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### Remaking Cinema: Black Hollywood Films, Filmmakers, and Finances

Kiana A. Carrington

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REMAKING CINEMA: BLACK HOLLYWOOD FILMS,  
FILMMAKERS, AND FINANCES

by

KIANA CARRINGTON

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Data Analysis and Visualization in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, The City University of New

York

2021

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CARRINGTON

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Finances

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Kiana Carrington

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Data Analysis and Visualization in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

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Date

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Aucher Serr

Thesis Advisor

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Date

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Matthew Gold

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

Remaking Cinema: Black Hollywood Films, Filmmakers, And

Finances

by

Kiana Carrington

Advisor: Aucher Serr

The goal of my project was to create a dataset of black film that can be used for analysis of fiscal trends in black film. It includes the estimated budget, domestic and worldwide box office numbers for over 700 American black films. I defined black films as those that centered on African American stories and African American characters, or were made by Black filmmakers. I also included movies embraced by African American audiences that were made by non-Black filmmakers like *Bad Boys*, *Django Unchained*, and *The Color Purple*. I used a combination of Box Office Mojo, The Black Cinema Database, Rotten Tomatoes, and the Blackclassicl\_movies.com database to create my dataset. The github repository can be found here <https://github.com/KianaC23/Capstone>.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Shoutouts to my support system. We did it y'all!

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## DIGITAL MANIFEST

1. Capstone Whitepaper (.PDF File)

Remaking Cinema report. Includes narrative and project summary.

2. Github Repository

An online file storage including all scripts, csv and excel files used in this project

<https://github.com/KianaC23/Capstone> .

3. Code and other Deliverables

Zip file containing content of Github repository at time of deposit

## LIST OF VARIABLES

COMBINATION	dataframe containing all data from all csv used in project
COMBINED_CLASSIX_DATA	dataframe of films from all black databases used in project
COMBINED_CSV_DATA	data frame of all data from the box office mojo csv files
GENRE_SITE_LIST	list of sites to scrape

## GLOSSARY OF FUNCTIONS

**crawl\_site():** loops through genre pages, scrapes page and writes results to csv

**crawl\_movie\_genre(base\_url):** crawl one genre page, parse page and check to see if there is another page after the current one

**persist\_html():** Write actual html to a file instead of recrawling web

**persist\_results(url, results):** write results to a csv file

**parse\_and\_extract(url, name):** select the table with data you want to scrape from site and choose the specific information you would like to scrape from that table and extract it

**parse\_page(url):** parse web page

**run(start\_year, years\_ago):** go through the year functions one by one starting with today and working backward

**url\_to\_txt(url, filename, save):** open url, get html text, and write to a new file

## A NOTE ON TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Users will need to have the following installed before cloning the github repository:

- Python 3.9 application.
- Text editor that can run python code. I used VS Code.

After downloading Python 3.9 you can use pip Python package manager to install the packages I used in this project (pandas, beautifulsoup, etc.).

## Introduction

“A film with a black director and black cast will not do well at the box office.” “Black films don't sell foreign.” “All black films should be marketed to black people.” All three of these myths are tied to money: projected returns on investment, perceived bankability of black actors and directors, and assumptions about who will show up at the movie theater. Hollywood decision-makers actively create and maintain racial hierarchy through how they conceptualize, discuss, package, produce, and distribute movies. Assumptions about economics and profits guide thinking about cinematic production that disproportionately disadvantages black directors. According to the film scholar Janet Wasko “the profit motive and the commodity narrative of film have implications for the kind of films that are produced and not produced, who makes them, how they are distributed, and where and when they are viewed” (Erigha 11).

As more research is done on diversity and inclusion in film the findings point to the opposite of the status quo. Films with diverse casts and leads from underrepresented groups are doing well at the box office. In fact there is a positive correlation between diverse casting and performance at the box office (Smith et al. 3) Studies thus far have examined trends based on race or gender. Many of the resources that exist on black film and filmmakers focus on the content of the stories told, critiquing the final product. I was interested in the process that led to what we get to see on screen: who are the decision makers, what factors play into which films get made, and what are the effects of those decisions on directors, actors, and film audiences. My project looks to expand the scope of analysis by looking at the practices and systems in place before a film even makes it to the big screen. I aim to investigate the flow of money from studio to project and better understand the rationale of top decision makers at major film studios including: 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures and Walt Disney Pictures.

The goal of my project was to create a dataset of black film that can be used for analysis of

fiscal trends in black film. It includes the estimated budget, domestic and worldwide box office numbers for over 700 black films. I defined black films as those that centered on African American stories and African American characters, or were made by Black filmmakers. I also included movies embraced by African American audiences that were made by non-Black filmmakers like *Bad Boys*, *Django Unchained*, and *The Color Purple*. I used a combination of Box Office Mojo, The Black Cinema Database, Rotten Tomatoes, and the Blackclassicl\_movies.com database to create my dataset. It includes 722 black film titles from 1920 to the present along with information on the directors, starring actors, estimated budget, and box office information that is available to the public for free. I wanted to compile this information to make an easily accessible dataset for others interested in critical media industry and offer a base that can be built on to analyze multiple aspects of the industry that I will discuss further later on.

