

## “FADE TO BLACK”

When Mike Tyson gives you a nickname, it tends to stick. Just ask Stevie “Black” Lockett – film producer, ex-con, and more than anything else, one of the most refreshingly genuine people you’ll meet in Hollywood today. Black is indeed black. Tyson, friends with Lockett since the former heavyweight champions’ Golden Glove days, gave Lockett the name “Black” based on his dark complexion. That he embraces the name speaks to just how comfortable Lockett is with himself, and in turn, to his Hollywood success story.

Not too long ago, Lockett was, as he puts it, “ready to become a statistic.” He’d already served time in both California and New York when a friendship with rapper Heavy-D allowed him an opportunity to become a casting director for the rapper’s videos.

“I’m passionate about what I do,” says Lockett, and his passion for film production was noted by Master P. The New Orleans based rapper recognized that “Black” not only embodied commitment, but that Lockett had the vision and work ethic of an industry veteran. For the next five-plus years, “Black” served as vice-president of Film Production for No Limit Films.

It was with No Limit that “Black” found a niche - urban themed, direct-to-video (and now DVD) films. With budgets ranging from \$500K-3 Million, these films can gross from \$5-10 Million in rental and sales domestically alone.

“Dollar for dollar,” Black notes, “straight-to-video or DVD films can be extraordinarily profitable. Take a successful hip-hop artist, craft an engaging script that tells their story... that develops a character that’s not a stretch for them as actors, and then reach just 3% of their audience...that’s \$3 Million dollars right there.”

The home video and DVD market continues to expand as well. Nationwide chains such as Blockbuster and Hollywood Video continuing to thrive, and new Internet-based niche

services such as NetFlix are growing as well. What's more, the audience for urban-based films also continues to balloon. It's no longer a shock to walk around a mall in middle America and see the next generation decked out in full Hip-Hop uniform, regardless of race.

"Black" has produced a number of films that video store grazers would be familiar with, from his first film "I Got the Hook Up" to "Foolish" starring Eddie Griffin, from "Da Last Don" to "No Tomorrow". Lockett's first television project, "Living Large", featured Carmen Electra and was widely syndicated.

Lockett's most successful film to date has been "Civil Brand". With noteworthy performances by Da Brat and Mos Def, the film centers on a woman's prison whose inmates are exploited as slave laborers. The film was not only accepted at the renowned Sundance Film Festival, but was entered into the American Spectrum series, essentially the best of the best of all the entrants for full form, dramatic works.

As if his plate wasn't already full, Lockett is also an executive and producing partner for Murphy Boyz Productions. One of his producing partner at Murphy Boyz is Ray Murphy, Jr., who had producing credits on such blockbusters as "Coming to America", "The Nutty Professor", and "Dr. Doolittle". "Black" is currently working with Baron Davis, the all-star point guard for the New Orleans Hornets, in his fledgling film production company. They've spent years formulating a plan to produce 4-films, each with a \$2-5 Million budget a year.

"I love getting up and going to work every morning," says "Black", his sparkling eyes and infectious smile making his words dance. And work for Lockett does not revolve around a desk in an office. "I'm an on-set, hands-on producer," he says. "From call to wrap, I'm there, and I enjoy every minute of it."

Yet for all his success, "Black" is still hungry. He's not only passionate about what he does, but about film as a whole. He never goes out and rides the wave of Hollywood

celebrity. Instead, he prefers to sit at home and watch films and television and engulf himself in the art he so intensely tries to create. He's a student of the game, as it were, able to spout volumes of Blacksploitation films you've never heard of with such insatiable enthusiasm it's as if he were naming the best dishes at the most expensive of restaurants.

Lockett, if he had his way, would love to remake every last Blacksploitation classic. And he wouldn't stop there. "Black" is very aware that as an African-American producer, he's tragically unique. Recognizing that opportunity for blacks in Hollywood is grossly limited isn't enough. "Black" is committed to creating those opportunities.

"I not only want to make great films. I want to make great *urban* films. We can make our movies, we can tell our stories."

With such genuine words from so genuine a man, it's impossible not to believe him.