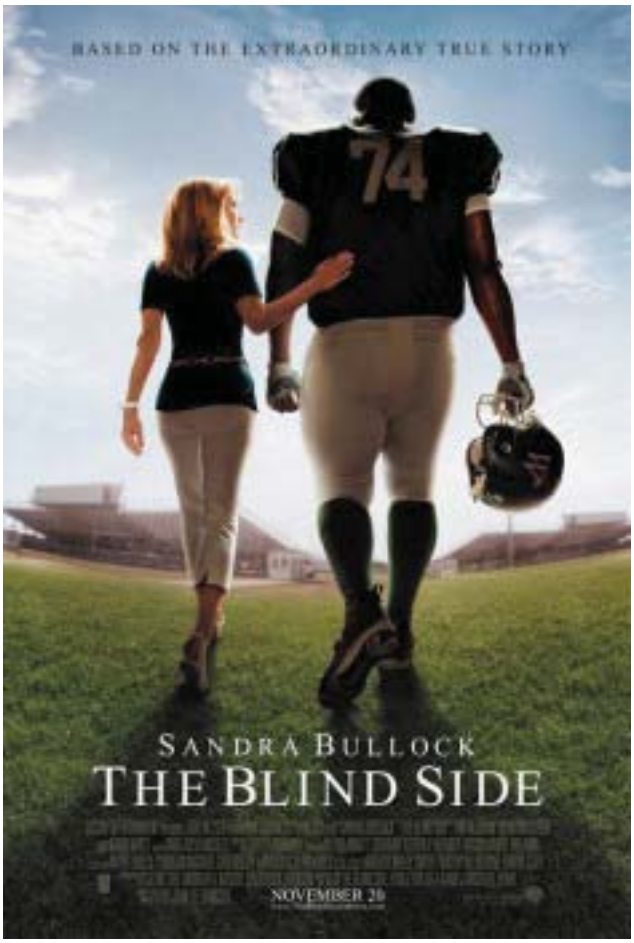
The Blind Side

Film length: 2 hr. 6 min.
Film rating: PG-13
Director: John Lee Hancock
Genre: Biography/Drama



Synopsis & Central Plot:

Based on the true story of Michael Oher and Leigh Anne Tuohy, this film traces the relationship of a homeless young African American high school student and a well-to-do family who opens their home and their hearts to him. With intensive tutoring and coaching, Mike begins to realize his potential in school and on the football field, which leads to his success as a professional football player after his college career.

The film's producer, Andrew Kosove describes why he feels this film is such a powerful story, "It is a current events story, as it were, but I don't think that creates complications as much as it creates opportunities. It's very timely, especially in the 21st century, when we have to come to understand that there is no set type of family. We live in a society made up of different kinds of families, where the only things that really matter are our love and support for one another. I think that's a wonderful thing, and it's a message that people can really relate to in this day and age."

"This team is your family and you have to protect them... Tony is your quarterback. You protect his blind side. When you look at him, you think of me...and how you have my back." -Leigh Anne Touhy

Main themes to engage through the film:

- Inclusion despite difference
- Causes and consequences of homelessness
- Issues of race, class and gender
- Poverty and perceptions of poverty
- Teamwork
- Courage and Honor
- The role of perseverance and hard work
- The formative role of family

Catholic Social Teaching Themes and Connections:

- **Dignity of the Human Person vs. racism -** every person, made in the image and likeness of God, is worthy of respect and reverence. This film highlights what happens when that dignity is recognized and the evil of racism is addressed.
- **Solidarity - '**Blind Side' illustrates that the bonds that unite go far beyond socioeconomics, race or class.
- **Fully Human in Community/ Family Community Participation** - Human persons thrive when they are fully included in all aspects of life and experience the joys of belonging, being loved and loving others.
- **Option for the Poor** - in this film the viewer sees how societal forces determine a great deal about the opportunities or lack of them a person enjoys. The option for the poor calls us to respond to those most on the margins.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- The Blind Side is a story about inclusion, the opening up of a family circle to include Michael, and the opening up of the team and school community to include him. What were the challenges that the family, especially the mother, Leanne, faces as they include Michael in their family home and their family life? What were the challenges Michael faced as he became a part of a family and a community so different than what he had known before?