### **Relationship Course of Study**

My academic interests always gravitate toward media and entertainment. For many years I've enjoyed using watching Netflix as a legitimate form of research. We consume so much media and it is deeply entwined in our daily lives as a means of getting information, leisure and entertainment, and staying in touch with others. It reflects us as much as we reflect it-- or at least that is what media companies would like you to think. Working in a white male dominated field academically (data analysis) and professionally (Off Broadway Theatre), I found it important to center my black womanhood in my studies.

Throughout my degree program I have created participatory projects focusing on themes of pro blackness and equity, as well as centering black feminist discourse in my data analyses. In my first year I worked with colleagues to conceptualize and then build a website focusing on Robin [D.G. Kelley's concept of Freedom Dreaming](#). Freedom Dreaming is an opportunity to visualize the future

that we want to live in, and harness the necessary tools and resources to actively move that dream toward a reality. It begins with addressing inequalities within ours and others lives to build awareness and then taking steps to enact change (Kelley). We asked visitors to our website to share their freedom dreams with us. We created community guidelines that clearly stated community rules on our site, explained how the data we collected would be used, and instructed users on how to contact us if they wanted their contributions taken down.

The following semester I did a series of [visualizations on gender in DC comic books](#) where I analyzed the number of appearances to female characters in comparison to their male counterparts. I applied that same idea to film later on delving into the directors of the 100 top grossing films of 2018. This was when I first discovered the Annenberg Institute Initiative led by Stacey I. Smith at the University of Southern California.. In that project I focused on who was in the director's chair, basing my interactive visualizations off of the AnnenbergInstitute's findings and showing the disparity between white male directors, their female counterparts, and directors of color.

Through my project on [representation in animated TV series](#), I moved beyond looking at only quantitative data. For that project, I used a black feminist lens to hone in on the importance of having people of color in decision making positions specifically writers, storyboard artists and other behind the scenes roles. This was also the first time I created my own dataset. I used IMDb as a base, filtered out the animated tv series I didn't need, and added in the race and gender information for the actors, writers, and directors left in my dataset. Much of the information I gathered came from disparate parts of the internet: different wikipedia pages, fandom pages and many google searches. There was no one place to find the information I was looking for. The research portion of the project was more difficult than I had anticipated which limited what I could do visually within the time constraints of a semester. I made sure to make my dataset accessible for others to offer a

base that can be built upon instead of someone having to start from scratch as I did. I would come to find out that these absences of information were not uncommon.

This past summer amidst nationwide protest against police brutality, I watched a virtual conference that focused on the intersection of technology and social justice. There were speakers from many organizations I found interesting including Data 4 Black Lives, Campaign Zero. During the conference the speaker Samuel Sinyangwe, who worked on the Mapping Police Violence project and later helped found Campaign Zero, talked about the large number of people that came together to create a dataset chronicling police violence in America. Part of the data came from official police websites, some was crowdsourced, and they used social media and obituaries to compile the dataset. This project led to a bigger movement through Campaign Zero to push for data driven solutions to reform police policies. Often the excuse from police departments to avoid reform was that they did not have enough data on the subject to make changes. Campaign Zero set out to change that. They organized a campaign for hundreds of people all over the country to insert the police guidelines in their local area. Using that information they were able to identify trends in different parts of the United States. They found that police departments that had clear restrictive restrictions on when and how officers use of force had significantly fewer police killings than those that did not have these restrictions in place (Campaign Zero). Campaign Zero is a form of collective action and protest by collecting data to refute current myths about police violence, present data on what is currently happening in communities across the United States, and holding police departments and elected officials accountable.

Data 4 Black Lives' slogan is "Data as protest. Data as accountability. Data as collective action." I am following in the tradition of Data 4 Black Lives, Campaign Zero, and others projects created by data scientists of color, by gathering data that is not currently available or easily available within my field of media and entertainment. Papers and books have been written about the need for

more diversity in Hollywood both on and off screen, but the numbers and methods of the research have been obscured. In addition, most look at a sample of the top grossing films of each year. This does not account for the fact that the most lucrative genre of film is action, especially sequels that rarely feature black casts and black directors. Over 60% of black movies are comedies or dramas, two genres that median budgets of 20 million and 10 million respectively (Follows). These are much lower than films with budgets over 100 million dollars. At the turn of the millennium, large budget films accounted for around 4% of movies released domestically (for which budgets are available) but by 2017 this had grown to over 12% (Follows). With this in mind, I set out to create a more comprehensive dataset that could be a resource for other media studies scholars who are researching black film. I'm following in a tradition of black data scientists and community organizers that use the collective to compile data on black people and culture in order for analysis and community activism.

