

# Stiller's brainchild sparks lots of controversy

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

You know you're asking for trouble when you make a movie with a White actor in Blackface wearing a lower lip extension who's always talking jive jibberish, and with a mentally-challenged character who's repeatedly teased about his disability. After all, in these more-enlightened times, it's not exactly politically-correct to refer to a dimwitted boy as "the dumbest [expletive] that ever lived" or to have a modern-day minstrel mimicking African-American street vernacular.

Consequently, it's no surprise that all the advance buzz for "Tropic Thunder," written and directed by Ben Stiller, has focused on picket lines and boycotts, instead of on the basic question of



Ben Stiller, left, and Robert Downey Jr., star in the controversial film "Tropic Thunder."

whether or not the film is otherwise worthwhile. Regrettably, the teen demographic which finds such crass fare so irresistible probably could

care less about the picture's mean-spiritedness provided it keeps them in stitches.

Therefore, at the end of the weekend, "Tropic

Thunder's" take at the box-office is likely to depend more on the degree to which kids enjoy its irreverent brand of humor than on if its redeeming qualities outweigh any insensitivity in its depiction of minorities.

Superficially, the storyline sounds innocuous enough. It revolves around a Vietnam War buddy flick being shot on location. Early on, we learn that each of the film's five co-stars has his own self-

This, of course, proves to be easier said than done and, more importantly, provides plenty of fodder for a surprisingly clever satire of the war movie genre. For the aforementioned actor archetypes replace such classic army flick staples as the sage sergeant, the gung-ho grizzled veteran, the nerdy medic and the frightened raw recruit.

Yes, "Tropic Thunder" is an intelligent and frequently funny film with some profound points to make about the shallowness of the movie industry. Unfortunately, those relatively-subtle insights are destined to be lost on audiences too busy laughing at all the slapstick and cruel humor coming at the expense of minorities to bother appreciating any deeper message.

Next time, maybe Ben Stiller won't feel a need to pander to the lowest common denominator by resorting to a profusion of profanity and the "R" and "N" words.

Very Good (3 stars).

Rated R for violence, drug use, sexual references, ethnic slurs, coarse humor and pervasive profanity.

## Source hip-hop magazine seeks to return to stature

NEW YORK (AP) — The *Source*, which was in bankruptcy last year, is relaunching with a 20th-anniversary issue and a new focus — a direction that its co-publisher says will restore the magazine, once known as hip-hop's bible, to prominence.

"It's a very seminal period, an opportunity to both celebrate 20 years of content and the fact that *The Source* was a leader in chronicling the culture of hip-hop," said L. Londell McMillan, a media and entertainment lawyer who, along with investment banker Jeffery Scott, purchased *The Source* earlier this year.

"I'm on a mission to restore it to the community that gave birth to it and open the door to those that currently enjoy and influence that hip-hop culture," he added. "It's exciting because we believe that we can do it."

The new issue, which hits newsstands next week, features four separate covers of hip-hop pioneers LL Cool J, Ice Cube, Queen Latifah and Nas, photographed by director Spike Lee.

"We shared with him what we were trying to do, the vision of hip-hop and where we thought it needed to go, and he thought it was refreshing and clever," McMillan said of Lee, a client.

Inside, the magazine takes a weightier tone, including a discussion with prominent professors Cornel West and

Michael Eric Dyson, led by Public Enemy's Chuck D.

"We're just going to expand on what *The Source* has always done well," said McMillan, adding that music will be "a core focus but not 80 percent of the book."

He said the magazine will have a "multigenerational" focus, and will include sections on lifestyle, travel, education, business and other topics.

"I think that what we're trying to do is evolve it as hip-hop has evolved and become an international force, to evolve it without losing its core essence that was the centerpiece of its earliest beginnings and greatness. But it has to evolve, just like hip-hop has to evolve," McMillan said.

At its prime, *The Source* was the pre-eminent magazine for rap, and it helped fuel the rise of urban magazines such as *XXL* and *Vibe*, which celebrated its 15th anniversary this week.

But over the last few years, *The Source* ran through a series of editors, had financial problems and suffered a decline under the ownership of Mays and Raymond "Benzino" Scott; the pair were fired in 2006 and subsequently launched *Hip-Hop Weekly*, and *Us Weekly* — like magazines chronicling the lives of urban music stars. When the magazine filed for bankruptcy, it was millions of dollars in

debt.

One magazine analyst said that while the magazine has been hurt by its problems, it is still viable.

"It is a force. Nobody can deny the force or the power of *The Source*. But is it the same as it was five years ago? No," said Samir Husni, journalism chair at the University of Mississippi. "It does not deliver with the same punch that it used to."

Husni said the magazine's new owners faced an uphill battle in their relaunch, but could be successful "if they are true to the DNA of the publication."

McMillan and Scott purchased *The Source* late last year through The North Star Group and Black Enterprise/Greenwich Street, respectively.

McMillan said that over the past few years, the magazine had focused so much on rap, it had excluded other reader interests.

"It left off so much of what is the key ingredients of hip-hop and lifestyle now... which is lifestyle, fashion, online, new media, international aspects of how people embrace content."

The magazine is searching for a new editor in chief. Besides a shift in content, it will also undergo a design relaunch, McMillan said.

"If anything, we want to restore it, restore it to greatness and its No. 1 spot," McMillan said.

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