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Reel Reading

Giknis

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Lit Log #2: Prompt 5

At first glance, *Blade Runner* (1982) presents itself as a commentary on some of the biggest social justice issues in history. The expositional crawl before the movie begins makes it seem like the message of the movie would be about inequality. As the film goes on, however, plotlines of inequality waiver as themes of humanity surface. Even still, what little themes of inequality take huge inspiration from real-world events and contexts.

The first thing we learn about the film is that Replicants are beings superior to humans. Because of this, they were used for excessive slave labor in dangerous environments. Right off the bat, we can already see similarities to slavery in the real world. A common justification for slavery by those who practiced it was that African Americans were physically built for labor. They tried saying that it was their duty to be slaves because they were capable of handling it. Even outside of slavery, black people were often the brunt of painful medical experiments because of this false notion that black people couldn't feel pain. Replicants are seemingly treated the same way. Not only were they put in extreme working conditions, but as explained by Roy, had to fight in gruesome wars. Replicants were made to be in the same positions as slaves were, without the morality associated with it. Nothing in the movie suggests any of the humans care about the treatment of the Replicants. Even when Zhora was hunted and killed in a public area, no one batted an eye.

There are more small details in the film that are worth discussing. When Deckard is getting briefed on the replicants, it is explained that Pris is a "pleasure" model. These pleasure models were used in clubs for the pleasure of human soldiers. This implies that some replicants weren't built for war or labor, but human pleasure. This is another aspect very similar to slavery. Not all slaves were designated to work in the fields. Some female slaves were subjected to tending the houses of the slaveowners. Not only

that but they were put through sexual abuse as well. While female slaves and programmed “pleasure” robots aren’t exactly 1-to-1 representations, they are similar in that certain groups of people were subjected to sexual misgivings by higher powers. One final aspect to nail home the inequality aspect of the film are some of the scenarios the Replicants find themselves in.

For example, it is established that the Replicants fled their captivity on another planet to make better lives for themselves on Earth. In an ironic twist, they fled to find their master while enslaved people ran away from them. Also similarly, both replicants and enslaved people were killed when running away. Some enslaved people were captured and taken back but Replicants were always executed on the spot. Finally, fighting back was a very important aspect of the history of slavery. The Replicants did anything they could to achieve their goal of extending their lifetimes. This meant killing, capturing, and manipulating people. In the film, the Replicants are seen as the antagonists. While we understood their motivations, the film never tried to make us sympathize with them until Roy’s final speech. Even though they were victims, it never felt like it. Enslaved people were always the victims. Their fighting back was their only chance at equality. Because *Blade Runner* skirts around the idea of inequality, it’s much harder to compare it to history. Even though they are in similar situations, the movie never develops it as such.

In my opinion, this film isn’t a cultural artifact when it comes to social justice and callbacks to the history of slavery. While the film starts off that way, it’s obvious that was never the point of the film. Ridley Scott’s vision for *Blade Runner* was one based on deconstructing humanity. While it had hints of historical relevance, they were few and far between. A lot of what I extrapolated could be seen as stretches or simply not true at all in terms of the Director’s vision. I like how this film chooses one main theme to focus on and executes it masterfully. The game *Detroit: Become Human* has the same premise but delves into the social justice side of things a lot more. While this film will never be a social justice classic, it will go down in history as a film that makes us question what being human even means.