## Development

Coming off of my project on representation in animation, I wanted to take my research a step further and investigate the processes that determined what content gets made in the first place. Critique of the final product is important, but I was interested in the invisible mechanisms that produced the movies we saw on the big screen. Some questions I had in mind were: why are there so many slave movies? Are they actually that popular? Do production budgets grow for prominent black directors and/or prominent black actors after previous successes? Aside from *Black Panther* I cannot think of any major black action film. Why is that? My thought was “follow the money” I was interested in how projects got funded and greenlit.

Through my environmental scan I learned that the budgets for films with black directors and/or black casts were often stagnant even if the films regularly brought in two to three times the

initial investment. I wanted to create a couple visualizations that compared the budget and box office numbers for black films over time and analyze trends. With this in mind I set out to extract data from multiple databases I had already identified: IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Black Cinema Database and the Black Classic Movies database. Each database would play a specific role. The Black Classic Movies database would provide a more historical aspect to this dataset including films as far back as 1920. The Black Cinema Database would add to the historical films and offer film titles and black directors working past 2000. Box Office Mojo would provide the financial information and IMDb could fill in any blanks that remained. When I dug into them I found I would have to do more research than I originally anticipated.

Each has one part of the information I wanted in my dataset and did not allow for the level of specificity I was looking for in regards to my research question. In addition neither of the sites has an API to easily extract and parse the data I was looking to study. The Black Cinema Database and Black Classic Movies were the first two sources I used to start my dataset. They both were created by communities of black film makers and film buffs, but they each were missing a lot of information. The Black Classic Movie database includes films from the 1920s to 2000. It included film titles, directors and film synopsis, but no box office information. A similar issue arose with Black Cinema Database. It is an LA based project by black filmmakers and scholars that is being updated periodically. While most films had detailed information there many that had only a title and photo. I initially emailed moderators for both sites hoping for access to their data files, but got no response. I then found another website Opus Data that had exactly what I was looking for: film names, directors, estimated budgets, and box office info. I was able to get a sample of their data for free that included about 1,900 films from 2006-2018, but access to their data and API was expensive even at the student rate. Even reputable sources like the Annenberg Initiative draw conclusions based off of a dataset of 1200-1400 top films that they do not make publicly available. I knew the

information I wanted exists, it just happened to be in bits and pieces scattered all over the internet. In addition, the sites that did have the details I wanted require multiple page clicks to get to what I needed making it difficult to extract. It was at this point that I decided I wanted to shift my focus to creating an easily accessible dataset of black movies for other scholars and film enthusiasts to use. I wanted my project to provide the tools needed to conduct my original visualization project idea and serve as a way to add to the growing literature on black film and representation. My hope is that this project will add to the growing documentation of white supremacy within the film industry and offer opportunities for others to add their voices and points of view through their own papers and visualization projects using the dataset I have created.

To build my dataset I used a combination of web scraping in python and adding information in manually. I learned a lot about python working on this project. I started with entering the details I wanted from the Black Cinema Database one by one to an excel sheet. I had some movie titles in an excel sheet from a previous project on top grossing films, and was adding in the box office info from the Black Cinema Database along with any title they had that were not in my list. I knew this process would take too much time for the other larger data sources and sought other more automated ways to extract the data. As a novice python user I spent many hours watching tutorials and troubleshooting my code. I was able to build a script that would scrape Box Office Mojo for all worldwide box office sales numbers on films in their database from 1977 to the present. Box Office Mojo has one page with all the films for a given year. My script was designed to do the following for each year: create a data folder; open the page Box Office Mojo page for each year; scrape the film name, domestic, international, and worldwide box office numbers for each film; and put it in its own csv file in the data folder. I have a screenshot of the resulting csv file below.

Rank	Release Group	Worldwide	Domestic	%	Foreign	0.1
1	Avengers: Endgame	\$2,797,501,328	\$858,373,000	30.70%	\$1,939,128,328	69.30%
1	Avatar	\$2,743,577,587	\$749,766,139	27.30%	\$1,993,811,448	72.70%
1	Star Wars: Episode 9	\$2,068,223,624	\$936,662,225	45.30%	\$1,131,561,399	54.70%
1	Avengers: Infinity War	\$2,048,359,754	\$678,815,482	33.10%	\$1,369,544,272	66.90%
1	Titanic	\$1,843,478,449	\$600,788,188	32.60%	\$1,242,690,261	67.40%
2	Jurassic World	\$1,670,400,637	\$652,270,625	39%	\$1,018,130,012	61%
3	Furious 7	\$1,515,047,671	\$353,007,020	23.30%	\$1,162,040,651	76.70%
3	Frozen II	\$1,450,026,933	\$477,373,578	32.90%	\$972,653,355	67.10%
4	Avengers: Age of Ultron	\$1,402,805,868	\$459,005,868	32.70%	\$943,800,000	67.30%
2	Black Panther	\$1,346,913,161	\$700,059,566	52%	\$646,853,595	48%

