



## 16 BLOCKS (Cert 12)

**Reel Issues author:** Duncan Strathie

**Overview:** Action movie that pairs a cop haunted by his past and a criminal-turned-informer with hopes for a new future.

**Director:** James Richard Donner (2006).

**Produced by:** Warner Bros. **Distribution:** Warner Bros.

**Cautions:** This film includes strong language and some scenes of 'action movie' gunfights and shooting.

### SUMMARY OF PLOT

A movie from the Director of all four *Lethal Weapon* films suggests that viewers are not going to be short on action, tension or shoot-outs. They will not be disappointed. Bruce Willis stars as New York Detective Jack Mosley in the sort of role he is very familiar with – there are many echoes of the *Die Hard* trilogy here. This time Willis is paired up with Mos Def who plays Eddie Bunker – a petty criminal who is due to testify before a Grand Jury. All Mosley has to do is drive Bunker the 16 blocks from the police cells to the courthouse before the Grand Jury is dismissed at 10:00 am - in 118 minutes.

While the story outline is simple, there is strong characterisation by both Willis and Def. Mosley is a cop who has given up on life and can't wait to retire. He walks slowly with a limp. He is unkempt and an alcoholic. His job and character have largely estranged him from meaningful relationships. He is simply counting out time until retirement – anything for the quiet life.

As he finishes a long night-shift, his Lieutenant forces him to take one final task on overtime. In Mosley's own words, he was the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time. The journey begins innocuously enough as Mosley drives the handcuffed

Bunker through the Manhattan traffic. Mosley stops by a liquor store to buy some whisky and, as he comes out of the store, he encounters a man about to pull the trigger on Bunker.

So begins a trail of mayhem that stretches the 16 blocks to the Courthouse. Whatever information Bunker has it seems that no-one wants him to live long enough to talk about it. Bunker's only hope is Mosley who has to get him there in less than two hours before the Grand Jury's tenure expires.

As Mosley seeks refuge in a favourite watering hole, so the twists begin to unfold. It becomes more and more difficult for Mosley to decide who to trust. His colleagues – and even his former partner – seem to be working against him. It soon emerges that Mosley and Bunker will only have themselves to rely on as we discover that Bunker is due to testify against corrupt police officers.

As Mosley and Bunker are forced together for survival, the real worth of the film comes from watching them work together. Jack Mosley may be a drunk but he is determined not to let these crooks get the better of him. Both Mosley and Bunker experience a number of growth points and, in the end, this is a simple morality tale about hope, forgiveness and transformation.

### SOME KEY ISSUES

**Corruption among public servants** – The news media are never far from exposing the next corruption story as they name and shame those who abuse their position as public servants to further their own status and position. Corrupt cops are frequent targets for Hollywood and for British TV police series. Why are stories like these so popular?

**Surveillance and information gathering** – In these times of heightened vigilance and suspicion, law enforcement agencies and governments are using

more and more surveillance methods. Recently it was reported that Britain is the most watched over nation on the planet in terms of the number of CCTV cameras in public places

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6108496.stm> 2

November 2006). Biometric passports with retinal scans and finger prints are just around the corner.

Where does the tracking of a suspect end and an abuse of privacy begin? How do we keep these things in a healthy balance?

**A search for a sign** – Bunker is an optimist and convinced that people have the potential to change. As he pursues his dream, he is always looking for a sign. He reads his hasty departure from the police cells as a bad sign and this is seemingly fulfilled almost immediately. But, as Bunker and Mosley journey to the Courthouse, Bunker sees a number of signs that reinforce his optimism and hope.

**Transformation** – As Mosley and Bunker near their destination, they are transformed, not so much by the journey as by their openness to each other. Bunker sees Mosley as his saviour, even in the midst of their ordeal. Mosley comes to see that his life's meaning hangs in the balance and the goodness in Bunker has shown him a better way.

## CLIPS AND IDEAS FOR RESPONDING

### Clip 1 – DVD: Chapter 3: 8.58 – 11.15

#### A drive to the courthouse

Mosley and Bunker begin their car journey through the morning traffic and Bunker tells Mosley this riddle:

You're driving along in a Hurricane and you pass by a bus stop. At the bus stop are three people: an old lady who is sick – about to die, the second one is your best friend who saved your life and the third is the girl of your dreams.

You only have room in your car for one of them. Which one do you take?

It's a riddle that's supposed to tell what kind of person you are, where you are in your life.

Bunker goes on to speak about seeing signs everywhere and being in the right place at the right time. For Bunker, the path of life has to be navigated by a combination of fate and opportunism. Mosley's cool response is that 'Life is too long and guys and like you make it even longer.'

#### *Small group discussion questions*

- As you heard the riddle for the first time, what was your response? How might it be used to show what kind of person someone is and where they are in their life? Is there more than one possible right answer?
- Some people always seem to be down on their luck while others always seem to get the lucky breaks and land on their feet. Is this due to the type of person you are, to chance or coincidence, or something else?
- At this point in the story, Mosley seems to have given up on life. How would you respond to him and, perhaps, try to show him that there is more to life?

#### *Whole group discussion*

- As the story develops, there are hints at why Bunker's view of life has changed and why he feels a need to look for signs everywhere. Do you feel he is justified in this? Do you look for signs? What signs have you seen?
- If everything in life is decided by fate, is there any point in trying to influence how events turn out?

## Clip 2 – DVD: Chapter 18: 1.06.19 – 1.08.50

Bunker is free to escape and to go to the Port Authority for his noon deadline and then catch the bus to Seattle. This is surely the path to which all the signs have been pointing. However, Bunker chooses to place himself once again in a place of extreme danger and he gets back on the bus to rejoin Mosley.

