel, Boaz Yakin

Screen Story by: Jeymes Samuel

Director of Photography: Mihai Malaimare Jr

Edited by: Tom Eagles

Production Designer: Martin Whist

Supervising Art Director: Greg Berry

Art Directors: Greg Hooper, Matt Gatlin

Costume Designer: Antoinette Messam

Music by: Jeymes Samuel

Re-recording Mixers: Ron Bartlett, D.M. Hemphill

Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer:

Richard King

Cast:

Jonathan Majors (*Nat Love*)

Zazie Beetz (*Mary Fields*)

R.J. Cyler (*Jim Beckwourth*)

Edi Gathegi (*Bill Pickett*)

Danielle Deadwyler (*Cuffee*)

Idris Elba (*Rufus Buck*)

Regina King (*Trudy Smith*)

LaKeith Stanfield (*Cherokee Bill*)

Deon Cole (*Wiley Escoe*)

Delroy Lindo (*Bass Reeves*)

Damon Wayans Jr (*Monroe Grimes*)

Julio César Cedillo (*Jesus Cortez*)

Woody McClain (*Clyde Grimes*)

USA 2021

137 mins

Digital 4K

### Writer/director Jeymes Samuel on 'The Harder They Fall'

*You wrote and directed the 50-minute western They Die by Dawn in 2013, but this is your debut proper as writer-director. What draws you to the genre and how did you come up with the story for The Harder They Fall?*

Westerns were always my favourite genre growing up. I love all of the John Fords and John Hustons, *The Searchers* [1956]. I love all the forms they take and the growth of them. But there were always glaring inconsistencies with the way they portrayed people of colour and women. If you're a woman or a person of colour in the Old West in Hollywood, you're in a subservient position. Growing up, I wanted to search more about the characters in this time and place, so I ended up researching and uncovered all these amazing real-life characters that existed that we never got to learn about. The Rufus Buck Gang; Nat Love; Jim Beckwourth; Marshal Bass Reeves, who was the inspiration for the Lone Ranger; Stagecoach Mary... so when I could get all these amazing men and women together in a fictional story, it was like the Avengers! Hopefully now people will want to learn more about them.

*Knowing that all of these characters in the film were historical figures, what made you decide to go down a fictional route rather than, say, a biopic or something more traditional?*

In real life, none of these people knew each other. But only one of their stories wouldn't have necessarily had all the tropes I would want to show for Black people in the western. I want the bank robbery, the train robbery and the jail break. And the real Rufus Buck was executed at 18 years of age. He wasn't Idris Elba's age. So I'm going to take liberties to tell the story that's in my head.

*I was curious to know about your decision to modernise the language of the film, as well as to make the music choices very intentionally anachronistic and of our own era.*

It's interesting you say that because with westerns the music you're hearing is almost never the music you'd have heard in the Old West. Like, in *Rio Bravo* [1958], with Dean Martin. [Sings a pitch-perfect rendition of 'My Rifle, My Pony and Me'.] What we imagine as 'western' music was just current to that day. That's just a Dean Martin song! I've always categorised the genre, and the style of the western, by the music. It's like it expands as they go further along. For *The Magnificent Seven* [1960], there's this big orchestral, Elmer Bernstein thing. Then you go to Italy, where Sergio Leone and Ennio Morricone teamed up, and Morricone was using an electric guitar, which was still pretty new then. They used their voices because they didn't have the bread for an orchestra. But when you look at the music, you can also see that the aesthetics shifted along with it.

So with *The Harder They Fall*, it was like, what am I going to do musically to separate this movie? You throw Black people in a western and it's like sci-fi. So growing up in London, we listened to a lot of dancehall and reggae and dub. As a kid I listened to Barrington Levy's 'Here I Come', and I could hear galloping horses. It's the perfect juxtaposition. So I went toward this kind of reggae/dub/afrobeat sonic landscape to place the movie on.

