

Four Brothers (2005)

Rated R. Our ratings: V-7; L- 7; S/N-5. Running time: 1:42

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Romans 12:17-19

Like one of the old Westerns, Four Brothers this is a shoot 'em up revenge tale, set amidst the dark streets and alleys of Detroit, rather than Tombstone or Deadwood. Although there are some worthy touches, including a bow to interracial relations, by and large this is a very disappointing film, when you consider that its director is the man who gave us the magnificent Boyz N the Hood. John Singleton has come a long ways since he made his first film at the amazing age of 24, but the journey now seems to lead downward rather than up.

Four "brothers" come together to mourn at the funeral of the woman they regarded as their "mother," Evelyn Mercer (Fionnula Flanagan). A white woman who took in a string of foster children, and who adopted the four Mercer boys because no one else would take them, she has been killed in a convenience store hold up. At the funeral, they discover that it might not have been a random killing, but that she might have been

deliberately targeted by persons unknown because of something she knew. Thus, Bobby's vow to discover what happened and to take revenge.

The brothers, two white and two African American, have gone their separate ways since leaving home, but now as they try to search for the truth about their mother's death, they begin to feel more like brothers. Bobby (Mark Wahlberg), the oldest is a natural born leader, but his temper has gotten him into trouble with the law. Angel (Tyrese Gibson), quite a ladies' man, reconnects with the Latina Sofi (Sofia Vergara). Jack (Garrett Hedlund), the youngest, is more at home with a guitar and his rock band than with one of the guns from the arsenal Bobby amasses. Jeremiah (Andre Benjamin) is the only one who has made what society would call a success of his life, running a business and marrying, and fathering a son upon whom he dotes. Reluctant to join in the vendetta, he observes, "The people who did this are from the same streets we're from. Mom would have been the first to forgive them." True, as their mom came to the convenience store because of a young shoplifter. After patching things up with the store owner, she gives the young thief a lecture, and sends him on his way, just moments before her death. However, though she would have agreed with the apostle Paul's teaching, Bobby has dropped out of the church choir a long time ago.

Of course, all four will unite, and the trail they follow will lead to corruption in high places (which might or might not involve Jeremiah), and a pile of bodies almost as high as one of the decrepit buildings that form the setting of many of the bloody scenes. The film is exciting, and in a perverse way, satisfying to one's sense of wrongs set right, but its message is the opposite of that of John Singleton's first great film. In that one young ghetto dweller Tré, though sorely tempted to follow his friends and wreak vengeance upon the gang that had shot down one of them, pulls back at the last moment, following the path of his responsible and loving father

instead. No pulling back in this film, just a shoot out worthy of a Sam Peckinpah bloodfest.