Foxy Ladies and Badass Super Agents: Legacies of 1970s Blaxploitation Spy and Detective Heroines

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FOXY LADIES AND BADASS SUPER AGENTS: LEGACIES OF 1970S BLAXPLOITATION SPY AND DETECTIVE HEROINES

by

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DEDICATION

To all the strong, persevering, women who have made me who I am today and made my presence in this institution and others in our society possible.
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ABSTRACT

The presentation of Black femininity in Blaxploitation spy and detective films like *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Get Christie Love!* (1974) – depicting powerful, independent, and multidimensional characters – was a sharp departure from the derogatory images of African American women in film prior. These films also included some of the first Black spy and detective film heroines – Foxy Brown, Cleo Jones, and Christie Love – that portrayed a “serious” female detective or government agent as the main protagonist and center of the film’s action. These Blaxploitation heroines were unique in how their characters departed from prior male spies and detectives in film, particularly James Bond. The significance of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines was never based upon their relation to male characters and nor were Blaxploitation heroines simply “Black female James Bond” replicas; instead they exhibited themes of nurturing, motherly attention, and care for their communities. Moreover, Blaxploitation heroines were neither just sexually objectified for the male gaze nor were they devoid of it. Rather, these Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines displayed a complex combination of being sexualized while also being strong, independent, multidimensional characters. This work asserts that Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines were unique in both the intersection of their race and character portrayals as powerful, independent, main protagonists which has been mostly minimal after the fall of Blaxploitation in the 1970s. Ultimately, white rather than Black actresses became the main, serious, multidimensional spy and detective heroine.
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CHAPTER 1

FOXY LADIES AND BADASS SUPER AGENTS: AN INTRODUCTION

Figure 1.1: Original film poster for Cleopatra Jones (1973)
Figure 1.2: Original film poster for *Foxy Brown* (1974)
“She’s 6 feet 2’ of Dynamite...and the Hottest Super Agent Ever!”

- Film poster headline for *Cleopatra Jones* (1973)

“Don’t mess aroun’ with...Foxy Brown. She’s the meanest chick in town! She’s brown sugar and spice but if you don’t treat her nice, she’ll put you on ice!”

- Film poster headline for *Foxy Brown* (1974)

On July 11, 1973, Tamara Dobson, as Cleopatra Jones, towered over Times Square in New York City. Standing at twenty-five feet tall and attached to the front of the DeMille Theater at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 47th Street, the image of the African-American actress and model could not be ignored. It was the largest billboard image to be placed on the front of the infamous theatre since actress Jane Fonda’s role in *Circle of Love* (1964) and it was also a Blaxploitation film. The billboard’s text blared “She’s 6 feet 2’ of Dynamite...and the Hottest Super Agent Ever!” as Cleo stood with a smirk on her face, holding an assault rifle on her hip.

The presentation of Black femininity in Blaxploitation films like *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Get Christie Love!* (1974) – depicting powerful, independent, and multidimensional characters – was a sharp departure from the

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1 See Figure 1.1. *Cleopatra Jones*. Film Poster. Directed by Jack Starrett. Warner Brothers, 1973.
2 See Figure 1.2. *Foxy Brown*. Film Poster. Directed by Jack Hill. American International Picture, 1974.
4 Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. "Billboard for the motion picture Circle of Love (La Ronde) at the De Mille Theater (47th and Broadway, New York City) featuring Jane Fonda (#2)" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 27, 2020. [http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3df1a600-1c6f-0134-de99-00505686a51c](http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3df1a600-1c6f-0134-de99-00505686a51c)
derogatory images of African American women in popular culture and film prior.5

Blaxploitation films were a subgenre of exploitation films that had emerged in the early 1970s displaying Black characters as heroes and main subjects rather than sidekicks, villains, or victims of violence. Originally aimed at urban African American audiences, they dealt with issues of racism, slavery, miscegenation, poverty, sex, violence, and drug use.6 These films also included some of the first Black spy and detective film heroines that portrayed a “serious” female detective or government agent as the main protagonist and center of the film’s action.7

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5 Scholar K. Sue Jewell found that before the 1980s there were four caricatures of Black femininity in popular culture – the Mammy, Aunt Jemimah, Sapphire, and the Jezebel. K. Sue Jewell discusses these stereotypes of African American womanhood in From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US. Social Policy (New York and London: Routledge, 1993). Mammies are desexualized depictions of Black women dating to the antebellum period, who were content and happy being slaves and providing loyal “loving” servitude to their white masters. Aunt Jemimas are based on the mammy archetype, dating to minstrel shows in the late 1800s. Sapphire caricatures portray Black women as rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing. “Jezebel” refers to a tempting, seductive, and promiscuous Black woman. These images traced their origins to enslavement and the perpetuation of white supremacy in American society. Jewell stated that these images portrayed African American women “as the antithesis of the American conception of beauty, femininity, and womanhood.” (36) Film scholar Ed Guerrero claimed that the representation of Black women and men on screen amounted to “one grand, multifaceted illusion” to “glorify and relentlessly hold in place the white dominated symbolic order and racial hierarchy of American society.” (2) Jewell and Guerrero were correct in their descriptions of early images of Black men and women on screen. Yet, social changes such as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, coupled with Black feminism, created a unique environment in which Black images were able to shift. See K. Sue Jewell, From Mammy to Miss American and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy and Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films.

6 There were many subtypes within the genre such as crime, action, prison, westerns, comedy, horror, and drama. This thesis focuses on the crime and action subgenres.

7 “Spy films” in this essay refers to films that engage with espionage activities and individuals collecting information or intelligence. Espionage involves activities directed toward the acquisition of information through clandestine means. To clarify, a spy is deemed in this work as a person who is obtaining information or intelligence about
These Blaxploitation heroines were also unique in how their characters departed from prior male spies and detectives in film, particularly James Bond, as well as how they varied from female white characters.\textsuperscript{8} There were spy and detective heroines before and after the 1970s Blaxploitation film era, however these heroines did not depict Black actresses as the main, independent, serious protagonists and were often performed by white actresses. Unlike “Bond girls” of the 1960s in the James Bond series, the significance of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines was never based upon their relation to male characters. While “Bond girls” were always placed in relation to James Bond, Blaxploitation spy heroines and detectives were the main protagonists with all other characters merely in their orbit or periphery. Nor were Blaxploitation heroines simply “Black female James Bond” replicas; instead they exhibited themes of nurturing, motherly attention, and care for their communities. Cleopatra Jones, for instance, runs a B&S community home with her lover Rueben Masters – played by Bernie Casey – to help her community’s drug addicts recover.

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another entity. There are distinctions between intelligence officers and spies in discussing national security procedures, however a character like Foxy Brown who is not working for a government entity would not be considered an officer, but rather a spy since this is one of the biggest distinctions. Given that most readers of this thesis will likely not know the many distinctions between the two terms, I have decided to keep with the term “spy” to limit jargon and to use the definition I have provided in this footnote for classifying such characters. As for detectives, these entities can work for a government agency and engage in espionage, however I have tried to limit my use of the term “detective” to refer to heroines who work in domestic law enforcement such as a police officer or FBI agent, like Christie Love.

\textsuperscript{8}Women in spy films and detective films had existed prior to the 1970s, but these women were mostly white women and were side characters meant for the main male protagonist. Those female characters who were the main protagonist served usually comedic purposes, such as in Modesty Blaise (1966) or the British television series, Get Smart (1965-1970) and The Avengers (1961-1969).
This is not to say that these Blaxploitation heroines were not also sexualized and objectified through the male gaze. Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema” argues that Hollywood narrative films use women in order to provide a pleasurable visual experience for men. The narrative film structures its gaze as masculine with the woman always the object of the reifying gaze, not the bearer of it. The cinematic gaze is always produced to be masculine, according to Mulvey, by the means of the identification and relation produced with the film’s male hero and through

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9 In her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey utilizes psychoanalysis theory as a "political weapon" to demonstrate how the patriarchic subconscious of society shapes our film watching experience and cinema itself. According to Mulvey the cinematic text is organized along lines that are corresponding to the cultural subconscious with is essentially patriarchic. Mulvey argues that the popularity of Hollywood films is determined and reinforced by preexisting social patterns which have shaped the fascinated subject. Mulvey's analysis in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" combines semiotic methodology of cinematic means of expression with psychoanalytic analysis of desire structures and the formation of subjectivity. The semiotic end of Mulvey's analysis enables the deciphering of how films produce the meanings they produce, while the psychoanalytic side of the article provides the link between the cinematic text and the viewer and explains his fascination through the way cinematic representations interact with his (culturally determined) subconscious. In looking at the objectification and male gaze, this thesis consults with Mulvey’s work. For more on Mulvey’s arguments and her analysis, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology, ed. MacKenzie Scott (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 359-70.

10 This is somewhat related to John Berger’s “Ways of Seeing” (1972) which was a television series but also adapted into book. In his work he analyzes the manner in which men and women are culturally represented, and the subsequent results these representations have on their conduct and self as well as mutual perception. He claims that the representations of men and women in visual culture entice different "gazes" with men having the legitimization of examining women, and women only examining other women. He argues that a man's presence in the world is about potency, power, and ability. A woman's presence is always related to itself, not the world, and she does not represent potential but rather only her herself, and what can or cannot be done to her, never by her. The woman’s self-value is measured through the manner in which she is portrayed, in her own eyes, in others' eyes and in men's eyes according to Berger. For more on Berger’s work, see John Berger, The Ways of Seeing, (UK: Penguin Books, 1972).
the use of the camera. In the case of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines, the latter is most prominent. But this gaze is not the sole reason for these heroines’ inclusion in these films nor do their characters only exhibit this objectification; these characters also depict strong, multidimensional, independent women. This is seen especially in marketing and film posters for Blaxploitation heroines, for instance, with Foxy Brown seen wearing a lowcut, tight dress that emphasizes her body, yet is situated at the center of the image, reaching for a pistol and poised for action.

