

Blazing Saddles

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Blazing Saddles is a 1974 satirical Western comedy film directed by Mel Brooks. Starring Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder, the film was written by Brooks, Andrew Bergman, Richard Pryor, Norman Steinberg, and Al Uger, and was based on Bergman's story and draft.^[3] The movie was nominated for three Academy Awards, and is ranked No. 6 on AFI's 100 Years...100 Laughs list.

Brooks appears in multiple supporting roles, including Governor William J. Le Petomane and a Yiddish-speaking Indian chief. The supporting cast also includes Slim Pickens, Alex Karras, and David Huddleston, as well as Brooks regulars Dom DeLuise, Madeline Kahn, and Harvey Korman. Bandleader Count Basie has a cameo as himself.

The film satirizes the racism obscured by myth-making Hollywood accounts of the American West, with the hero being a black sheriff in an all white town. The film is full of deliberate anachronisms, from the Count Basie Orchestra playing April in Paris in the Wild West to a rustler referring to the *Wide World of Sports* to Nazis and camels.

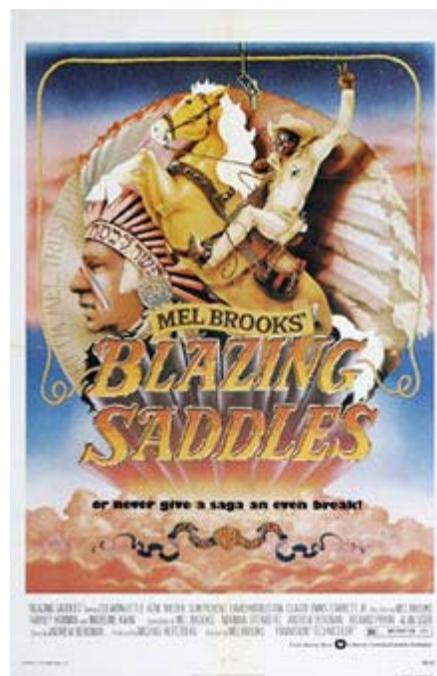
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Plot

In the American Old West of 1874, construction on a new railroad led by Lyle (Burton Gilliam) runs into quicksand. The route has to be changed, which will require it to go through Rock Ridge, a frontier town where everyone has the

Blazing Saddles



Theatrical release poster by John Alvin^[1]

Directed by	Mel Brooks
Produced by	Michael Hertzberg
Screenplay by	Mel Brooks Norman Steinberg Andrew Bergman Richard Pryor Al Uger
Story by	Andrew Bergman
Starring	Cleavon Little Gene Wilder Harvey Korman Slim Pickens Madeline Kahn Mel Brooks Dom DeLuise
Music by	Mel Brooks (<i>songs</i>) John Morris (<i>score</i>)
Cinematography	Joseph F. Biroc

last name of "Johnson" (including a "Howard Johnson", a "Dr. Samuel Johnson", a "Van Johnson" and an "Olson N. Johnson".) The conniving State Attorney General Hedley Lamarr (Harvey Korman) wants to buy the land along the new railroad route cheaply by driving out the townspeople. He sends a gang of thugs, led by his flunky assistant Taggart (Slim Pickens), to scare them away, prompting the townsfolk to demand that Governor William J. Le Petomane (Mel Brooks) appoint a new sheriff. The Attorney General convinces the dim-witted Le Petomane to select Bart (Cleavon Little), a black railroad worker who was about to be hanged. (Bart had hit Taggart in the head with a shovel after Taggart ignored him and his black friend sinking in quicksand, deciding to save their handcar instead.) Lamarr believes a black lawman will so offend the townspeople that they will either abandon Rock Ridge or lynch the new sheriff, with either result paving the way for him to take over the town.