FIGURE 1: Screenshot of the data transcription process. Shows data from Box Office Mojo

Then, I consulted with a friend who had python experience to build a more complex script to scrape the Black Classic Movies database. On that site the movies were spread among several pages categorized by genre. The script we built scrapes each film title, year, director, and actors and puts it in a csv with the genre as the title. Some films were listed multiple times under different genres. For example a 48 Hours an action comedy starring Eddie Murphy would be listed in the comedy file and the action file. The films from the Black Cinema Database were a bit more specific, including other categories like “thriller” and “crime” movies under the umbrella genre” action” for example. In order to easily combine data from the various sources I stuck with the genres in the Black Classic Movies database: comedy, drama, family, action, romance, and blaxploitation shown below.

Title	Year	Director	Stars	Genre
Within Our Gates	1920	Oscar Micheaux	Evelyn Preer, Flo Clements, James D. Ruffin	Romance
Body and Soul	1925	Oscar Micheaux	Paul Robeson, Marshall Rogers, Lawrence Che	Drama
Hallelujah!	1929	King Vidor	Daniel L. Haynes, Nina Mae McKinney, William	Drama
Imitation of Life 1934	1934	John M. Stahl	Claudette Colbert, Warren William, Rochelle H	Romance
Imitation of Life, 1934	1934	John M. Stahl	Claudette Colbert, Warren William, Rochelle H	Drama
Dark Manhattan	1937	Harry L. Fraser	Ralph Cooper, Cleo Herndon, Clarence Brooks	Drama
God's Step Children	1938	Oscar Micheaux	Jacqueline Lewis, Ethel Moses, Alice B. Russel	Drama
Double Deal	1939	Arthur Dreifuss	Monte Hawley, Jeni Le Gon, Edward Thompsor	Comedy
Paradise in Harlem	1939	Joseph Seiden	Frank H. Wilson, Mamie Smith, Norman Astwo	Comedy
Gone With the Wind	1939	Victor Fleming	Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Thomas Mitchell	Romance

FIGURE 2: Screenshot of the data transcription process. Shows data from Black Classic Movies Database, Black Cinema Database and Rotten Tomatoes

Once I had scraped all the data I wanted, I built a script to read my csv files into data frames using pandas and combine them into one dataframe. I used it several times: once to combine the Box Office Mojo files, again to combine the files from the black film databases I used and another time to join the two dataframes. I modeled these scripts off old Jupyter notebooks I had from a python bootcamp I took at the Graduate Center.

It was interesting to see how the data changed throughout the process. After combining the two black film datasets I had 1075 rows of data containing 722 films from 1920-2020. When I joined it with the Box Office Mojo data that list was cut in half and contained 544 rows of data for 422 films. This was because Box Office Mojo data started in 1977. There are a small number of films released before then that are in the database. This meant that many films on my list were excluded because of their age. Only nine films released before 1980 were still in my dataset after joining it with the Box Office Mojo Data. I went in and cleaned my data removing any duplicates and adding films that I did not see in the dataset. Many film titles and actors' names had apostrophes and accents that python was not sure what to do with. This resulted in some prominent films being left off the list after combined csv files. For example *Boys N' the Hood* directed by John Singleton was in my black film csv file but did not carry over into the final csv because of an apostrophe in the title. Below is a screenshot of my dataset after cleaning and adding budgets. For this reason I have included the full black film dataset along with the smaller dataset that has financial information from box office Mojo.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Title	Year	Genre	Budget	Worldwide	Domestic	Foreign	Director	Domestic %	Foreign%	Studio	Stars
112	Middle of Nowhere	2012	Drama	\$200,000	\$236,806	\$236,806	\$0	Ava DuVernay	100%	0%	AFFRM	Emayatzy Corin
113	Beasts of the Southern Wild	2012	Drama		\$21,107,746	\$12,795,746	\$8,312,000	Benh Zeitlin	60.60%	39%	Fox Searchlight	Quvenzhané Wa
114	A Thousand Words	2012	Comedy		\$22,044,277	\$18,450,127	\$3,594,150	Brian Robbins	83.70%	16%	DreamWorks Dis	Eddie Murphy, C
115	A Thousand Words	2012	Drama		\$22,044,277	\$18,450,127	\$3,594,150	Brian Robbins	83.70%	16%	DreamWorks Dis	Eddie Murphy, C
116	Dysfunctional Friends	2012	Comedy		\$13,546	\$13,546	\$0	Corey Grant	100%	0%	Datari Turner Pr	Stacey Dash, Re
117	Safe House	2012	Action	\$85,000,000	\$208,076,205	\$126,373,434	\$81,702,771	Daniel Espinosa	60.70%	39%	Universal Picture	Denzel Washing
118	Django Unchained	2012	Drama	\$100,000,000	\$425,368,238	\$162,805,434	\$262,562,804	Quentin Tarantin	38.30%	62%	The Weinstein C	Jamie Foxx, Chr
119	Alex Cross	2012	Action		\$34,618,867	\$25,888,412	\$8,730,455	Rob Cohen	74.80%	25%	Lionsgate	Tyler Perry, Matt
120	Flight	2012	Drama	\$31,000,000	\$161,772,375	\$93,772,375	\$68,000,000	Robert Zemeckis	58%	42%	Paramount Pictu	Denzel Washing
121	LUV	2012	Action		\$156,996	\$156,996	\$0	Sheldon Candis	100%	0%	Indomina Media	Common, Danny
122	Think Like a Man	2012	Comedy		\$96,070,507	\$91,547,205	\$4,523,302	Tim Story	95.30%	5%	Screen Gems	Chris Brown, Ga
123	Think Like a Man	2012	Romance	\$12,000,000	\$96,070,507	\$91,547,205	\$4,523,302	Tim Story	95.30%	5%	Universal Picture	Chris Brown, Ga
124	Joyful Noise	2012	Comedy		\$31,158,113	\$30,932,113	\$226,000	Todd Graff	99.30%	1%	Warner Bros	Queen Latifah, D
125	Good Deeds	2012	Comedy	\$14,000,000	\$35,579,177	\$35,025,791	\$553,386	Tyler Perry	98.40%	2%	Lionsgate	Tyler Perry, Gab
126	Madea's Witness Protection	2012	Comedy	\$20,000,000	\$66,899,242	\$65,653,242	\$1,246,000	Tyler Perry	98.10%	2%	Lionsgate	Tyler Perry, Eug
127	Good Deeds	2012	Drama	\$14,000,000	\$35,579,177	\$35,025,791	\$553,386	Tyler Perry	98.40%	2%	Lionsgate	Tyler Perry, Gab