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## **BLACK RODEO: A HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WESTERN**

### **The Legend of N\*\*\*\*\* Charley**

Sat 1 Feb 12:45; Wed 19 Feb 20:50

### **Duel at Diablo**

Sat 1 Feb 16:10; Fri 7 Feb 20:40

### **100 Rifles**

Sat 1 Feb 20:45; Tue 18 Feb 18:10

### **Sergeant Rutledge**

Sun 2 Feb 13:30; Sat 8 Feb 17:40 (+ intro by season programmer Mia Mask)

### **The Learning Tree**

Wed 5 Feb 20:40; Fri 21 Feb 18:10

### **Skin Game**

Thu 6 Feb 20:40; Sun 2 Mar 18:30

### **Take a Hard Ride**

Sat 8 Feb 15:00; Thu 13 Feb 20:30

### **Django Unchained**

Sat 8 Mar 20:00; Sun 16 Mar 17:40

### **Buck and the Preacher**

Sat 8 Feb 20:30 (+ intro by season programmer Mia Mask); Sat 15 Feb 12:50

### **Concrete Cowboy**

Sun 9 Mar 16:00; Sun 16 Mar 15:00

### **Introducing Black Rodeo**

Mon 10 Feb 18:20

### **Posse**

Mon 10 Feb 20:40 (+ intro by Mario Van Peebles); Tue 25 Feb 20:40

### **Rosewood**

Wed 12 Feb 20:30; Sat 15 Mar 12:15

### **The Harder They Come**

Sat 15 Feb 15:20; Tue 4 Mar 20:55

### **The Harder They Fall**

Sat 15 Mar 17:30; Mon 17 Mar 20:20

### **Nope**

Sat 15 Mar 20:30; Tue 18 Mar 18:10

**Please note** that many of these films contain excessive violence along with racist, misogynist and other discriminatory language, images or other content that reflect views prevalent in its time but will cause offence today (as they did then). The titles are included here for historical, cultural or aesthetic reasons and these views are in no way endorsed by the BFI or its partners.

Find Mia Mask's book *Black Rodeo: A History of the African American Western* in the BFI Shop

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*This movie feels like it's very clearly a corrective to a lot of the western genre, which in the main has been white, in spite of the fact that the actual history of the American West says otherwise.*

Hollywood has done us a disservice by not mining those truths, and not presenting those storylines. You know, if you show just half of the truth, then for me the whole basis is a lie. We grew up thinking Native Americans were bad people. If you just go on westerns, you'd think Native Americans just circled wagons full of old white women. As much as I love westerns – and I can't emphasise how much I love them, maybe with the music and getting lost in that world. But often the presentation of the characters is very narrow. It allowed no room for interpretation. I'm glad I'm alive in this era so we have access to so much information, we can present something new. Seeing all these people of colour and women who are subservient... that's just not the reality. So it was important to me to bring balance in that way.

*What was it like to get this cast together?*

Some people we had read for us, but for most, it was the case of 'These are the people we want.' People like Jonathan [Majors], I didn't audition. I saw an interview he was doing for the film *White Boy Rick* [2018], and he was explaining something about the inner workings of his approach to the character. And everything about that guy was Nat Love. So when we had our first conversation on FaceTime, he already had the role for me.

*You keep hearing that people don't watch westerns much anymore, that they're no longer a dominant artform. But for me they contain so many allegorical battles about civilisation, law and order, the moral universe we live in and how we get along together, they are still universal stories.*

Absolutely. We haven't been fed westerns; fundamentally they've stopped being made. So they only come out now and again. But I think if you give us the stuff we want in the western – the stories – we will turn up. Maybe a big percentage of the population don't like superhero movies, but then they went to see *Black Panther*. Let people have the artistic freedom to implement things to push the genre forward. That's what I was aiming to do with *The Harder They Fall*, and I think we accomplished that.

Interview by Christina Newland, *Sight and Sound*, November 2021