Blaxploitation films were situated during a period of significant political, cultural, and social change and conflict. As works of fiction, Blaxploitation films themselves may not have depicted realities of this period’s environment accurately or entirely, however these specific historical circumstances created a unique sociocultural environment in which Blaxploitation films could thrive commercially, if only for a fleeting moment. Such an environment could not be replicated again historically. Though

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11 Mulvey identifies two manners in which Hollywood cinema produces pleasure, manners which arise from different mental mechanisms. The first involves the objectification of the image, and the second one is the identification with it. Both mechanisms represent the mental desires of the male subject. The first form of pleasure relates to what Freud termed as scopophilia or the pleasure derived from subjecting someone to one's gaze. The second form of pleasure operates alongside the scopophilia and is the identification with the represented character which is brought about by needs stemming from the Freudian Ego. Because these Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines are the main protagonists and never have their significance determined by their relation to male characters, objectification of these heroines is mainly through the first rather than the second form of pleasure. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology, ed. MacKenzie Scott (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 359-70.

12 See Figure 1.2. Foxy Brown. Film Poster. Directed by Jack Hill. American International Picture, 1974.

13 The Black Power Movement, Second Wave Feminist Movement, and Cold War political tensions were just some political and social aspects that intersected to influence culture and products of culture during the 1970s.
more factors were certainly at play, it is notable that the Black Power Movement, which emphasized racial pride, economic gain, and the creation of political and cultural institutions for African Americans, had experienced a decline in energy in the late 1970s around the same time that Blaxploitation films declined in production. This matters in examining Blaxploitation heroines because ultimately the fall of Blaxploitation also meant their corresponding Black female spy and detectives heroines mostly went away with them. Since the end of Blaxploitation, Black actresses have continued to be minimally included in spy and detective films and when they are, these characters are often secondary to the main protagonist. This is seen even in the most recent James Bond film, No Time To Die (2020) in which Black actress Lashana Lynch, inherits the codename of 007 but remains a secondary character to the main protagonist James Bond, played by Daniel Craig.\(^{14}\)

This work aims to understand how 1970s Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines varied from mostly white actresses in these roles both during the 1960s as well as after the fall of Blaxploitation. How were Blaxploitation actresses in spy and detective films depicted differently or similarly to their white female counterparts? How did Blaxploitation heroines vary from Black actresses’ performances in films prior? Why do we still not see more Black actresses as lead spy and detective film heroines today? This essay asserts that Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines were unique in both the

intersection of their race and character portrayals as powerful, independent, main protagonists which has been seen limitedly after the 1970s. White rather than Black actresses became the main “serious” heroines in the spy and detective film genres after the 1970s yet displaying similar character qualities. Blaxploitation heroines were certainly not the first women to be depicted as main, central protagonists in the spy and detective genres, however they were unique as Black women in these roles. These genres had mostly not depicted Black women as being multidimensional, serious, independent, main protagonists prior to Blaxploitation. Blaxploitation films like *Foxy Brown* and *Cleopatra Jones* not only depicted their heroines as having these qualities but they were also commercially successful. However, after the fall of Blaxploitation, Black actresses became mostly absent from the spy and detective genres and when they were present, it was often in secondary roles. As an interdisciplinary study, this thesis engages with scholarship from cultural history and film studies and analyzes films, television series, interviews, newspaper articles, film posters and more. The work hopes to establish a foundation for future research on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in the history of the spy film and ultimately seeks to advocate for more African American actresses in these roles.¹⁵

¹⁵ This study is by no means an exhaustive account of these shifting cultural perceptions of women in the field of intelligence and national security, but it provides a groundwork for future research and tracing of the subject matter. This is especially important as women increasingly take key operational and leadership roles within the United States’ Intelligence Community (IC) in understanding how women, including those of intersectional identities, are viewed both historically and in their contemporary service. As a very masculine field, women’s real and imaginary presence in the field can show us shifting beliefs in gender roles and gender norms.
As a typically hypermasculine genre, spy films reassign law and order, national security, and other themes of “protection” to the male domain. Because these gender norms typically find women incapable of serving as protectors and they are deemed more suited for nurturing, women in this genre become afterthoughts, sexual temptations, or damsels in distress such as seen with “Bond girls” in the James Bond series. When women flip this role and become the “protector” in films dealing with law and order, they disrupt these gender norms and indicate a shifting perception of women’s roles in society in one of the most masculine ascribed domains possible. These characters serve as a fictional means for informing the public of their political environment, albeit often dramatically. Spy films confront issues of loyalty, paranoia, and the threat of war, and demonstrate the significance of politics and national security. The intersection of these problems with that of shifting gender norms and expectations inform us why we should care when we see female spies in film.

Some historians and scholars have explored the importance of Black heroines in Blaxploitation films – albeit not through the lens of spy films – mainly in a debate over whether women in Blaxploitation action films were sexualized or liberated.\(^\text{16}\) Yvonne D.

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\(^{16}\) Historians and scholars that have examined Blaxploitation heroines have often grouped them with male actors and the genre broadly, deeming their performances as a continuation of historical caricatures of Black femininity. Examining male and female Black caricatures in film, Donald Bogle, Mark Reid, and Ed Guerrero found that Blaxploitation heroines like Foxy Brown and Cleo Jones, were merely replacing the old stereotypes of Jezebel and mammy with a new stereotype deemed as the “macho goddess,” fulfilling a “high flung male fantasy.” For Cedric Robinson, female characters, both Black and white, only served to display and reinforce white male supremacy culturally and used as a tool to reinforce social hierarchies based around race and class. Cedric J. Robinson, “Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation,” \textit{Race & Class} 40, no. 1 (1998); Cedric J. Robinson, \textit{Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before World War II} (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Donald Bogle, \textit{Toms, Coons,}
Sims’ *Women of Blaxploitation Films: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture*, examined how 1970s Blaxploitation actresses set the stage for producing action films centered upon strong female heroines while also providing a fertile ground for Black actresses to move past historical caricatures of Black womanhood.\(^{17}\) However, this point is overstated in the scholarship’s claim that *all* women benefited from Blaxploitation actresses’ performances after the 1970s.\(^{18}\) Stephanie Dunn also examined how the intersection of race, class, gender and sexual politics influenced visual depictions of black female heroines in her work ‘*Baad Bitches’ and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*.\(^{19}\) Dunn does not cite Sims in her work, but she directly pushes back against her argument, concluding that Blaxploitation films perpetuated stereotypes of Black female sexuality and femininity by “exoticizing”

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\(^{18}\) As already discussed, the Blaxploitation period had employed the highest amount of African American on and off screen proportionately than any time before or after the 1970s. This is documented in Ed Guerrero’s work *Framing Blackness* and Donald Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammmies, and Bucks*. However, both these authors and other film scholars have extensively documented that African American actors and actresses still remain greatly underrepresented in film and television series including the action, crime, and drama genres.

\(^{19}\) Dunn is more moderate in the contribution of Blaxploitation actresses and particularly cites their influence on female rappers of the 1990s. Stephane Dunn, “*Baad Bitches’ and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
and “hypersexualizing” them. However, this thesis finds that Blaxploitation heroines were neither just sexually objectified for male gazes nor were they devoid of this. Rather, these Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines displayed a complex combination of being sexualized while also being strong, independent, multidimensional characters.

Organizationally, the paper is broken into eight chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The second chapter examines the cultural and political environment in which Blaxploitation films and spy films were situated to understand their popularity and social significance. The next chapter examines 1960s spy films, particularly the *James Bond* series, to compare female characters within these films with that of Black actresses in 1970s Blaxploitation films. The following three chapters explore the multi-dimensionality of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines through a case study of three actresses: Tamara Dobson, Pam Grier, and Teresa Graves. The analysis centers mainly upon their films *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Get Christie Love!* (1974) due to their popularity among audiences and their depiction of Black female heroines. The seventh chapter examines white heroines of the 1980s and after, comparing these characters to those of Blaxploitation heroines. The final chapter ends with concluding thoughts about future research inquiries on the subject matter.

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20 Dunn, 57.
21 The ways of which these characters display these qualities varies based on the film, however some examples of this can be seen in their strategic actions to achieve their goals, resilience to setbacks, and in fighting their enemies – often single-handedly. The thesis will analyze the various ways that these qualities are shown in the films *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Get Christie Love!* (1974) while also examining the ways heroines in these films were sexualized and objectified.
22 Not added in the seven sections mentioned is the introduction and conclusion. The conclusion is more of an inquiry in research looking forward.
CHAPTER 2

“CAN YOU DIG IT?”: CULTURE, POLITICS, AND BLAXPLOITATION DURING 1970s AMERICA

I saw one woman in a 42nd Street theater smack her boyfriend’s arm as Pam was icing half the Roman army in The Arena. The woman said, “See fool, I’m going to get myself together like her, so next time you think you’re superman, watch out.”

- Pam Grier, interview with Marc Jacobson, May 1975

The woman smacking her boyfriend’s arm in response to seeing Grier take out a group of men demonstrates the strength these Blaxploitation heroines brought to female audiences, showing positive qualities in these actresses’ performances, such as confidence, sophistication, power. However, this quote also emphasizes the cultural and social environment of the 1970s with its shifting notions of gender and race. The Black Power movement, second-wave feminism, Cold War anxieties, and an increasingly visible Black feminist agenda were influential dynamics in the reception and creation of cultural products during this period including films. The image of serious, independent, Blaxploitation female spies and detectives may not have been directly associated with these movements, but the environment of the period allowed for these Black heroines depictions to flourish in a way they had not been seen before by African American actresses.

