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*Shaft* (1971) Review

I found the sleek, stylized opening credits of *Shaft* deceptive. As the titular character swaggered across New York City to Isaac Hayes Oscar-winning theme song, I couldn’t help but crack a smile. I loved the campy tone and, combined with the comical title, was fully on board for what *Shaft* had to offer. Unfortunately, as the film went on, I found most of the elements to be mediocre and the narrative to be pretty one-note.

*Shaft* was cheesy enough for any limitations to add to its charm (such as the obvious ADR added anytime the crew shot in a public New York Street). This low-budget feel made the world feel very lived in and I can’t help but commend the production design. John Shaft’s office looks cheaply made which adds so much to his character. If anything, the film could have greatly benefitted from being more over the top.

The film definitely drags at times and is too dialogue heavy. Gordon Park’s 100-minute runtime feels more around 200 minutes with its extremely sparse action sequences. From a film whose theme song proclaims its protagonist as being the “cat that won’t cop out when there’s danger all about” there was much less action than I was expecting and way too many moving pieces to keep up with during the many exposition scenes.

I still had fun with *Shaft* and think it’s important to recognize the film’s impact on African American cinema. The bar sequence, for instance, was just too much fun and I loved Richard Roundtree’s performance. However, due to all the complaints I’ve stated, on top of the film’s casual misogyny, I cannot see myself revisiting this film.