

'Miracle at St. Anna,' Another Spike Lee Thriller

Contributed by Kianta C. Key -- Black College Wire
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War drama combines mystery, adventure

Spike Lee's "Miracle at St. Anna" is a film that many African-American movie buffs have been waiting for. Clint Eastwood's two films based on World War II, "Flags of Our Fathers" and "Letters from Iwo Jima," overlooked the African-American soldiers in the war. "Miracle at St. Anna's" is a victory for black war heroes and manages to provide tons of thrills along with entertainment.

Based on James McBride's novel of the same name, the movie is set in the 1980's, when a postal worker named Hector Negron (Laz Alonso) commits a murder after watching a John Wayne war movie on television. After his arrest, Hector won't talk, but a reporter finds a clue about Negron's past hidden in his apartment.

The film then flashes back to 1944, in Tuscany, Italy, as Negron and three other members of the 92nd Infantry make their way through the Italian countryside fighting what one character refers to as "a white man's war." The rest of the cast of main characters is introduced at this point: Staff Sgt. Aubrey Stamps (Derek Luke), a college-educated stoic devoted to his service; Sgt. Bishop Cummings (Michael Ealy), furious at the world and a loose cannon with no loyalty to the country he's fighting for; and Pvt. Sam Train (Omar Benson Miller), a starry-eyed oversized simpleton who befriends a young Italian boy (Matteo Sciabordi) who is the only survivor of the St. Anna Massacre.

After being hung out to dry by a white superior officer, they find solace in an Italian village.

With the Germans headed their way, the four soldiers mingle with the crowd and discuss the racism that seems to be non-existent in the country. As they wait for help and gather information from a captured German soldier, a traitor lurks within the crowd. The same clue the reporter found in Negron's apartment holds the key to their survival.

Outside of the conflicts involving race and society, another dramatic focal point is the war of wills between Stamps and Cummings. These two play out their adaptation of the Negro-versus-Nigger debate that has echoed through many decades of black american life, though this one would be more convincing if Ealy, a dynamic actor, had projected his anger more in period, with a little less of today's "thug" recklessness.

There are various intricacies in plot and character development as well as a few motivation elements that are not ironed out. Train, who is also called "Chocolate Giant" by his Italian counterparts, has a few "Simple Jack" moments that slow down the movie but add a Spike Lee type of humor. However, the lack of predictability and typical circular plots are exactly what make this movie phenomenal.

The film's spectacular cast is led by John Leguizamo, Joseph Gordon Levitt, Valentina Cervi, Pierfrancesco Favino, Michael K. Williams, and the versatile Kerry Washington.

Lee does quite a fine job in crafting a heartrending tale. One of the most moving scenes in the movie is when the Italian village gathers in the church to pray, while black soldiers and a German soldier are doing the same in different parts of Italy. The scene reflects the notion that even though languages make be looked upon as barriers, the meaning of the words are all the same.

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Kianta C. Key writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published this article.