

Journal: Bob Roberts
Politics thru Film – Spring 2006
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Bob Roberts is a shining example of a level one film. Every part of the movie is refined and nuanced. The most amazing and impressive thing about this movie is that it was written and directed by Tim Robbins, who also played the leading role as the folk-singing politician Bob Roberts. The incredibly talented Robbins demonstrated his wit and writing capabilities, his natural acting abilities, and his mastery of directing. This man truly has his finger on the pulse of what movie-making is all about. In addition, he understands the true essence of the shallowness of the great divide in American politics. This 14 years old movie is frighteningly representative of our political climate today.

The casting decisions were superb, especially the selection of Jack Black to play the obsessive, idol-worshiping mayor's son. One of his most poetic moments in the film is the shot of him being interviewed by the documentary film-maker with the name "Bob" written on his forehead. Alan Rickman, the man who played Roberts political advisor and ally, was the perfectly slimy man for the slimy role. His dark, circle-rimmed glasses, his facial expressions, and his evasiveness were exact for the part. His most famous line from the film is priceless, "Excuse me, I have to go pray." In addition to characters, the man who played the incumbent Senator typified the northwestern Democratic congressional careerist. Even his name, Brickley Paiste, is so incredibly white that it implied wealth and, well, whiteness.

The camera work was very nice. There was never a shortage of interesting angles. Even better, it was shot documentary style, so the occasional out of focus shot, the raw looking zooms (on Robert's tapping foot, and his eye on the television screen when he is in his bed at home), and the jerky camera movements added to the story. The lighting and shot compositions were also well done. I do not remember a single frame where I couldn't make out objects due to poor lighting.

The music was great. Not only does Tim Robbins act, direct, and write, he's also a comedian with a guitar. What can't this man do? The lyrics of the songs were hilarious, and Robbins sang them with seriousness and deep pride. He was a man of conviction thru and thru. He reminded me of a right wing Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, or Willie Nelson.

The story and plot of the film kept you hanging on. It was representational of the American political system and partisan divide at large. The crazy leftist reporter who was honestly trying to uncover the truth was ultimately made out to be an extremist wacko, was framed for attempted murder, and then the poor bastard ended up being killed. All he wanted was a little bit of truth and justice. Roberts himself was sly, charismatic, cunning, and dominant. He had the full command of his crew and the people who loved him.

The political team featured the token black person who forgets about the slavery and oppression of the American Negro's past and who checks the values of equality, social justice, and minority rights at the door in his quest for vicariously obtained power. The television crew of the comedy show that was based out of New York was a typical group of left-leaning creatives. Knowing that Roberts stood for everything they opposed in life, they aggressively tried to undermine his appearance on their show, which was imposed from the top of the network hierarchy. John Cusack goes on a rant about war corporatism as if he is rehearsing his skit, and then has to walk off the show because he morally refuses to support Roberts political spot on the show.

This is a great film, and I give it an A+.