FIGURE 3: Screenshot of the data transcription process. Shows the of data from Box Office Mojo combined with data from black film databases

## Visualizing the Data

In my visualizations below I will present some data points I found interesting in the dataset.

I focused on budget and box office numbers for black films from the 1980's to the present. The

1980's were a pivotal decade for the film industry. First, the 1980's marked a key moment for

Hollywood's expansion into global markets due to deregulation and privatization of media

operations. During this shift toward globalization, transnational entertainment conglomerates sent

cinema abroad making entertainment the second largest export (behind aerospace) from the United

States (Erigha 102). In addition, the 1980's ushered in a wave of independent filmmakers including

Spike Lee and Robert Townsend, who would go on to make films that have become mainstays in

black culture to this day. Though not nearly the first black filmmakers these trailblazers would pave

the way for the advancement we see today as more black people move to produce and own their

own content. Last but certainly not least, Euzhan Palcy became the first black woman to direct a

film by a major Hollywood studio in 1989 with *A Dry White Season*.

Initially I wanted to focus my analysis on Hollywood film specifically because it has more

resources and reach than independent film. For example in 2011, major film studios controlled 88%

of market share and grossed over 8 billion in revenue, twice as much as the next 140 Studios combined (Erigha 15). Many independent film studios are subsidiaries of the larger studios. In addition, the content of independent films do not rely on formula and stereotype in the way that larger film studios do. Instead many indie films are shown at film festivals and may get a distribution deal with an independent studio. The studio does not put in money to produce the film. This distribution arrangement was not within the scope of what I was looking to investigate regarding trends that show in a movie from the beginning of the process including screenplay selection, marketing efforts, and casting among other things. Although, after gathering the data, I adjusted my analysis to focus on the budgets for different genres of film and the people who make them. My dataset includes movies from major and independent studios. Many of the directors have worked only with independent studios, so excluding them would greatly skew my findings.

Arranged by budget, most Hollywood films fall into one of three categories (Erigha 85):

1. Big-budget blockbuster movies with production budgets at or above 100 million dollars with roughly one-third of the budget spent on marketing and promoting the film
2. Middle budget movies which have an average budget of around 40 million dollars with only between 10 and 15% of the budget spent on advertising the film
3. Small budget independent movies generally cost less than 10 million to make and have a miniscule promotion budget that only increases if the film performs well at the box office

The chart below shows the average estimated production budget for the films in my dataset along with the worldwide box office sales.