With his quick wits and the assistance of drunken gunslinger Jim (Gene Wilder), also known as "The Waco Kid" ("I must have killed more men than Cecil B. DeMille"),^[4] Bart works to overcome the townsfolk's hostile reception. He defeats and befriends Mongo (Alex Karras), an immensely strong, slow-thinking (but surprisingly philosophical) henchman sent by Taggart and Lyle to kill Bart, and then beats German seductress-for-hire Lili von Shtupp (Madeline Kahn) at her own game. Lamarr is furious that his plans keep failing and decides to destroy Rock Ridge with a newly recruited and diverse army of thugs (which Lamarr characterized as ideally consisting of "rustlers, cutthroats, murderers, bounty hunters, desperadoes, mugs, pugs, thugs, nitwits, half-wits, dimwits, vipers, snipers, con men, Indian agents, Mexican bandits, muggers, buggerers, bushwhackers, hornswagglers, horse thieves, bull dykes, train robbers, bank robbers, ass kickers, shit kickers – and Methodists"). In a scene where Lamarr hires his villains, the candidates include bikers, Arabs, banditos, crusaders, Nazis, and Klansmen. Lamarr even kills a bank robber for chewing gum in line and not having enough to share with everyone else.

Bart now has twenty-four hours to come up with a "brilliant plan to save our town." He gathers the town, along with the railroad workers, three miles east of Rock Ridge to build a fake town as a diversion. The workers labor all night to complete their task. After the sun rises, the fake town is a perfect replica, right down to the orange roof on Howard Johnson's outhouse. Bart realizes the town has no people in it, so it won't fool Lamarr's villains. Bart orders the townspeople to make "exact replicas of themselves," and leaves with Jim and Mongo to execute a plan that will slow the villains "to a crawl." The three construct a tollbooth labeled "Le Petomane Thruway," requiring Taggart's crew to pay ten cents each to pass on their horses. Upon seeing it, Taggart asks, "now what will that asshole think of next?" Since no one in the raiding party is carrying any change, nor do they realize that there is nothing stopping them from simply riding *around* the tollbooth, Taggart sends someone back to town to "get a shitload of dimes."

Once through the tollbooth, Lamarr's villains attack the fake town, which Bart boobytrapped with several dynamite bombs. Bart attempts to set off the bombs but is unsuccessful as the detonator he has won't work. Jim is given the task of exploding the bombs, which he does by firing pistol shots into them. After the bombs explode, throwing villains high into the air, the citizens of Rock Ridge attack the villains.

The resulting fight between the townsfolk and Lamarr's army of thugs breaks the fourth wall, quite literally; the fight spills out from the Warner Bros. film lot into a neighboring all-gay musical set being directed by Buddy Bizarre (Dom DeLuise), then into the studio commissary, where a pie fight ensues. Taggart is knocked out when

Editing by	Danford B. Greene John C. Howard
Distributed by	Warner Bros.
Release date(s)	February 7, 1974
Running time	93 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$2.6 million
Box office	\$119,500,000 ^[2]

Mongo smashes his head on a cash register, and the fight finally pours out into the surrounding streets. The citizens of Rock Ridge chase the villains back to town to destroy them, but Lamarr runs to the theater while Bart and Jim follow him.

The film ends with Bart killing Lamarr by shooting him in the groin at the 'premiere' of *Blazing Saddles* outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre, saving the town, and then joining Jim inside the theatre to view the end of the movie, persuading people of all colors and creeds to live in harmony, before they hand in their horses and ride off (in a limousine) into the sunset.

Cast

- Cleavon Little as Sheriff Bart
- Gene Wilder as Jim, aka "The Waco Kid"
- Harvey Korman as Hedley Lamarr
- Madeline Kahn as Lili von Shtupp, the "Teutonic Titwillow"
- Slim Pickens as Taggart
- Dom DeLuise as Buddy Bizarre
- Mel Brooks as Gov. William J. Le Petomane / Indian Chief / Tough wearing sunglasses and a bomber jacket.
- Liam Dunn as Reverend Johnson
- George Furth as Van Johnson
- Burton Gilliam as Lyle
- John Hillerman as Howard Johnson
- David Huddleston as Olson Johnson
- Richard Collier as Dr. Samuel Johnson
- Alex Karras as Mongo
- Jack Starrett as Gabby Johnson
- Robyn Hilton as Miss Stein (the governor's secretary)
- Rodney Allen Rippy as Young Bart
- Charles McGregor as Charlie
- Robert Ridgely as Boris, the hangman
- Carol Arthur as Harriet Johnson
- Anne Bancroft as Extra in Church Congregation (uncredited)