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To understand these Blaxploitation heroines, it is essential to understand the shifting political and cultural landscape the 1960s brought for depictions of African American women in society and on the big screen. The Black Power Movement intersected with efforts by Black feminists which became formed in response to issues within the second-wave feminist movement. The second-wave feminist movement was a period of feminist activity beginning in the United States in the early 1960s that dealt mainly with gender issues such as sexuality, family, workplace, and reproductive rights as well as de facto and legal inequalities for women. However, African American women had felt alienated from this movement in their efforts because the issues being advocate for concerned mainly white women such as in women’s rights to work outside the home and in the expansion of reproductive rights. Black feminism emerged as a way of acknowledging and addressing the unique intersectional struggles of women of color including those associated with class oppression and racism. African American women such as Black feminist Angela Davis during the Black Power Movement, displayed racial pride and Black female beauty in society through embracing natural and diverse hairstyles and attire that reflected African ancestry. Some influences of this can be seen with 1970s Blaxploitation heroines including Cleo Jones, Foxy Brown, and Christie Love, who also displayed Black beauty and pride through their attire and natural hairstyles. Some scenes in these films, such as that of Foxy Brown getting the help of


25 There are several examples of natural hairstyles and African influenced attire in these three films, however a quick example of this can be seen in the film poster for *Cleopatra Jones*, seen in figure 1.1, where Cleo is seen with a natural afro similar to Davis.
Black Panther Party members to stop the white antagonists from harming their community, also displayed influences of these two movements.

Despite exhibiting some influences of the Black Power and Black feminist efforts of the period, Blaxploitation films were not entirely received in a positive light by African Americans. While the Civil Rights Movement was thought to have brought some positive visual images of African American by highlighting leaders influential to social and political change in the 1960s, leaders and activists such as Junius Griffin, Jesse Jackson, and others feared that these films perpetuated negative images of African Americans that would dismantle the progress made by the movement. These leaders and activists demonstrated their positions often through boycotts and strikes. For example, on July 29, 1972, Civil Rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson, in the first conference of the People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), stated that his organization would challenge the nation’s major corporations on their responsibilities to Blacks, targeting the film industry with a “program of full blown confrontation” over two issues: the exploitation of Black images and themes in commercial cinema and the lack of jobs for African Americans in all aspects of the film industry.

Since we’re organized in 30 key cities, the language we will use, if we are not heard, will not be obscenity and vulgarity. It will be at the box offices of the major theaters in those cities. Picket and boycott will be one form of protest. When and if we strike, it will not be a secret. We are prepared to move on major studios with Black films in production, those with films in the planning stages, and, if necessary, those already in distribution.26

For other activists, Blaxploitation films were a form of “cultural genocide,” negatively impacting the minds of young African Americans. Junius Griffin, the former president of the Beverly Hills/Hollywood branch of the NAACP, stated in a press conference:

We will not tolerate the continued warping of our black children’s minds with the filth, violence and cultural lies that are all pervasive in current productions of so called black movies. The transformation from the stereotyped Stepin’ Fetchit to Super Nigger on the screen is just another form of cultural genocide. The black community should deal with this problem by whatever means necessary.27

The fact that Blaxploitation films had mixed reviews among African Americans, cautions us to be moderate in how we think about audience’s perceptions of Blaxploitation heroines. Because it is difficult to determine widely how African American audiences felt about these films, this thesis has chosen to focus on what images were depicted of the characters in these films rather than how audiences responded to them. However, it should be noted that this does not mean that influences of the period politically, culturally, and socially cannot be seen in some instances in these films, but rather as historians and scholars it is difficult to get into the mindset of audiences almost fifty years ago and how the environment in which they were exposed to influenced their interpretation of Blaxploitation films.

Intersecting with this social environment were political tensions and anxieties that also influenced spy and detective films in their depictions of law and order. Cold War films like the early James Bond series and thrillers such The Manchurian Candidate (1962) and Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964) were not produced in a cultural vacuum from the foreign and domestic political environment of the period. The two greatest threats of fear during the Cold War were nuclear war and of espionage. Films, posters, and other media had served as a means to influence and control public opinion with both the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

(USSR) and the United States (US) investing in propaganda to influence the hearts and minds of their populaces. Having a pre-existing cinematic infrastructure gave an advantage to the United States in creating films that perpetuated communism as a villainous enemy. In the 1960s, spy films effectively became a “weapon of confrontation between the two world systems.” These films often displayed themes of paranoia and suspicion by depicting the enemy as both a foreign and domestic threat from within. The spy film also reduced the complexity of international relations to a navigable understanding for popular audiences through interpersonal relationships. Moreover, they demonstrated an unpredictability of the Cold War in which the actions of one individual, such as James Bond, could single-handedly protect the nation from the

29 Alexander Patrick Langer, “Dr. No & Dr. Strangelove: Cold War Anxiety in Film, 1962-1964,” Concept, Vol XXXVII, 2014. For more information on the rise of spy films and fiction and what this entailed, also see Wesley Britton’s Beyond Bond: Spies in Fiction and Film.
30 As Megan Kelley discusses in her work, Projections of Passing: Postwar Anxieties and Hollywood Films, 1947-1960, a key concern in postwar America was “who’s passing for whom?” Questions over identity and authenticity become themes in Hollywood films in the immediate postwar period, demonstrating imagined fear of an enemy within through “passing” socially. Passing threatened to destabilize preexisting notions of identity including not only segregation and the color line separating white and Black Americans, but also notions of gender roles ascribed to women and men, and heteronormativity among other forms of identity. Fears about communist infiltration, invasion by aliens, collapsing gender roles, non-heterosexual relations, racial ambiguity, and miscegenation appear in Cold War films including Invasion of the Body-Snatchers (1956), I Married a Monster From Outer Space (1958), Rebel without a Cause (1955), Vertigo (1958), All About Eve (1950), Gentlemen’s Agreement (1947), and Pinky (1949), among many others. See: Megan Kelley, Projections of Passing: Postwar Anxieties and Hollywood Films, 1947-1960 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).
villainous enemy. This enemy was symbolic of Communists broadly and only exemplified the division of the war itself as one of “good” versus “evil.”

In spy films, female characters were often highly sexualized, secondary, love interest characters, objectified for marketing purposes. White women dominated these roles throughout the 1960s, the most notorious characters being “Bond Girls” like Pussy Galore and Tatiana Romanova. In *Goldfinger* (1964), Pussy Galore, Goldfinger’s personal pilot, played by Honor Blackman, displays the role of white women in Bond films well. Her sexual attire and even her name emphasized the sexual objectification of her being. *Dr. No* (1962) similarly depicts character Honey Ryder, played by actress Ursula Andress, as a sexualized secondary character for Bond. The only positive trait

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31 It is important to note that this formula of “good” versus “evil” was not a radical departure for Hollywood films that had utilized this formula countless times before in action, crime, dramas, and other genres. However, the way that spy films present this formula through means often involving superstructures such as government agencies or secretive criminal organizations like SPECRE in the James Bond series that is discussed later in this thesis coupled with concerns over things like nuclear war and terrorist attacks, make spy films slightly different from this formula’s use in other Hollywood films. It is also important to note that spy films could simultaneously combine action, science fiction, and political thriller genres and did not have to be restricted to just one genre. Some spy films took on more serious tones than that of the *James Bond* series such as with *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) which centered around Korean War veteran, Raymond Shaw, who becomes an unwitting assassin involved with a communist conspiracy. *The Manchurian Candidate*, Directed by John Frankenheimer, M.C. Productions, 1962.

32 For more information about the James Bond film formula, including the “Bond girl,” and the use of this formula in other spy films during the 1960s, see Drew Moniot, “James Bond and America in the Sixties: An Investigation of the Formula Film in Popular Culture.” *Journal of the University Film Association, Special Student Issue* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1976): 25–33.


34 In addition to female Bond characters, white women also served as comedic entertainment in *Get Smart* (1965-70), *The Avengers* (1961-69), and *Modesty Blaise* (1966). *Get Smart*, Directed by Gary Nelson, Bruce Bilson, Don Adams, James Komack, and Earl Bellamy, NBC, 1965-1970; *The Avengers*, Directed by Robert Fuest, ABC
seen from these characters in the series is the use of female bodies and sexuality to entrap and manipulate James Bond along with other male characters. But even this is limited, especially by the fact that Bond always succeeds in foiling the plans of female characters and utilizes sexual tactics with his own body in seducing female opponents. Unlike Pussy Galore though, Bond is deemed more important as an independent character despite his use of sexual tactics. This is seen in the centrality of his character in the film and even minor aspects such as the lack of a sexualized name for his character. For example, female characters in the series are often named “Bond girls,” deeming their significance in relation to James Bond, however he himself is never referenced in relation to the female characters.

African American actresses were mostly absent from the genre during the 1960s, and when present were typically treated much like white female characters, being sexually objectified, secondary characters. The first major appearance of a Black woman in a spy film was actress, Trina Parks’ performance in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), where she plays “Thumper,” a nemesis to James Bond. Despite the significance of her performance, Parks’ role reinforced the stereotypical tropes of Black femininity in popular culture particularly as a sexually promiscuous, animalistic, exotic character.  


__Dr. No__, Directed by Terence Young, Eon Productions, 1962.

__The earliest James Bond films of the 1960s excluded Black female characters, likely because it was the norm. Filmmakers thought audiences only perceived Black women defined by cultural tropes of Black femininity. White women themselves served as little more than sexual bodies for male characters and audiences to gain visual pleasure from and the *James Bond* series exemplified this degrading sexualization. *Diamonds Are Forever*, Directed by Guy Hamilton. Eon Productions, 1971. Another notable mention is Eartha Kitt’s role as Cat Woman in the third and final season of the *Batman* series during the late 1960s, in which she played a serious role that had belonged to actress, Julie__
The depictions of Black women in James Bond films is discussed further in the following section of this thesis.