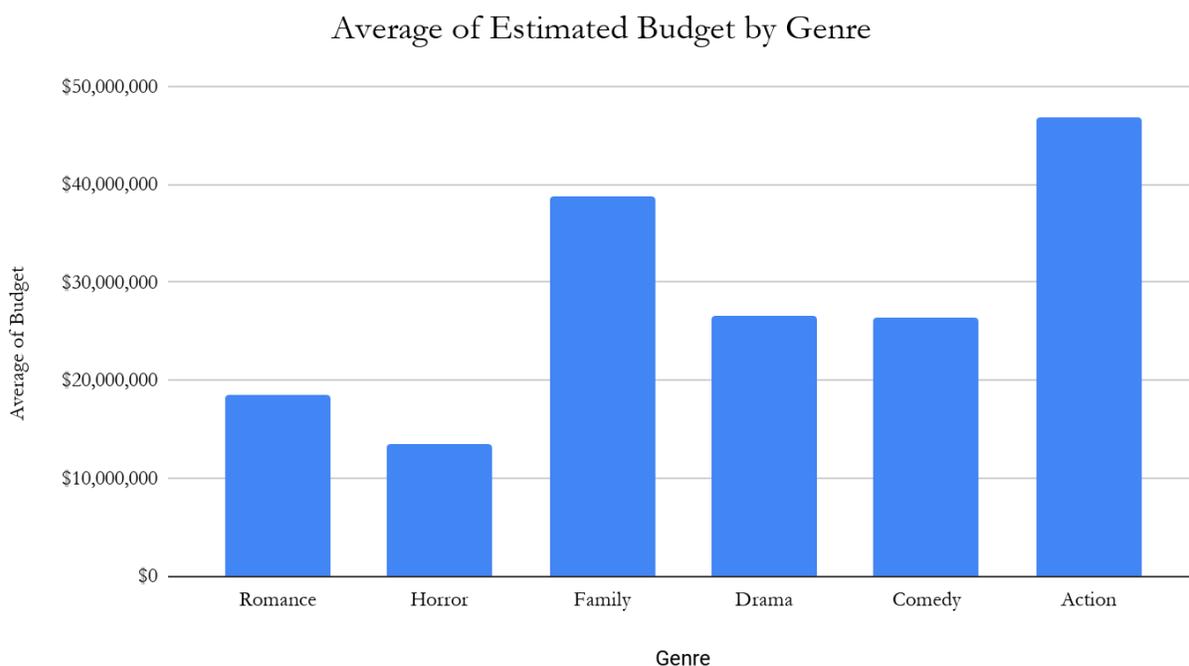


FIGURE 4: Bar Chart of film budgets and worldwide box office sales by genre

As you can see they all fall within the middle to small budget film range. Average budget for black films small relative to the returns from box office sales. More often than not distributors make back twice their investment on black films. Middle budget movies have been in decline the last two decades with large budget films seeing a rapid increase. In addition, horror and thriller genres have seen a sharp decline in budget the last twenty years. The 4.5 million dollar budget of *Get Out* was the smallest of the horror films in my dataset yet it brought in the most money raking in \$176,040,665 domestically and \$79,367,304 in international markets.

The genres with the most films in my dataset were Drama and Comedy making up 35.2% and 33.6% of all movies in my dataset respectively. These two genres get among the smallest budgets of the different genres of film. The reasoning behind this is that drama and comedy are driven by storyline and dialogue. They also require an understanding of American culture and will

not translate well overseas. Between 1999 and 2018 the median budget for films made in the United States was 18 million dollars (Follows). The median budget for comedies from between 2014 and 2018 was 20 million dollar and dramas had budgets of around 10 million dollars (Follows).