Notes

- Count Basie appears as himself in a cameo, with his band, which plays "April in Paris".
- Mel Brooks also appears in a cameo as one of Hedley Lamarr's toughs, wearing sunglasses and a bomber jacket. He also dubbed the voice for one of the German chorus boys backing Madeline Kahn's performance of "I'm Tired", speaking lines such as "Give her a break!", "She's not a snake" and, "Don't you know she's pooped?!"

Production

In the DVD commentary, Brooks explains that the original title of the film, *Tex X* (as in the name of Black Muslim leader Malcolm X), was rejected, along with *Black Bart* and *Purple Sage*. Finally, Brooks concocted the title *Blazing Saddles* while taking a shower.^[5]

Blazing Saddles was Brooks' first film shot in anamorphic format. To date, this film and *History of the World, Part I* are the only Brooks films in this format.

Brooks had repeated conflicts with studio executives over the cast and content. They objected to both the highly provocative script and to the "irregular" activities of the writers (particularly Richard Pryor, who reportedly led all-night writing jams where loud music and drugs played a prominent role). Brooks wanted Pryor to play the sheriff, but Warner executives expressed concern over Pryor's reliability because of his heavy drug use and the belief that he was mentally unstable.^[5] In a similar vein, Gene Wilder was the second choice to play the Waco Kid. He was quickly brought in to replace Gig Young after the first day of filming.^[6]

After screening the movie, the head of Warner Bros. complained about the use of the word "nigger", a flatulent campfire scene, and Mongo punching a horse. Brooks was told to remove these elements. As Brooks' contract gave him control of the final cut, the complaints were disregarded and the elements remained. The only element removed was a scene in which Lili tried to seduce Bart in the dark, prompting him to quip, "That's my arm you're sucking."

Brooks wanted the movie's title song to reflect the western genre, and advertised in the trade papers for a "Frankie Laine-type" sound. Several days later, Laine himself visited Brooks' office to offer his services. Brooks had not told Laine that the movie was a comedy: "Frankie sang his heart out... and we didn't have the heart to tell him it was a spoof — we just said, 'Oh, great!'. He never heard the whip cracks; we put those in later. We got so lucky with his serious interpretation of the song."^[7]

In an interview included in the DVD release of *Blazing Saddles*, Brooks claimed that Hedy Lamarr threatened to sue, saying the film's running "Hedley Lamarr" joke infringed her right to publicity. This is lampooned when Hedley corrects Governor Le Petomane's pronunciation of his name, and Le Petomane replies with "What the hell are you worried about? This is 1874, you'll be able to sue *her!*". Brooks says he and the actress settled out of court for a small sum. In the same interview, Brooks related how he managed to convince John Wayne to read the script after meeting him in the Warner Bros. studio commissary. Wayne was impressed with the script, but politely declined a cameo, fearing it was "too dirty" for his family image. He is also said to have told Brooks that he "would be first in line to see the film, though".

Influences

The plot (i.e. thwarting a ruthless scheming land-grabber) was a spoof of countless Western movies and cliches, including *Destry Rides Again*, *The Wild Bunch* and *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

The film, town, and many of the scenes, music, and themes in *Blazing Saddles* were parodies of the classic Gary Cooper film *High Noon*. The church scene in particular was imitated down to the costumes and 'murmuring' of the townsfolk. Brooks' *The Ballad Of Rock Ridge* uses motifs and melodies that echo "Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin'", performed by Tex Ritter.