Newmar, in the seasons prior. Kitt had replaced Newmar because she was doing a movie at the time, Mackenna’s Gold (1969). While the series had set up a sexual attraction between Batman, played by Adam West, and Cat Woman, because of her race, Kitt was not seen as a suitable love interest of Batman. Instead the idea shift to creating a potential love interest between Batman and Batgirl, played by actress Yvonne Joyce Craig. This was not Kitt’s first film role either. She had stared in the popular musicals New Faces (1952) and St. Louis Blues (1958) prior and is known for her songs “C’est si bon” and “Santa Baby.” While the series was an action comic series, Kitt’s one season role on the series was short lived.
CHAPTER 3

“SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED:” A RENDITION OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE JAMES BOND SERIES

Diamonds are forever, sparkling round my little finger / Unlike men, the diamonds linger / Men are mere mortals who are not worth going to your grave for / [...] Diamonds never lie to me / For when love’s gone, they’ll luster on.38

– Shirley Bassey, “Diamonds Are Forever”

The opening title scene to Diamonds are Forever (1971) featured nude Black women dancing and holding or wearing diamonds.39 Their bodies are made visible as the camera moves across their breasts and torsos while Welsh singer, Shirley Bassey, sings the film’s theme song, “Diamonds are Forever.”40 The film was the first in the series to feature a Black female character, Trina Parks’ “Thumper.” Her appearance was groundbreaking for the series and film genre, although she is only featured in the film for

37 This is a famous line by Sir Sean Connery in Dr. No, despite most bartenders finding a “shaken” martini to be the incorrect way to serve the drink. The “incorrect” one-liner is fitting for this section on the series’ ill treatment of Black femininity. Dr. No, Directed by Terence Young, Eon Productions, 1962.
40 Shirley Bassey recorded the theme songs to the James Bond Films Goldfinger (1964), Diamonds Are Forever (1971), and Moonraker (1979). Shirley’s mother was English, and her father was Nigerian, only adding to the film’s theme of colonization. Shirley Bassey, “Diamonds Are Forever,” recorded 1971, track 1 on Diamonds Are Forever Soundtrack, United Artists Records, 1971, vinyl.
less than four minutes.\textsuperscript{41} Thumper and “Bambi,” played by Lola Larson, engage in a fight with James Bond to prevent him from getting to Willard Whyte, played by actor Jimmy Dean.\textsuperscript{42} Both Bambi and Thumper are named in reference to Disney’s \textit{Bambi} (1942) and portrayed as a reference and degradation to these female characters.\textsuperscript{43} Their fighting comes off as amusing child’s play as the two women lose the fight after attempting to drown Bond in a swimming pool. Bond gets the upper hand and holds the women down under the water, letting them come up for air periodically. He does this almost in a casual manner as he carries on a conversation with another character, Felix Leiter, played by Norman Burton.\textsuperscript{44}

The film also depicts some female characters animalistically, reinforcing the notion that these characters are less than human in their worth. Cameras depict Thumper in her first shot as lounging on a rock like a lioness while Bambi wears dark brown velvety clothes akin to deer fur. The names of the two women alone imply animalism and the degradation of their humanity to an animalistic state. In a more disturbing, but seemingly innocuous scene in the film, an unnamed tall Black woman performs in an

\textsuperscript{41} This is also the only scene that features her in the film. \textit{Diamonds Are Forever}, Directed by Guy Hamilton. Eon Productions, 1971.


\textsuperscript{43} Related to this scene, Mulvey discusses in her work that the female cinematic figure must combine attraction with the playing on fears of castration. The male subconscious has two ways of escaping his fear of castration. One is the demystification of the female figure and the dismantling of her mysteries through being punished or saved by the male figure. The other way to escape this fear of being castrated by the woman is through the fetishization and sexualization of her. In this scene, it is evident in how Bond is able to easily fight off the two women and punish them by playfully drowning them, that these women are being dismantled in their attempts. see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in \textit{Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology}, ed. MacKenzie Scott (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 359-70.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Diamonds Are Forever}, Directed by Guy Hamilton. Eon Productions, 1971.
exploitative Las Vegas magic show where she transforms into a gorilla.\textsuperscript{45} When she is making the transformation, her wrists are chained together as she stands in a cage, resembling the enslavement and imprisonment of Black people. Upon turning into a gorilla, she breaks from the cage and chases after the audience, causing them to run frantically.\textsuperscript{46} It is an insulting one-off scene that provided no substance to the film and only further indicated the continuation of historical tropes of Black women as “exotics” colonized by white men.\textsuperscript{47}


\textsuperscript{46} Film scholar Kara Keeling in her work \textit{The Witch’s Flight}, she discusses the creation of the “common-sense” image theorized by Gilles Deleuze of “the Black” and how cinematically the Black is represented as “the problem.” Pairing Deleuze with Franz Fanon’s work of the “Black imago,” which critiques the complex ways identity, particularly Blackness is constructed through colonized psyches, Keeling tries to show alternatives to the notions of being “Black” and a “woman.” She does this through her analysis of the Black lesbian butch femme and suggests that cinematic representations shift to understanding that “the black image” and the “white image” are inherently problematic not just “the Black.” Keeling’s work is noted in regards to this scene in how this Black women is depicted as a problem while also presenting a specific racialized image of “the Black” as animalistic. For more on Keeling and Black common sense, see Kara Keeling, \textit{The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 18. For more information on “the Black imago,” see Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953). For the English version, see the Grove Press, 1967 edition. For more information on cinematic representation and problematization of “the Black,” see Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Cinéma 1. L’image-mouvement} (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1983). This title is translated to \textit{Cinema 1: The Movement Image}. Also see, Deleuze, \textit{Cinéma 2. L’image-temps} (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1985).

\textsuperscript{47} Travis L Wagner argues in his work, “The Old Ways are the Best: The Colonization of Women of Color in Bond Films,” that intersecting identities and systems of oppression allow Bond to maintain colonial privilege over women of color. Wagner found Bond as a “colonizing agent,” never allowing equal standing with socially disadvantaged people either by race and/or gender. Scholars Wagner, Lisa Funnell, and Charles Burnett make the common argument that female Bond characters were objectified not just sexually, but racially as well. Travis L Wagner, “The Old Ways are the Best: The Colonization of Women of Color in Bond Films,” in Lisa Funnell (ed.), \textit{For His Eyes Only: The Women of James Bond} (Columbia University Press: New York, 2015) 51-59.
The film’s successor, *Live and Let Die* (1973), similarly used the Black female body for male audiences’ pleasure in the film’s title scene. Black women once again dance seductively. Cameras focus on their naked bodies, as shots of their faces and eyes are transposed with images of burning skulls in a crude attempt to symbolize “voodoo” practices.48 Despite the film’s release during the height of the Blaxploitation era, Paul McCarthy’s “Live and Let Die” as the theme song did not fit with the numerous Blaxploitation archetypes presented throughout the film. Black artists often performed the theme songs of Blaxploitation films, highlighting the main protagonists in their lyrics.49 Aspects of Blaxploitation were used to increase viewership and sales but gave little respect to the genre. The Black “Bond girl” and CIA double agent in the film, Rosie Carver, played by Gloria Hendry, also dies early in the film making her role minor in comparison to white characters. Rosie projects a strong female image of courageousness, yet it is evident that her character is present only for supporting James Bond.50 In short, the *James Bond* series did almost nothing to change caricatures of Black women and merely used their bodies to fulfill male audiences’ fantasies. As Laura Mulvey said best, women “stand in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not marker of meaning.”51

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CHAPTER 4

“LOOK OUT JAMES BOND, JOHN SHAFT, AND ALL YOU OTHER SUPER-DUDES, HERE COMES

CLEOPATRA JONES!”

Baby you walk right / You smile and you talk right / Baby you move right
/ [...] Make me wanna love you again and again / You so sweet and strong
/ Girl you keep me from doin’ wrong [...] I feel like calling your name
Cleo!  

– Joe Simon, “Theme for Cleopatra Jones”

The opening scene of Jack Starrett’s 1973 film, Cleopatra Jones, features Joe
Simon singing the theme of the film as a helicopter flies over a field of poppy flowers in
Turkey. The first shot of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent Cleo Jones, played
by Tamara Dobson, shows her stepping off the helicopter. The camera tilts first to her
high heels and up her long tall body, emphasizing her height and beauty. However, her

52 “Cleopatra Filming in L.A.,” The Chicago Defender, 28 December 1972
53 Joe Simon (performer), J.J. Johnson (composer), and Dominic Frontiere (composer),
“Theme for Cleopatra Jones,” recorded 1973, track 1 of Cleopatra Jones Soundtrack,
54 Tamara Dobson plays as a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent, Cleo Jones, who
is working undercover as a fashion model and returns home to fight drug king pin,
Mommy (Shelly Winters), from destroying her hometown community.
55 This opening scene definitely engages with the cinematic gaze and objectification of
Cleo in how the camera focuses on her body and fetishizes her height – engaging in the
first form of pleasure mentioned in an earlier footnote in this thesis. As Mulvey discusses
in her work, the fetishization of female characters is used as a way for male gazers to
reconcile their fears of castration which is associated with the female cinematic figure
alongside attraction. This is discussed further in the section on Foxy Brown where Foxy
literally castrates a male character in the film. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema," in Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical
359-61.
character is still sexualized as part of the male gaze in these shots. This is exemplified especially through the gazing of male characters as she exits the helicopter and they stand in lines to greet her, smitten by her beauty. With two words, she orders the destruction of the poppy fields and the men easily comply to her request. But, unlike female spy characters in the *James Bond* series, Cleo is an independent serious main protagonist whose significance in the film is not because of her relation to a man, indicating that she is more than an object for the male gaze.