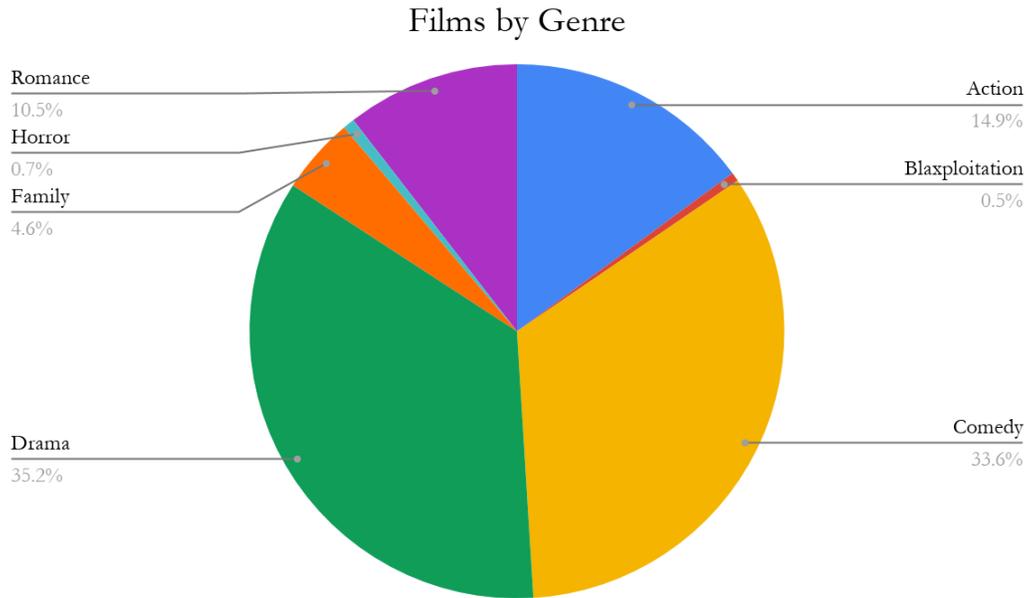


FIGURE 5: Pie chart of percentage of films in eachgenre

	Director	Average Worldwide Box Office	Average Esitmatd Budget Budget
1	Tyler Perry	\$53,151,617	\$17,818,182
2	Spike Lee	\$30,323,002	\$15,728,261
3	Bill Duke	\$19,783,797	\$15,433,333
4	Tim Story	\$108,288,743	\$20,833,333
5	Michael Schultz	\$13,058,118	\$6,166,667
6	Malcolm D. Lee	\$51,437,310	\$23,166,667

FIGURE 6: Table featuring the 6 directors that show up most in the dataset

Above are the directors that appear the most in my dataset. Tyler Perry and Spike Lee are the most prolific directors (16 films each) in my dataset. That being said their box office successes did not always translate to higher budgets. The chart below shows the estimated budgets for Tyler Perry movies over time. All of the films were distributed by Lionsgate.

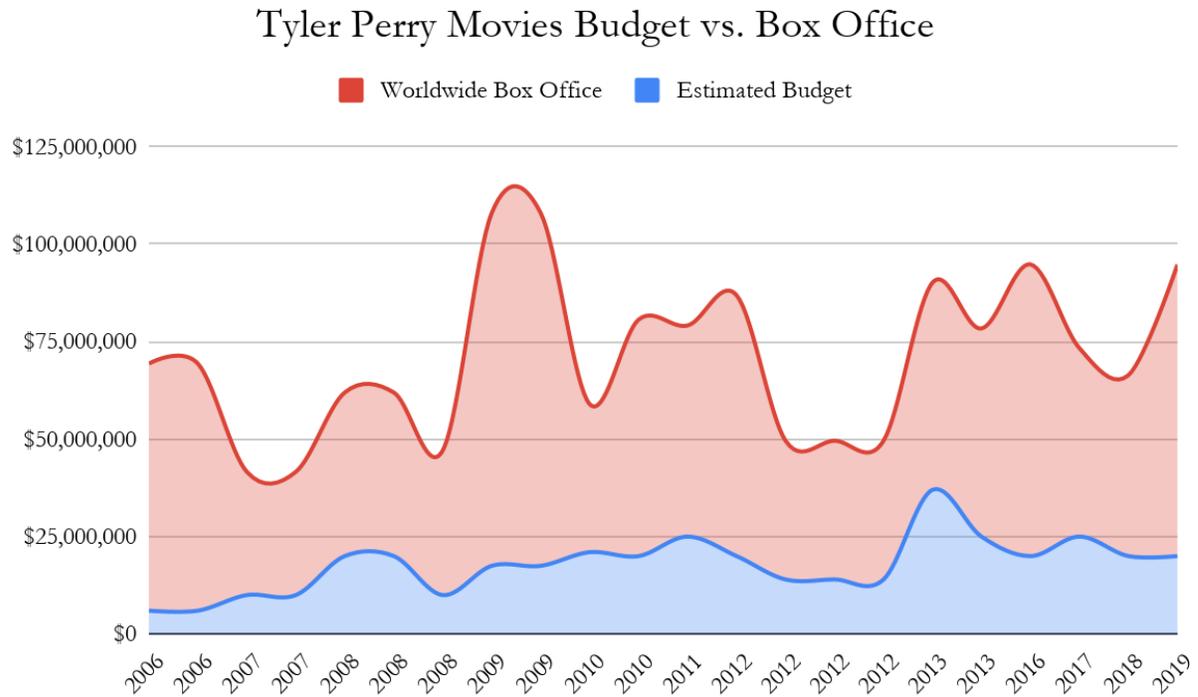


FIGURE 7: Area Chart comparing Tyler Perry film budgets to their worldwide box office numbers

Although his movies often make double and sometimes triple the cost of filming, the median cost for a Tyler Perry film is about 20 million dollars. If bankability of directors and actors holds true as Tyler Perry films continue to succeed there should have been a significant increase in funding given that Lionsgate could “bank” on his films. This is an example of how black directors can be put in “genre ghettos”<sup>1</sup>, which stagnates professional advancement with average budgets for their films are way less than their counterparts. The budget of a movie determines if it can be made at all and can greatly limit the artistic vision of the director and creative team.

<sup>1</sup> For more about genre ghettos see Erigha chapter 4

Most black film hovers between small budget independent movies and middle budget movies. This is because blockbuster films tend to be action movies that are rarely directed by black filmmakers. This is in stark comparison with white directors, who have directed 230 films with production budgets over 100 million dollars, more than 110 white directors having budgets of 150 million or more and over 40 white directed films with budgets over 200 million dollars (Erigha 87).