The line "We don't need no stinking badges!" is a reference to a similar line in the Humphrey Bogart and John Huston film *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*.

Madeline Kahn's character, Lili Von Shtupp, is a parody of Marlene Dietrich in her chanteuse roles from *Destry Rides Again* and *The Blue Angel*, etc. The song "I'm Tired" is a parody of Dietrich's "I'm the Laziest Gal in Town" from Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*. 'Shtup' is a Yiddish verb meaning "to stuff, poke, or fill" but which is commonly used as a vulgarism best translated into English as "to have sex" (and which is considered as crude in polite society as its English counterpart). (When broadcast on television, Lili's last name is usually changed to "Shhhhhh..." to avoid use of the vulgarism, but is still written normally on the title card.)

Some references to Mel Brooks' first film *The Producers* include the playing of "Springtime for Hitler" before the introduction of Lili von Shtupp, Governor Le Petomane's echoes of Max Bialystock's line "Hello Boys!" and the use of the theme from "The French Mistake" when Hedley Lamarr and others escape the movie studio lot after breaking the fourth wall. Brooks also used the names of actors Richard Dix and Randolph Scott as partial tributes to both stars.

The scene under Hedley Lamarr's office window involving Boris, the Quasimodo-like hangman, is used again in a larger fashion in Brooks' 1993 comedy, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* with Robert Ridgely reprising his role.

The extensions to the ISO 9660 standard for Unix Filesystem attributes are named as Rock Ridge extensions after the movie's town.

Reception

While the film is widely considered a classic comedy today, critical reaction was mixed when the film was first released.^[*citation needed*] Vincent Canby wrote:^[8]

“Blazing Saddles has no dominant personality, and it looks as if it includes every gag thought up in every story conference. Whether good, bad, or mild, nothing was thrown out. Mr. [Woody] Allen's comedy, though very much a product of our Age of Analysis, recalls the wonder and discipline of people like Keaton and Laurel and Hardy. Mr. Brooks's sights are lower. His brashness is rare, but his use of anachronism and anarchy recalls not the great film comedies of the past, but the middling ones like the Hope-Crosby "Road" pictures. With his talent he should do much better than that.”

Roger Ebert gave the film four stars and called it a "crazed grabbag of a movie that does everything to keep us laughing except hit us over the head with a rubber chicken. Mostly, it succeeds. It's an audience picture; it doesn't have a lot of classy polish and its structure is a total mess. But of course! What does that matter while Alex Karras is knocking a horse cold with a right cross to the jaw?"^[9] The film grossed \$119.5 million in the box office becoming only the tenth film in history up to that point to pass the \$100 million mark.^[10]

On Rotten Tomatoes, the film has a certified "fresh" rating of 89%.^[11]

Awards and honors

In the scene where Lamarr addresses his band of bad guys, he says, "You men are only risking your lives, while I am risking an almost-certain Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor!" Harvey Korman did not, in fact, get an Oscar nomination, but the film did receive three other Academy Awards nominations in 1974: Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Madeline Kahn, Best Film Editing, and Best Music, Original Song. The film also earned two BAFTA awards nominations, for Best Newcomer (Cleavon Little) and Best Screenplay.

The film won the Writers Guild of America Award for "Best Comedy Written Directly for the Screen" for writers Mel Brooks, Norman Steinberg, Andrew Bergman, Richard Pryor, and Alan Uger.^[12]

In 2006, *Blazing Saddles* was deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry.^[13] The American film critic Dave Kehr queried if the historical significance of *Blazing Saddles* lay in the fact that it was the first film from a major studio to have a fart joke.^[14]

American Film Institute Lists

- AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies – Nominated
- AFI's 100 Years...100 Laughs – #6
- AFI's 100 Years...100 Songs:
 - I'm Tired – Nominated
- AFI's 100 Years...100 Movie Quotes:
 - "Excuse me while I whip this out." – Nominated
- AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition) – Nominated
- AFI's 10 Top 10 – Nominated Western film