While Cleo was described by magazines such as *Sepia* as “a female James Bond, an Interpol agent fighting dope traffic, an image black people could be proud of,” Cleo was by no means a carbon copy of the James Bond character. This description was made by the many parallels visible between James Bond and Cleo in their attire, skills, and personalities. Both characters drive fancy sports cars equipped with gadgets or weaponry. Cleo also has expertise in martial arts and is not afraid to use handguns if necessary. Her clothing is flashy and eye-catching, like Bond’s dinner jackets and playboy wardrobe. Moreover, both characters portray sophisticated and confident characters. Writer Christ Norton took the Bond comparison further by suggesting that, “like Bond, Cleo is not a stealthy character who tries to infiltrate the underworld by losing her identity [...] Bond seldom tried to hide his identity, often using his real name

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58 Her sequel, *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, uses handguns more often furthering the connection with the James Bond character who also uses firearms often in combat. *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, Directed by Charles Bail. Warner Brothers, 1975.
during introductions, and all Bond films rely on his being recognized as 007.”

Similarly, Cleo never goes undercover, relying instead on her flamboyance and ability to be recognized to disrupt the antagonists’ plans. Moreover, Cleo Jones was fighting real issues faced by African American communities during the 1970s, including drug abuse, police brutality and violence, and unemployment. James Bond, on the other hand, tended to fight less relatable threats such as the secret international criminal organization, Special Executive for Counter-Intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion (SPECTRE), from starting a nuclear war or conducting a terrorist attack.

In comparison to other Blaxploitation actresses, Dobson tried to distance herself from becoming sexualized, like Pam Grier’s characters, Coffy and Foxy Brown. Her disdain of Grier centered on nudity before the cameras as part of Grier’s performance. Dobson felt nudity was unwarranted and sought to make a distinction between her heroine and those of other African American actresses. “It’s not that I am opposed to nudity in films if it’s relevant. But when it’s used as a vehicle to get people into the

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60 In a scene where Cleo finishes speaking with two unnamed Black men outside her apartment, one of the men discusses trouble over finding employment. A subtle, but meaningful indication of the issue discussed in the film’s dialogue. Cleopatra Jones, Directed by Jack Starrett. Warner Brothers, 1973. In some ways, this differs from James Bond who is mostly fighting imaginary characters rather than real issues. This is partially because film studios producing these Blaxploitation films wanted to target Black audiences in these films and relate with them in the process.

61 Dobson was known for refusing to appear at celebrity events that Pam Grier attended. Grier did not have disdain for Dobson in any way. It is not clear if there were other motives for Dobson drastically separating herself from Grier’s image. Sims, Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture, 94.
theater for $3.50 a peep, it becomes exploitation and that’s not for me.” Dobson’s heroines never performed nude on screen. In *Cleopatra Jones*, the only sex scene in the film was more implied than shown through the camera’s lens, framing only the faces of the two lovers. Both Pam Grier’s *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy* similarly included one sex scene with her fictional boyfriends, but the scenes were much more explicit in showing nudity. “I figure a person goes to the movie for pleasure and he gets out of it what he wants,” Dobson stated in an interview with the *Chicago Defender*, “he enjoys seeing a black woman in charge and that she has no reason to disrobe herself. She’s an agent for the FBI and is like a superwoman but is always a lady in essence. I think this appeals to most women.” Despite Dobson’s insistence against the objectification of her character, Cleo was still sexualized in some instances. This perhaps most obvious with the film poster for her sequel film, *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold* (1975) where she is sexualized through her attire that displays and accentuates her protruding buttocks. However, this is also complicated through the image of her holding a gun while being the central figure on the poster demonstrating some level of authority and power as she “explodes into action.”

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66 See Figure 4.1 for *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*. film’s poster. The sequel film poster sexualizes Cleo rather than emphasizing her natural hair and beauty as was seen in the first film’s poster. See Figure 1.1 for this poster. *Cleopatra Jones*, Directed by Jack Starrett, Warner Brothers, 1973, film poster. *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*. Directed by Charles Bail. Warner Brothers Studios, 1975, film poster.
67 See Figure 4.1. *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*. Film Poster. Directed by Charles Bail. Warner Bros, 1975.
Figure 4.1: Original film poster for Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold (1975)
The appeal of *Cleopatra Jones* among audiences and Warner Bros. casting of Tamara Dobson for the role also indicates some influence of a shifting social, cultural, and political environment engaging with race and gender during the 1970s. In July of 1973, when asked why there were so many white attendees present in the over 1,500 person audience for her film’s premier at the DeMille Theater in New York City, Dobson replied “I don’t think it was because I represent the Women’s Lib movement, but rather because young women have changing ideas. More whites are going to see black oriented films because they are going to school together and associating more with blacks than ever before. When this kind of association takes place, people have a different outlook on each other.” Dobson’s image as a powerful, independent, woman was also intentional by Warner Brothers. Vincent Tubb, the publicity and minority affairs manager at Warner Brothers, stated in 1973 that “Tamara is getting the biggest play of any black star hired by a major studio. Warner Bros. [...] wants to make sure that she emerges as a black heroine. I think she represents the classic blackwoman. She’s a Lena Horne, Mary Bethune and Sojourner Truth and the strong dominant black female all at the same time.” Dobson and Tubb’s comments indicate the kind of environment which was

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68 In a review of *Cleopatra Jones* by the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, one audience members at the premier screamed during the film’s ending that Cleo, “makes Super Fly look like a punk.” Another viewer said, “I liked the action, I liked Bernie Casey.” The review praised the casting of Bernie Casey as Cleo’s boyfriend in the film, in how the two “stand eye to eye.” Standing six foot and four inches, Casey had stated that it was “quite nice to have a movie girlfriend to look at eye to eye.” See “’Cleo’ Is A Big Hit,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1973 and Earl Calloway, “Dobson Makes Successful Debut as Actress,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 July 1973

taking place outside of these films and how this may have influenced audiences’ and directors’ mindsets in viewing Blaxploitation films.

The commercial success of *Cleopatra Jones* earned Tamara Dobson name recognition and gave the actress the ability to gain more control over her character’s image in the sequel, *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold* (1975). In the sequel, Dobson had great latitude over her makeup and clothing choices, choosing more lavish attire than in *Cleopatra Jones*. Dobson was very knowledgeable of beauty culture and valued it greatly, having received a degree in fashion illustration at the Maryland Institute of Art. Despite aesthetic changes, her character transforms even further in the sequel, becoming less independently powerful by adding a sidekick Tanny, played by prominent

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70 *Cleopatra Jones* was also commercially successful as a Blaxploitation film centered around a Black female heroine. The film made $3.25 million in its opening and the soundtrack by J.J. Johnson sold half a million copies. In comparison to other Blaxploitation films, the film had a larger budget, a great screen writer, and more well-known actors and actresses. Written by African American actor and screenwriter Max Julien (known for his work with *The Mack*), and directed by Jack Starrett, the film was Warner Brothers’ attempt at competing with American International Production’s (AIP) highly successful *Coffy* (1973), which earned over eight million in sales, labeling Pam Grier as the “Queen of Blaxploitation.” *Cleopatra Jones* was also the first Blaxploitation film to use martial arts as part of its promotion. American studios began moving to martial arts films particularly after the success of Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Dragon* (1973). In referring to martial arts films here, some of these were Black martial arts films, but most were not. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film, Culture and the Moving Image* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 98. Also see, Yvonne D. Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture*, 76.

71 Dobson reportedly did her own makeup according to Stephane Dunn’s, “*Baad Bitches*” and *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 40; And, according to Jennifer DeVere Brody, “The Returns of "Cleopatra Jones"." *Signs* 25, no. 1 (1999): 91-121.

Chinese actress, Ni Tien, to support her in fighting the “dragon lady.” There is also no connection with her community, nor does she exhibit maternal care to others throughout the film. Despite more personal control over her character, the sequel was a failure for Warner Brothers in financial return, and Dobson only starred in two more Blaxploitation films before her acting career ended in 1984.\footnote{Her career ceased due to a lack of casting roles by studios. She did star in Blaxploitation woman-in-prison film \textit{Chained Heat} (1983) and comedy \textit{Norman... Is That You?} (1976).}

\footnote{Ni Tien played in other prominent films including \textit{Corpse Mania} (1981), \textit{Han Tuo} (1972), and the \textit{International Assassin} (1976). \textit{Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold}. Directed by Charles Bail. Warner Brothers Studios, 1975.}
CHAPTER 5

FOXY BROWN: “THE SEX GODDESS OF THE SEVENTIES”75

Hey hey hey! Foxy! / Oh, Ms. Foxy Brown [...] / Oh girl, you’re cute and sweet / No, but you don’t play around / No, but please don’t make Foxy mad / Or you’ll find out that the lady is Superbad.76

– Willie Hutch, “Theme of Foxy Brown”

The opening credits of *Foxy Brown* begin with artist Willie Hutch singing about the beauty, strength, “Superbad” attitude of Ms. Foxy Brown as the first shot zooms into Pam Grier’s right eye. The shot is color graded into various neon hues as silhouettes of Foxy emerge dancing seductively, transposed in a similar manner to women in the title scenes of 1960s James Bond films. The silhouettes soon fade into displaying Pam Grier in a bra and underwear still dancing, but with the shot now fixated on her breasts, a clear instance of the male gaze created by the camera. The last shot of this title scene is of Foxy in a jumpsuit shooting a revolver into the camera firing back at this male gaze while simultaneously paying another homage to the *James Bond* series’ opening credits in their final shots which feature Bond shooting a handgun at the camera.77 *Foxy Brown* is deemed as a spy and detective film in this thesis because of her engagement in spy craft in several of the scenes throughout the movie and her detective-like investigation of the

77 For the opening credit scene, see *Foxy Brown*, Directed by Jack Hill. American International Pictures, 1974.
murder of her police officer boyfriend. Foxy exemplifies this most in the scene where she goes undercover as a prostitute to infiltrate and gather intelligence on the criminal organization involved in her boyfriend’s death.\textsuperscript{78}

While Grier was deemed by Marc Jacobson, reporter for \textit{New York Magazine}, as “the Sex Goddess of the Seventies,” her sexuality was only one dimension of her characters’ portrayals, especially as Foxy.\textsuperscript{79} Her roles in \textit{Coffy}, \textit{Foxy Brown}, \textit{Friday Foster}, and \textit{Sheba Baby}, provided alternative images of Black womanhood from simply derogatory caricatures seen in films prior, displaying a character who is strong, independent, and resilient in achieving her goals of seeking justice for her boyfriend’s death. This is not to say that her character was not sexually objectified as this was demonstrated in various ways including the marketing for the film in posters and in the very opening credit scene itself. But, this was not the sole defining aspect of her character.\textsuperscript{80} For example, in one scene, Foxy is held captive to be sold as a sex slave and is drugged with heroin on a farm, being beaten with a cow whip before being chained to a

\textsuperscript{78} To clarify, a spy is deemed in this work as a person who is obtaining information or intelligence about another entity. There are distinctions between intelligence officers and spies in discussing national security procedures, however because Foxy is not working for a government entity she would not be considered an officer, but rather a spy since this is one of the biggest distinctions. Given that most readers of this thesis will likely not know the many distinctions between the two terms, I have decided to keep with the term “spy” to limit jargon and to use the definition I have provided in this footnote for classifying such characters.