### *Whole group discussion*

- Why do you think Bunker returns to the bus?
- Bunker was committed to a process of change. He knew the change he was undergoing was real and wished Mosley would change too. Bunker says: 'Chuck Berry – he got locked up for armed robbery. He changed. Barry White – he stole 300 tyres. Can you imagine big Barry White stealing 300 tyres? He changed.' In what ways do Mosley and Bunker need each other to help in their own process of transformation?

### *Small group discussion questions*

- Have you ever undergone a process of transformation with someone helping you along – maybe coaching in sport, training in your job or simply growing as a person? How did it feel? Was it easier or more difficult to have someone alongside you? Was the other person changed in any way?
- To redeem something means to 'buy back'. Bunker was going to buy back his freedom by testifying in front of the Grand Jury. The corrupt police officers were going to buy back their immunity from being found out by killing Bunker. Mosley bought back his dignity and pride by betraying his friends and setting Bunker free. What other things were bought back in the film? What was the 'price paid' and what was the 'result'?

- Where did the story touch on themes of justice? Who received justice and who escaped it? How did you feel about this?
- In the underground car park near the end of the film, there is a stand-off between Mosley and Nugent his former partner. Nugent has a pretty poor opinion of the Ling family (a case they worked on) and of truth. To what extent are justice and truth upheld in today's society? Are they important? Are they worth fighting for or sacrificing something for?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you started out bending the truth a little and ended up digging a bigger hole for yourself? As the story progresses, Nugent and his colleagues invent bigger and bigger lies to cover up each failed attempt to kill Mosley and Bunker. In the end, Nugent was forced to lie to the Commissioner of Police and in the final Courthouse scene Nugent gave Bobby the order to 'take [Mosley] out'. Can you ever imagine getting into a situation where murder seems the only course of action open to you?

## Clip 3 – DVD: Extras : Alternative ending

Mosley is shot at the courthouse.

### *Buzz session*

- How did you feel about the alternative ending? How would you have felt about the film as a whole if that has been used in the movie?
- Did Nugent, by his attempted action, redeem himself in your eyes? Did Mosley simply get was due to him?
- The alternative ending still has Mosley asking the Assistant District Attorney to expunge Bunker's

record. Is that still important given that Bunker had already made his escape?

- How did you feel about the different messages on the cake?

### GOD'S STORY

**Amos 5.6–15** – Amos delivers a prophecy for the people of God who have turned away from God. His is a call to justice and a return to God's ways. The consequence will be that God will act in judgement on those who are unjust.

- The Bible calls us to take responsibility for the decisions we make to ensure that we live by the right moral code. It is very easy to take this too far and to start meting out justice on those who have done wrong. Again, the Bible makes it clear that God will put everything right in the end. On the stairs in the apartment building after Bunker has saved Mosley from Nugent's intervention and he is holding a gun to Nugent's throat, Bunker asks Nugent 'How does it feel?' You can see how close he comes to pulling the trigger. Why is it sometimes easier to take revenge now and so difficult to follow the Bible's teaching and leave things to God?

**Romans 12.1–21** – The writer of the letter to the church in Rome urges his readers not to conform automatically to the norms of behaviour around them, but to be changed so that they will know what God's way is and how to follow it.

- Every day we are faced with opportunities to conform or be transformed. Sometimes they are small things, sometimes large. It might not be until after an event, when you've had time to reflect on it, that you see which way you went. How do you go about evaluating these decisions? What parts

do conscience and the Bible play in the process of transformation?

- It is clear from verse 5 that this process of transformation is something that takes place in community. Bunker and Mosley needed each other to help in the process of their transformation. Christianity is a faith that needs to be lived out in community, which is why being a member of a local church is so important. How (and how well) does your local Christian community help in terms of furthering this process of transformation?
- Earlier in Romans 5.3-4, the writer talks about how we face up to life's difficulties: 'Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.' This process is guided by God's Spirit. Our inner transformation is the result of God's Spirit at work within us and it is this that ultimately gives us the hope that God's ways will prevail. Although we may see signs of God's direction of our lives in various ways, inward change is one of the strongest – for ourselves and for others. When have you been aware of a sign guiding you in some way?

**Colossians 1.9–23** – This is a very powerful passage, where Paul says that we have been redeemed (bought back) by Jesus Christ. He goes on to say that once we were 'alienated from God and enemies in [our] minds because of [our] evil behaviour'. The good news is that, in his death, Jesus took everything that alienates us from God onto himself and died in our place. And, by rising from death, Jesus shows that death is now defeated and we can have new life. When we put our trust in God and in his Son, we are made one with God again and a new life begins.

- The Bible uses many different 'pictures' to show us what redemption is all about.

- Washing, or cleansing  
(Isa. 1.18; Heb. 9.22; 10.22; I John 1.7; Rev. 1.5; 7.14).
- New 'birth' or a new 'creation' - a new beginning  
(John 3.3,7; 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 6.15; Eph. 2.10; Tit. 3.5; James 1.18; I Pet. 1.23).
- The acquittal of an accused, and guilty, criminal  
(Isa. 50.8,9; Rom. 3.26; 8.31-34; Heb. 7.25; I John 2.1).
- Adoption into a family; the love of a father or mother  
(Isa. 66.13; Rom. 8.23; 9.4; I Thess. 2.7,11).
- Putting on a new garment  
(I Cor. 15.53,54; Gal. 3.27; Eph. 4.24; Col. 3.10-14).
- A tree bearing fruit  
(Matt. 7.17-19; Mark 11.13,14; Luke 13.6-9; Gal. 3.22,23).

Which of these pictures most help you to more fully understand the meaning of redemption?

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