Legacy

TV pilot

A television pilot was produced for CBS based on Andrew Bergman's initial story, titled *Black Bart*,^[15] which was the original title of the film. It featured Louis Gossett, Jr. as Bart and Steve Landesberg as the drunk sidekick. Mel Brooks had little if anything to do with the pilot, as writer Andrew Bergman is listed as the sole creator. The pilot did not sell, but CBS aired it once on April 4, 1975. It was later included as a bonus feature on the *Blazing Saddles* 30th Anniversary DVD and the Blu-ray disc.

Musical adaptation

With the production of musical adaptations of *The Producers* and *Young Frankenstein*, rumors spread about a possible adaptation of *Blazing Saddles*. Brooks joked about the concept in the final number in *Young Frankenstein*, in which the full company sings, "next year, *Blazing Saddles*!" In 2010, Mel Brooks confirmed this, saying that the musical could be finished within a year. No creative team or plan has been announced.^[16]

Soundtrack

The first studio-licensed release of the full music soundtrack to *Blazing Saddles* was on La-La Land Records on August 26, 2008. Remastered from original studio vault elements, the limited edition CD (a run of 3000) features the songs from the film as well as composer John Morris's score. Instrumental versions of all the songs are bonus tracks on the disc. The disc features exclusive liner notes featuring comments from Mel Brooks and John Morris.^[17]

Notes

- ↑ Stewart, Jocelyn (February 10, 2008). "John Alvin, 59; created movie posters for such films as 'Blazing Saddles' and 'E.T.'" (<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/california/la-me-alvin10feb10,1,5113268.story>) . *Los Angeles Times*. <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/california/la-me-alvin10feb10,1,5113268.story>. Retrieved February 10, 2008.
- ↑ "Box Office Information for Blazing Saddles" (<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blazingsaddles.htm>) . Box Office Mojo. <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blazingsaddles.htm>. Retrieved January 17, 2012.
- ↑ Director and Leading Actors (<http://www.getback.com/movie/blazing-saddles/1499232>)
- ↑ Quotes from *Blazing Saddles* (1974) – GarnersClassics.com. (<http://www.garnersclassics.com/qblazing.htm>)
- ↑ ^{*a b*} 2001 Review (<http://archive.salon.com/ent/movies/dvd/review/2001/05/08/blazing/>) , mostly of Brooks's DVD commentary, from Salon.com
- ↑ IMDb Biography for Gig Young (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0949574/bio>)
- ↑ From the libretto of the La-LaLand Records

- soundtrack album
8. ^ Review of *Blazing Saddles* (http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html?title1=BLAZING%20SADDLES%20(MOVIE)) by Vincent Canby
 9. ^ Roger Ebert. "Blazing Saddles" (http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19740207/REVIEWS/401010306/1023) . *Chicago Sun-Times*. http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19740207/REVIEWS/401010306/1023.
 10. ^ http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blazingsaddles.htm
 11. ^ http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blazing_saddles/
 12. ^ Awards for *Blazing Saddles* (1974) (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071230/awards)
 13. ^ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071230/awards
 14. ^ National Film Registry Announces New Titles (http://davekehr.com/?p=148)
 15. ^ *Black Bart* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121113/) at the Internet Movie Database
 16. ^ Back on the Horse: Mel Brooks Penning Songs for *Blazing Saddles* Musical (http://www.playbill.com/news/article/137884-Back-on-the-Horse-Mel-Brooks-Penning-Songs-for-Blazing-Saddles-)
 17. ^ *Blazing Saddles* press release at La-La Land Records (http://www.lalalandrecords.com/BlazingSaddles.html)

External links

- *Blazing Saddles* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071230/) at the Internet Movie Database
- *Blazing Saddles* (http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/blazing_saddles/) at Rotten Tomatoes
- *Blazing Saddles* (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blazingsaddles.htm) at Box Office Mojo

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