\textsuperscript{80} A few examples of the sexualization of Foxy has already been discussed earlier in the paper such as in her revealing attire in film posters advertising the film and in the actual film itself. She is also sexualized in how her body is presented nude in the one sex scene in the film. See both the film poster in Figure 1.2 for how she is presented for marketing and see the film for the scene. \textit{Foxy Brown}, Directed by Jack Hill. American International Pictures, 1974.
bed and raped by two white henchmen. Beating her with a whip and raping her brings up associations with the experiences of enslaved Black women, but despite the traumatic experience, she is able to escape her captors and focus on getting revenge through the help of Black Panther Party members to stop the antagonists in the film. The scene exemplifies the strength and resilience her character displayed as a survivor of sexual assault in focusing on how to escape the situation and focus on achieving justice for herself and her deceased boyfriend.81

Foxy also displayed superiority over male characters, regularly overpowering and outsmarting them, as well as pushed back against the male gaze. The most prominent example of this is in one of the last scenes of the film, where she is able to lure henchman and antagonist, Steve played by actor Peter Brown, into a trap with the help of Black Panther Party members who surround him unexpectedly on a dirt road. Unable to escape, she castrates him and gives his testicles to his lover and main antagonist, Kathryn Loder played by actress Katherine Wall.82 The literal castration of this character is emblematic of her character’s dominance and sexual control over men. This relates significantly to Laura Mulvey’s analysis of female cinematic figures “in forming the patriarchal unconscious” which combines attraction with the fears of castration.

The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestation is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to it its world. An idea of woman stands as lynch pin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presences, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies.83

The male subconscious has two ways of escaping his fear of castration including
demystifying her mysteries, for instance the punishing or saving of a female character.
The other way is through the fetishization of her, for instance the depiction of the female
character as unobtainable.\(^{84}\) However, in the case of Foxy Brown’s literal castration of
Steve, she achieves the ultimate fear of the male subconscious, making the experience an
unpleasurable visual experience for men and pushing back against the male gaze.

The film also depicted some instances of racial pride, Black beauty, and other
Black Power influences of the period particularly in her various hair styles she wears and
in the scenes where she asks her Black Panther Party “brothers” to help her. Pam Grier
had substantial control over her character’s attire, makeup, and hair, in the film.\(^{85}\) Foxy
exhibited multiple hairstyles from long, flowing, curly hair, to natural afros.\(^{86}\) Compared
to her prior film, *Coffy* (1973), Grier had gained more control over how she projected her
image to audiences.\(^{87}\) This was seen in her insistence for costume and hairstyle changes
described by *Coffy*, director Jack Hill, who did not like Grier’s demands on choosing her
own clothing, hairstyles, and makeup for *Foxy Brown*. “Pam had much more control

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\(^{84}\) Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Manifestos and
Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. MacKenzie Scott (Berkeley, CA:

\(^{85}\) The emphasis of Black beauty in blaxploitation films reflects aspects of the Black
Power Movement that was simultaneously occurring during the early 1970s.

\(^{86}\) Diversity in Black women’s hair is also an indication that Black beauty was unique and
represented the individual Black woman rather than being “depersonalized” through
stereotypes that grouped Black beauty as representing only one style of hair.

\(^{87}\) In the film poster for *Foxy Brown*, Grier wears an evening gown, toting a gun, with
long flowing hair, balancing both masculine and female traits. The poster also suggests
that Grier felt more comfortable wearing formal frocks and carrying a gun than in her
prior film, *Coffy*. Examining the film poster for *Coffy*, Grier is a muscular, curvaceous
woman, handling a gun, yet doing so less professionally on her hip. *Coffy*, Directed by
because now she was a major star. That is why she is wearing all these glamorous outfits and makeup and stuff, which I thought wasn’t really right for the movie at all.”

The film also had scenes where Black Panther Party members help Foxy capture those responsible for her boyfriend’s death. In one scene, Foxy visits the organizations’ house which is adorned with posters of Black Power fists on the walls. She eventually enters a room where the all-male committee leaders of the organization, donning afros and attire reflecting African heritage, await with their backs to a wall of assault rifles. Foxy gives a speech to the committee declaring that she wants justice for their “brothers” and “sisters” effected by the antagonists’ crimes. When questioned by one of the committee members if she was simply seeking revenge, she refuted stating that they could “take care of the justice” while she handled the revenge herself. This scene ultimately shows influences of Black Power, racial pride, and Black beauty of the time period while also providing another example of the strength that Grier’s Foxy demonstrates.

As female spy and detective heroines, Foxy Brown and Cleo Jones contrast from male heroes in these roles like that of James Bond in that they also displayed feminine aspects of nurturing and motherly attention to the needy. In defending her brother in Foxy Brown, Foxy’s concern for her brother, despite his drug use, paralleled many women’s positions in their families as nurturers, caretakers, and disciplinarians. When undercover as a

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90 Grier’s *Coffy* also displays maternal care. Coffy who herself is a nurse, treats others, but cares for her hospitalized sister throughout the film. *Cleopatra Jones* also displays these maternal themes as Cleo returned from her work oversees to take care of her community. Upon her arrival home, she visits the B&S House, tending to a man going
prostitute, Foxy also helps save a Black woman from being sold as a sex-slave and is able to reunite her with her husband and child, showing care for fellow Black women in her community.\textsuperscript{91} In one scene of \textit{Cleopatra Jones}, Cleo helps a man going through drug withdraw at her B&S House, a community home for recovering drug addicts, sitting next to him in his cot and encouraging him to keep trying while dabbing his head with a wet washcloth.\textsuperscript{92} While James Bond does not provide these same qualities, maternal care and nurturing should not be deemed as negative characteristics.\textsuperscript{93} These qualities emphasized the embracement of femininity by female spy and detective heroines including caring for and connecting with others in her community, family, and friends, bringing a multidimensionality to these heroines. Pam Grier stated that “All across the country, a lot of women were \textit{Foxy Brown} and \textit{Coffy}. They were independent, fighting to save their families, not accepting rape or being victimized [...] I just happened to do it on film. I don’t think it took any genius or great imagination. I just exemplified it.”\textsuperscript{94} Displaying through a drug withdraw. \textit{Foxy Brown}, Directed by Jack Hill. American International Pictures, 1974; \textit{Coffy}, Directed by Jack Hill, American International Pictures, 1973; \textit{Cleopatra Jones}, Directed by Jack Starrett. Warner Brothers, 1973.


\textsuperscript{93} American film historian, Donald Bogle, had stated that “Dobson and Grier represented Woman as Protector, Nurturer, Communal Mother Surrogate,” failing to elaborate further on how the image of maternal care and nurturing was a positive trait. Donald Bogle, \textit{Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films}, (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1973) 251. Some scholars do explore maternal care as a form of female power, mainly Yvonne Sims’s work. See Yvonne D. Sims, \textit{Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture} (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2006). Film studios and filmmakers depicted Blaxploitation heroines utilizing maternal care to balance the rough exteriors of these heroines and potentially to portray them as more realistic.

nurturing and compassion for their loved ones and communities presented these Blaxploitation heroines as having a duality of feminine and masculine traits that make up women’s identities in real life as caretakers, mothers, and leaders of their own lives, families, and communities.

Grier’s films disrupted conventions of Black female characters in detective and action films prior in that like Dobson in that she was not a “side-kick,” villain, or simple love interest in her films – she was the main protagonist. Both Foxy and Cleo depart from female spy or detectives seen in that of 1960s “Bond girls” in that their significance was never based on their relation to a male character such as that of Bond’s love interest. Their characters dominated the screen and when they were not in the camera’s frame, it was never long before they returned. Not only could Black women be beautiful, they could also be powerful, serious spies and detectives without giving up their femininity in the process. Pam Grier stated, “You don’t have to lose your femininity to be powerful; you maintain it. You can have high IQs, study, take martial arts, whatever [...] It’s very different than male power. Just maintain that female power always.”

While Grier’s characters may have displayed aspects of sexual objectification such as in her attire or in marketing for her films, this was not the only dimension that made up her characters’ identities. Instead, they were complex, similar to women’s identities in real life during the 1970s as gender norms and conventions about what was deemed masculine and feminine were also becoming increasingly blurred.

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95 Gerald Martinez, Diana Martinez, and Andres Chavez, eds., What It Is, What It Was!: The Black Explosion of the 1970s in Words and Pictures, 138.
CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIE LOVE: “YOU’RE UNDER ARREST, SUGAR!”

If there’s trouble, she’s your girl / Get Christie Love! / Get Christie Love! / Who to call when things get rough / Get Christie Love! / Get Christie Love! / Take our advice when it gets tough / Get Christie Love! / Get Christie Love! / She’s a cop? / You’re under arrest, sugar!

– Get Christie Love! television theme song

Every Wednesday night on ABC from August 1974 to April 1975, the Get Christie Love! theme song echoed over television sets. As Christie Love, a Los Angeles police detective, actress Teresa Graves, captured the screen. Unlike her Blaxploitation heroine predecessors, Christie did not seek revenge or justice, but simply did her job.