The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative is a research arm of the University of Southern California is the leading authority researching diversity in Hollywood. They publish annual reports on topics including LGBT representation in film, research who's in the directors chair, and how factors like gender and race affect film finances. Their February 2020 study of 1200 top grossing films from 2007-2018 was part of the impetus for this project. In the report they tried to find out whether or not race and gender play a role in box office performance and how it was significant if at all. Some of the findings about women leads from underrepresented groups in that paper included the following. Films with underrepresented female leads:

1. Receive less financial support in terms of production and marketing costs
2. Are distributed in fewer international territories
3. Less likely to be seen in sequels, action, or sci-fi/fantasy movies which can be some of the most lucrative cinematic properties (Smith et al. 5).

In addition when controlling for certain factors they found that the presence of a lead or co/lead from an underrepresented group significantly increases domestic revenue (Smith et al. 3). As for international revenue, the Annenberg report found that the presence of a female or under-represented lead or co-lead did not significantly predict the revenue (Smith et al. 3). In other words the gender and race of a lead or co-lead in a film had no bearings on earnings. This result counters the long-standing beliefs that women and people of color do not sell internationally. The findings in the Annenberg report are limited given the small sample of films they are able to analyze and the disproportionate distribution of funds to different projects. Until movies starring women of color are given the same support that is granted to films with white male leads, it is difficult to tell

whether differences in economic performance are because of the lack of support or real biases in audience attendance. Overall, the report reveals that biases regarding women and people of color are driving decision-making rather than a sophisticated understanding of the marketplace. This negatively affects the careers of directors and actors of color who are relegated to less lucrative opportunities within the industry.

Very few people of color have made it to the top ranks of major film studios. This is important because it means there are few people who can advocate for and help greenlight more diverse screenplays. *Amistad* directed by Steven Spielberg and *White Dry Season* directed by Euzhan Palcy are two films that black women pushed for that major film studios were not interested in. Palcy's original deal with Warner Bros. to make the South African apartheid drama fell through and she managed to get backing from MGM (Bogle 182). What helped was that Marlon Brando believed so strongly in the project that he agreed to star at scale salary. In the case of *Amistad* Debby Allen, who was at the height of her career as the star of hit TV show *Fame*, was struggling to get producers in her professional network on board for a film she wanted to make about the the mutiny on the *Amistad* slave ship and the slaves who won their freedom in court in the early years of the United States of America (*The Gotta Have Us*). I thought it was interesting that their advocates were the white men who would come to work on the projects. The content was not enough to garner support. Their previous successes as artists was not enough to garner support. Would this have been different if there were more black film executives then? Marketing efforts rarely focus on promotion abroad and instead center black people as the only interested party in black film.

## **Future**

I want to keep adding to the dataset. I was focused on feature films so I did not add documentaries or animated films. I would also want to add content descriptions. I'd be interested to

see the trends that persist in the content that is allowed to be created i.e. slave films, gang films, and more recently films about police brutality. I think it could add to the discussion being had right now about the importance of Black people telling our own stories and owning the means of production. Some argue that through the types of films mentioned above our trauma is being sold back to us in the cinema as entertainment. I wonder, would it be different if there were more black directors making films? How could it be different if there were executives of color to greenlight narratives that are not currently being seen on the big screen? I think these are questions with answers on the horizon as more black people move to produce content and as streaming platforms continue to create original content.

This is an exciting moment in film history! Many black actors are becoming directors and producers. They are showing nuanced narratives and pushing for diversity and inclusion both on and off screen. Streaming platforms like Netflix are competing with the more established film studios and creating their own content. Black creators are also making their own online platforms to show original content. AllBlk is a new streaming service centered around black media that offers exclusive original series, independent films, popular network TV and much more. KevOnStage Studios is another platform for comedians to share their work and maintain ownership of their content. Tyler Perry now owns his own studio in Atlanta where *Coming to America 2* and *Bad Boys: Boys for Life* were both shot. In 2018 Michael B. Jordan became a champion for inclusion riders, a contract clause for actors that would require filmmakers to meet diversity benchmarks in their cast and crew, and decided they would be standard at his production company (Victor). Issa Rae, creator and star of *Insecure*, has partnered with LifeWTR to create a campaign that exposes representational blind spots in the creative industry, while uplifting the expressions of artists spanning fashion, film, and other arts disciplines. I believe it will provide an open, accessible and quantitative angle to the conversation around diversity in Hollywood filmmaking. Change is happening, as we continue to move into

decision making positions. I am grateful for those who have paved the way, The Oscar Micheaux's, Michael Van Peeble's and Spike Lee's of the world, and I am hopeful for a more equitable and inclusive future in the movie industry

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