



‘Sicario: Day of Soldado’ is a poorly written blockbuster filled with racist stereotypes. Hollywood should know better.

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“Sicario: Day of the Soldado,” which opens this weekend nationwide is the follow up to the 2015 film “Sicario.” The original starred Emily Blunt as an idealistic FBI agent caught up in a bloody albeit complicated situation at the Mexican border. Blunt decided she didn’t want to return for the second installment, and with good reason. On top of being just a generally terrible movie, the new “Sicario” is one of the worst-timed offerings of 2018.

Premiering on a weekend when protesters across the country are decrying Trump’s handling of the border crisis, this is a film that relies heavily on every negative border stereotype Fox News could imagine. If Hollywood were collectively serious about actually making a difference in the immigration debate, instead of just raising awareness or throwing money at it, it wouldn’t put out movies like this.

In the first film, Blunt’s character gets hired by Matt (Josh Brolin) and his partner Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro) in order to provide cover for semi-illegal tactics taking down Mexican drug cartels. Without Blunt, the focus shifts to Brolin’s character Matt, who seeks out Alejandro in his retirement in Colombia for one last mission. In the first film, Alejandro was taking down the drug cartels to get revenge for what happened to his wife. Now, under Matt’s orders, he gets to kidnap the daughter of the head of the very cartel who slaughtered his family.

What follows is the stereotypical abductor/abductee Stockholm syndrome scenario in which Del Toro and the girl eventually become close. It’s all been done before, in dozens of films far better than this one. But outside of its main story, the film is full of unnecessary and offensive details that should have given at least one studio executive pause.

The film begins with an incredibly Trumpian plotline that is as implausible as it is irresponsible. Essentially, it involves Islamic suicide bombers who have infiltrated Latino migrants trying to sneak across the southern U.S. border. Several of these terrorists blow themselves up — one on the border, four in an unbranded MegaMart in Kansas — leading the U.S. government to look for ways to shut down the southern border. It also prompts an even stupider plan to create a cartel civil war, hence the reason why Matt and Alejandro kidnap a drug kingpin’s kid.

Incredibly, all of this happens before purported star Benicio Del Toro appears on screen for even one minute.

It's a scenario right out of a Sean Hannity fever dream. The last time an actual Islam-inspired terror attack on American soil occurred was in 2015 in San Bernardino, and the perpetrators did not sneak across the Mexican border to do so. (In fact, no Muslim terrorists have ever crossed in via Mexico, according to the Cato Institute.) There are terrorist attacks regularly in this country, but nearly all of them are perpetrated by white men who are either virulently racist or really mad because they didn't get laid.

Moreover, this type of set-up, fictionalized or not, is an excellent way to spread disinformation to huge numbers of people at a time when the public desperately needs accurate information about immigration. When the crisis at the border (again) became front-page news a couple of weeks ago, Hollywood actors and actresses were quick to speak out against the horrors we were seeing. Us Weekly ran stories citing everyone from Reese Witherspoon to Chrissy Teigen, Jimmy Kimmel, Anne Hathaway, Kristen Bell and James Van Der Beek. The Hollywood Reporter reported that "Kumail Nanjiani, Ellen DeGeneres, Chelsea Handler, Kate Walsh, John Legend... called for action" against Trump's zero tolerance policy. Others have spoken publicly about Trump's "Muslim Ban," which the Supreme Court upheld this week.

Perhaps, though, these celebrities should consider an alternative route to tweeting their feelings. Social media is one way to send a message, but it's also an echo chamber. If Hollywood is actually interested in doing something consequential about racism in America, attempting to tamp down the hysteria surrounding the border would be a good place to start.

A Hollywood that wants us to take their liberalism seriously would make films that depict the reality of the migrant story, not a white supremacist's idea of the border. Making matters worse, the terrorism subplot totally disappears from the film once Del Toro's character arrives — except for one throwaway line in which we learn that the bombers didn't actually come from Mexico. They were from New Jersey all along. Unless this is a very sophisticated attempt at irony, it's pretty horrifying.

All movies, and in fact all media, are on some level propaganda. In the 1940s we had Bugs Bunny, in the 1950s Americans were sold the idea of the prosperous, suburban middle class through early TV shows. For decades, gay people were portrayed as unwell, sexual predator stereotypes — until one day they weren't. This is also why activists insist representation matters, because positive representation is just as important a propaganda piece to acceptance of all kinds as negative stereotypes are in reinforcing hatred. "Sicario: Day of the Soldado" is the worst kind of propaganda, in that it probably doesn't even realize just how harmful it really is.