Teresa Graves reached a much larger audience than that of Dobson or Grier because her character appeared in an ABC movie of the week, Get Christie Love!, which transformed into a television series with the same title. Styled after ABC’s crime drama Toma (1973-1974), Graves’ television show made her the first Black actress to have a successful television series as a female detective with an hour-long running time. The 1957 series, Decoy, had been the first American television show to focus on a female

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98 I distinguish between the television show and film throughout by either stating the format or by placing parentheticals next to the title.
99 Toma was an American crime drama series that ran on ABC from March 1973 to May 1974 and stared actor, Tony Musante as a real-life detective Dave Toma in Newark, New Jersey. See Toma, Produced by Stephen Cannell, ABC, 1973-1974, television series.
police officer, but only had a 30-minute running time and lasted one season. Christie embodied many of the characteristics of Dobson and Grier’s characters as a female detective heroine. Like Cleo and Foxy, Christie was a serious character who the Chicago Defender called “beautiful, black, bright, an upbeat lady who is also an excellent police officer.”

Unlike Dobson and Grier, Graves’ Christie Love was much less sexually objectified and engages in little to no acts of violence. Instead of gaining a voice in her character’s image through successful films, Graves had significant input into her character’s development from the beginning of the series’ development. Before the television series’ release, Graves became a Jehovah’s Witness through her sister, Peggy.

100 It is important to note that Get Christie Love! preceded Police Woman (1974-1978) in its release by almost nine months with the former being release in January of 1974 and the latter in September of that year. Police Woman starred white actress Angie Dickinson as Sgt. Pepper Anderson and the running time was between 48-50 minutes. This is noted because Police Woman is sometimes credited with being the first hour long television drama starring a woman as a detective. However, Get Christie Love! had a similar running time of 46 to 48 minutes and was released months prior. Ultimately, Police Woman was more successful in that it lasted four seasons and Dickinson was nominated for a Golden Globe and three times for an Emmy in her performance on the show. However, neither of these series were the “first female detective series,” and this discrepancy should be clarified. Theresa Graves was though the first Black female actress to be a detective in an hour-long drama series. See Nellie Andreeva, “‘Get Christie Love’ Series Reboot From ‘Power’ Creator Courtney Kemp & Vin Diesel Set At ABC With Big Commitment,” Deadline, 26 September 2017.

101 The film’s scenes tend to feature long and medium shots with an occasional close-up shot. The lack of variety in the film’s shots indicates poor cinematography skills.


leading her to shift away from her more sexualized image from the film to the series.\textsuperscript{104} This led her to negotiating her contract with ABC immediately after the series premiered to accommodate her religion. She refused to perform scenes that involved wearing suggestive clothing or scenes that required the sexual enticement of men or violence toward another character. Christie could not “kill anybody on the show, [...] tell a direct lie (although she may assume undercover identities) and utter no profanity.”\textsuperscript{105} It is not clear why ABC agreed to Graves’ contract stipulations, but Graves’ success in the film version may have gained her power in renegotiating her contract for the television series.\textsuperscript{106}

As a female detective, Christie utilizes maternal care and compassion in solving crimes and stopping criminals from hurting her community, displaying multidimensionality in this character’s role. When interviewed by Earl Calloway of the \textit{Chicago Defender} in August 1974 about Christie as a character, Graves stated:

I will not be a superwoman, but an average female with feminine qualities who has a job to perform for the police department. In fact, the character was picked because of her lovely features that can be disguised [...] She is a natural normal lady, and the character is genuine. She was taken from the real-life experiences of Oga Ford, a policewoman in New York.\textsuperscript{107}

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\textsuperscript{104} In the film, Graves is seen wearing skimpier clothing, even dressing as a prostitute in the first scene of the film. In the television series, her attire is much more conservative showing no cleavage and de-emphasizing her feminine bodily features. \textit{Get Christie Love!} Directed by William Graham, ABC, 1974, film.
\textsuperscript{105} “Will the Real Teresa Graves Please Stand Up?,” \textit{Ebony}, December 1974, 68.
Christie’s background also indicates her maternal goals of improving her community. She came from a broken home and an impoverished environment, living mostly on the streets. While looking at the destitution around her, she realized she could help to improve the situation of her community through legal means. She finished high school, studied criminology in college and joined the police department. For a while she worked in uniform, but eventually was promoted to the special investigations division and became the youngest member of an impressive team of specialists, consisting of eight men and two women. By deciding to improve her community through law and order, she too displays motherly care similar to heroines Foxy Brown and Cleo.108

Television series after *Get Christie Love!* replaced the depiction of female detectives with mostly white actresses, such as in series like *Charlies Angels* (1976-1981) and *Cagney and Lacey* (1982-1988). The end of the series also marked the decline of the Blaxploitation genre in the mid-1970s. Blaxploitation films continued to be produced by film studios for the remainder of the decade, but at a smaller scale.109 As the Blaxploitation genre disappeared, it seemed that the Black heroine did too. Taking her place in mainstream cinema was the white heroine who lacked the sociological

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109 *Velvet Smooth* (1976) also featured a private female detective, Velvet Smooth, also supported by a staff of women. Smooth attempts to find out who threatens a gang leader’s turf. The film was a low budget martial arts film which feature poor cinematography and camera shots throughout. In a scene where the gang leader and Smooth are sitting on a sofa conversing, the audio boom shifts back and forth between the characters at the bottom of the frame. It only further indicates the low quality of the film. CBS Television film, *Ebony, Ivory, and Jade* (1979) also was a low-quality Blaxploitation film that was more of an attempt at creating a “Black James Bond” than a film empowering Black heroines. By the time of its release, the Blaxploitation genre was dead. *Velvet Smooth*, Directed by Michael Fink, Howard Mahler Films, 1976; *Ebony, Ivory, and Jade*, Directed by John Llewellyn Moxey, CBS-TV, 1979.
backgrounds of Black actresses that brought the duality of being both Black and a woman to their performances.

In the 1980s, under the political influences of conservatism, African Americans on screen and behind it were confronted with what film scholar, Ed Guerrero called the “recuperation” of inequalities they had struggled to eradicate during the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement. A reduction of films with Black narratives and leading roles pushed Black actors and actresses into the margins or background of the cinematic frame. The ideologically conservative cycle of production led filmmakers to focus upon blockbuster films that reached wider and mostly white audiences – simultaneously ignoring racial differences. The election of Republican President and actor, Ronald Reagan in 1980 also ushered in the “corporate age” in Hollywood – with increasing deregulation and a dramatic reinterpretation of antitrust guidelines, the introduction of junk-bond funding and its use in leveraged mergers and acquisitions, and the growing consolidation of assets and power by large corporations within the industry. Instead of creating films for specific audiences such as African Americans, studios moved to broadening their film audience focus. Black actresses like Grier, Dobson, and Graves, struggled to find work in the new film industry, some never returning to the big screen.

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110 Ed Guerrero, 113-114.
CHAPTER 7

THE “HEARTBREAKING” REALITIES: A RENDITION OF HEROINES FROM 1980S TO 2000S

To sit here almost 15 years later, knowing that another woman of color has not walked through that door, is heartbreaking. It’s heartbreaking because I thought that moment was bigger than me. It’s heartbreaking to start to think maybe it wasn’t bigger than me. Maybe it wasn’t.112

– Halle Berry, first and only woman of color to win the Academy Award for Best Actress, 2016

Halle Berry never imagined that she would be the first Black woman to win the Academy Award for Best Actress for her role in Monster’s Ball (2002), nor did she believe she would still be the only one after almost twenty years. Berry was also the first Black woman to act in a successful spy film since the 1970s, Die Another Day (2002).113 Despite being the first heroic Black Bond girl, her role as the “Bond girl” meant that her character supported the male protagonist James Bond, played by Pierce Brosnan.114 Outside her performance in Die Another Day and Catwoman (2004), Berry, like other Black female actresses, struggled to secure lead roles in spy film and the action genre more broadly. Since the fall of Blaxploitation, the number of roles for African American

113 Berry plays as a National Security Agency (NSA) agent and Bond girl, Jinx Johnson.
women in spy and detective films has remained consistently low and minimal.\textsuperscript{115} Nonetheless, this failure on behalf of the film industry is not to say that aspects of Blaxploitation heroines’ character qualities are not also seen in female depictions in the spy and detective genres.\textsuperscript{116}

After the 1970s, roles opened increasingly for white women in action films broadly, rather than just being damsels in distress. Unlike Blaxploitation heroines, female heroines of the 1980s and 1990s were not portrayed as the same voluptuous and curvaceous characters. Instead they were depicted as having more muscular, boney bodies, as an attempt by mostly male directors to project a masculine identity for these heroines. Clothing for example, changed from attire that accentuated their female bodies, to looser and more masculine clothing that did not highlight female features such as hips or breasts. This can be seen in the attire worn by actress Sigourney Weaver’s Ripley in \textit{Alien} (1979). However, this is not to say that these heroines were not also sexualized in their roles and in the attire they wear, but similar to Blaxploitation heroines, their characters were more dimensional than this one aspect.\textsuperscript{117} Despite not being a spy or

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\item\textsuperscript{115} African American actors became more visible in the genres such as Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Jamie Foxx, Idris Elba and Martin Lawrence to name a few. \textit{Training Day} (2001), \textit{Bad Boys} (1995), \textit{Bad Boys II} (2003), \textit{Enemy of the State} (1998), \textit{Blue Streak} (1999), \textit{Shaft} (2019), \textit{BlacKkKlansman} (2018) are a few movies centered around Black male detectives or agents.
\item\textsuperscript{116} There is no direct evidence that this study could find showing that Blaxploitation heroines’ characters influenced that of white heroines in the 1980s and after. However, there certainly is similarities which this section discusses and the question of whether there was a direct question is an excellent one for future researchers to explore.
\item\textsuperscript{117} In \textit{Alien}, Ripley became a woman who was out to save the world from destructive forces, whether man made or extraterrestrial. As male characters put up little to no fight to the Alien (all the male characters die in the film) Ripley successfully fights off the Alien long enough to escape death. \textit{Alien}, Directed by Ridley Scott, 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Fox, 1979.
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detective film, Ripley’s emergence as a strong, self-reliant action heroine signified an evolution in the purpose of women’s roles in mainstream action movies.\textsuperscript{118} Ripley’s clothing is non-accentuating, wearing mostly masculine attire, but she is still sexualized in last scene of the film when she dresses down in underwear with her cat.\textsuperscript{119} Ripley also retains her characters traits of strength and independences in the \textit{Alien} sequel, \textit{Aliens} (1986), but she is also seen as a mother figure to the young girl, Newt, played by Carrie Henn. She, like Grier and Dobson, shows instances of nurturing and maternal care in taking care of and protecting Newt throughout the film. The emphasis on maternal care, a feminine quality, seen in action heroine’s identity does not completely cease from the 1970s and differentiates them from male heroes in these action films.\textsuperscript{120}

Similar to these white action film heroines, female spy and detective heroines of the 1980s and onward were also displaying mostly strong, independent, multidimensional characters. In \textit{La Femme Nikita} (1990), Nikita, played by Anne Parillaud, is an assassin for a secretive government agency known as “the Centre” where she consistently fights and kills men as ordered by her superiors. She displays aspects of sexual objectification by dressing in revealing attire to make her appearance non-threatening to her male targets and seduce them into revealing intelligence. In a scene when Nikita is preparing her

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\textsuperscript{118} Female driven spy and detective films are non-existent after the immediate fall of Blaxploitation. Except for television shows like \textit{Charlies Angels} and \textit{Cagney and Lacey}, it is not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that female centered spy and detective movies re-emerge.

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Alien}, Directed by Ridley Scott, 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Fox, 1979.

\textsuperscript{120} Yvonne Tasker’s \textit{Spectacular Bodies: Gender Genre and the Action Cinema}, described Ripley in \textit{Alien} not as a woman acting and appearing like a man, but as a “musculinized” heroine working within the action genre’s conventions. For more on Tasker’s analysis of action film heroines, see Yvonne Tasker, \textit{Spectacular Bodies: Gender Genre and the Action Cinema} (London: Routledge, 1993).
makeup, her trainer, Amande, played by Jeanne Moreau, tells her “There are two things that have no limit: femininity and the means of taking advantage of it.” This sort of seduction is not uncommon for spy film heroines and is seen in even more recent spy films by heroines including the films *Salt* (2010), *Atomic Blonde* (2017), and *Red Sparrow* (2018). Similar to Blaxploitation heroines, the significance of these heroines is never based solely on their relation to male characters and rather all other characters in these films are seen in relation to them as the main protagonist and center of the film’s action.

Television series displayed a similar trend with mostly white heroines making an increasing appearance in crime-drama series as police officers, private detectives, agents, and even as super heroines. A multitude of television series in the late 1970s and onward centered on women as detectives or working for government agencies such as in *Police Woman* (1974-78), *Charlies Angels* (1976-81), *Cagney and Lacey* (1982-88), *X-Files* (1993-2002), and *Alias* (2001-2006), as well as even more contemporary shows like *Rizzoli & Isles* (2010-2016) and *Homeland* (2011-present). Like most subsequent spy and detective films, these television series centered on white characters whose traits were

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122 *Red Sparrow*, Directed by Francis Lawrence, 20th Century Fox, 2018; *Salt*, Directed by Phillip Noyce, Columbia Pictures 2010.
123 These heroines often portrayed similar multi-dimensional characteristics and balancing of feminine and masculine traits such as maternal care for victims and proficiency in combat. *Charlie’s Angels*, Produced by Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg, ABC 1976-81; *Cagney and Lacey*, Produced by Barney Rosenzweig, CBS 1982-88; *Police Woman*, Produced by David Gerber, NBC 1974-78; *X-Files*, Produced by Christ Carter et. al., Fox 1993-2002; *Homeland*, Produced by Alex Gansa et. al., Showtime 2011-present. *Rizzoli and Isles*, Produced by Bill Haber et. al., TNT 2010-2016; *Alias*, Produced by J.J. Abrams et. al., ABC 2001-2006.
multidimensional. Very few detective-drama series since the 1970s have featured African American actresses as the main protagonists. The detective series *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999-Present) featured Black actress Viola Davis as a guest star and lawyer Donna Emmett in seven episodes of the series, from 2003 to 2008. Davis would also go on to play a law professor, Annalise Keating, in the legal thriller series, *How To Get Away With Murder* (2014-2020). In addition to Davis, actress Vivica Fox’s role in *1-800-Missing* (2003-2006) was one of the very few detective series where the lead character was a Black female agent, Nicole Scott. Despite her characters’ display of strength and ingenuity as an agent, the series failed to be commercially successful, lasting only three seasons.

This is not to say that Blaxploitation heroines did not have a significant cultural and social influence in other realms. The influence of these heroines on especially female audiences can still be seen years after the end of Blaxploitation. Rapper Foxy Brown, also known as Inga Marchand, took her stage name from Pam Grier’s character and became a popular female rapper in the mid-1990s and continues to produce music today. Beyoncé Knowles in an interview over her role as Foxxy Cleopatra, a homage character name to both Foxy Brown and Cleo, in the Austin Powers film, *Goldmember* (2002), discussed how empowering Blaxploitation heroines like Cleo Jones and Foxy Brown were to

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124 Nina Holiday, played by Idara Victor, becomes a major supporting African American female detective in the television series *Rizzoli & Isles* after the fourth season. *Rizzoli and Isles*, Produced by Bill Haber et. al., TNT 2010-2016.
125 *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, created by Dick Wolf, NBC, 1999-present.
126 *How To Get Away With Murder*, created by Peter Nowalk, ABC, 2014-2020.
developing her character in the film. “I watched ‘Foxy Brown’ again, ‘Coffy’ and ‘Cleopatra Jones,’ I did more research, watching all the blaxploitation films I could find. I now have all of the original ‘Foxy Brown’ posters. I really became kind of obsessed with Pam Grier. I’d love to meet her, though I don’t know what I would say to her.”128 Knowles’ role as Foxxy Cleopatra was very much a parody on Black spy film heroines just like the film itself was a parody of the spy film genre. In this film, Knowles plays an important character who helps Austin Powers played by comedian and actor, Mike Myers, defeat Dr. Evil’s plans, also played by Myers. However, Knowles is portrayed comedically in her attire and acting which is overly sexualized.129 These are just two artists whose lives and work were influenced by the images of Blaxploitation heroines like Cleo, Foxy Brown, and Christie Love.

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CHAPTER 8

“ONE GRAND, MULTIFACETED ILLUSION:” CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In April 2019, Eon productions announced that Black actress, Lashana Lynch would be in the upcoming James Bond film, No Time to Die (2020). Confusion among media outlets grew over whether she would become the first Black female 007 or simply another “Bond Girl.” Eon productions released in September that Daniel Craig would still play as James Bond for the upcoming film, but that Lynch would play a “spy who inherits the codename in the wake of Bond’s retirement.” The significance of Lynch becoming 007 is incredibly significant for moving Black women’s roles in Bond films out of just the “Bond Girl” side-kick character. However, No Time to Die was definitely still a Bond film with Craig at the forefront of the film. In January 2020, the family that has an “iron grip” on the Bond series franchise, mainly siblings Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, claimed that the James Bond character will always be male. “He can be of any color, but he is male,” Broccoli said. “I believe we should be creating new characters for women – strong female characters. I’m not particularly interested in taking a male character and having a woman play it.” By not being James Bond though, it

130 Ed Guerrero, 2.
131 Gabrielle Bruney, “The First Photos of Lashana Lynch as 007 in James Bond Film, No Time to Die, Have Arrived,” Esquire (27 September 2018).
132 The sibling duo have the final say on casting decisions in the franchise. Broccoli had insisted that Daniel Craig be casted for the role in 2006 for Casino Royale (2006). For more information, see Callie Ahlgrim’s interview with the siblings: Callie Ahlgrim,
only displays the limitations women and especially Black actresses continue to face in the spy and detective film genres.\textsuperscript{133}

This work has attempted to explore the complexities of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines’ and how they were similar and varied from that of mostly white actresses in these roles during the 1960s and after the fall of Blaxploitation. Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines were unique in both the intersection of their race and character portrayals as powerful, independent, main protagonists which has been minimally after the 1970s. Yet, white rather than Black actresses became the main “serious” heroines in the spy and detective film genres after the 1970s, despite displaying similar character qualities. However, this work is by no means a complete study of Blaxploitation spy and detective heroines and is rather a groundwork for future researchers to explore this subject. While this study could not find evidence to indicate a direct connection between Blaxploitation heroines’ and the multidimensional aspects of their characters to that of white heroines of the 1980s and after, this work does allow for researchers to inquire further about the ways in which Black actresses continue to be minimally and marginally included in the spy and detective film genres. Will we see an increase in Black actresses as main protagonists in the spy and detective genres or will

\textsuperscript{133} While a different research inquiry, other women with intersectional identities either ethnically or racially did not necessarily have this issue after the 1970s in being casted for spy or detective film heroine roles. For instance, women of Asian descent found roles in American martial arts, action, and spy films on the big screen. American actress Lucy Liu has played in a multitude of these kinds of roles such as agent, Alex Munday in the \textit{Charlie’s Angels} film series (2000-2003) and detective Joan Watson in the crime-drama series \textit{Elementary} (2012-2019).
the legacy left behind by Blaxploitation heroines prove to be just “one grand, multifaceted illusion” for future Black actresses in the genre? Only time and further research will tell. 

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134 Ed Guerrero, 2.
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