- Does the movie provide a full picture of the challenges of inclusion and the benefits? What other movies or books deal with the theme of including an outsider? Is this a popular theme in our culture; why or why not?

- What kind of inclusion do you see people struggling with in real life? What kind of exclusion still exists in our society? How do we promote inclusion on the local, state and national levels and thus build solidarity and full participation in community, central values in Catholic Social Teaching?

- Who is transformed in this film? Within the sphere of the movie, what causes transformation and how do the transformations happen? What other movies deal with transformation? In real life, have you seen transformation in yourself, others, or in larger segment of society? What are some of the necessary conditions, inner and outer conditions, for transformation?

- What does the movie imply about the value of teamwork—teamwork in schools, in families, in sports?

- When does teamwork support the values of Catholic Social Teaching—Human Dignity, Rights and Responsibilities, Solidarity, Participation, etc.? Can the concept of teamwork ever undercut these values?

- How are people in poverty portrayed in this film? What does this portrayal suggest about the causes of poverty? Is this a full and fair picture of people in poverty? What are some stereotypes about people in poverty that you have seen in films, on TV, in popular culture?

- The Catholic Church teaches that there are structural causes of poverty—unjust systems and structures that sustain inequality in a variety of ways and inhibit full development of every human person. Can you think of any formal legal structures—laws, judicial and penal systems—that have, or still do, contribute to an unequal playing field? In The Blind Side, we learn that Michael comes to private high school without a basic education; what does this suggest about our educational systems and poverty?

- The movie also shows great disparity in lifestyle; what economic structures have contributed to our present economic situation--today we have less middle class families, and a greater gap than ever between the rich and the those families struggling to pay basic bills?

- Some responses to The Blind Side reflected that the movie demonstrates charity in action but ignores social justice, which would include working to change some of the systems and structures that caused the situations Mike found himself in. Should we expect movies and other forms of popular culture to reflect some of the complexities of poverty, its causes and possible solutions? What are the pros and cons of such expectations?

- American Studies scholars have traced the stereotypes of African males that have appeared, and often persist, in American literature and later in American films; such stereotypes have shaped many people's perceptions of real-life African American males. For example, in Huck Finn, we see the portrayal of the "good negro," Jim, who is often passive and dominated by a young boy, very protective of Huck, and is thus non-threatening. Are there any echoes of Jim and Huck in the relationship in the movie between Big Mike and his young, clever white brother? If so, what might be the implications of such a portrayal on viewers' sense of "appropriate" behavior of African American males?

- Another, polar opposite, stereotype of African American males is the "bad negro," the "uppity," violent, threatening (especially to white woman), criminal type, which first appeared in one of the earliest American films, The Birth of a Nation; this cultural stereotype became so ingrained that it was used to defend the thousands of lynchings of African American men that occurred in the American South in the first half of the 20th century. Is this stereotype evident in The Blind Side in any way?

- What messages may be sent when the two main types of African American men portrayed in a film are, on one hand, the "Good Jim" type as opposed to the "Bad gangster" type, on the other hand? What does this dichotomy imply? How does it limit our sense of the complexity of human beings? Can it promote racism, which the Church has defined as an individual sin and a social sin?

- A 2009 poll demonstrated that African American men with both undergraduate and graduate degrees from high-ranking universities had a much more difficult time gaining employment that similarly educated African American women, often because employers reported feeling "less threatened" by minority females. Obviously, some of the stereotypes produced in popular culture, and the news media, still impact perceptions of African American men, even those with an Ivy League degree. What other examples of the influence of stereotypes of any kind?

- How does unexamined acceptance of stereotypes impact people on the outside of the group, and how does it impact the people being stereotyped? How does it inhibit community and inclusion?

- Finally, should inclusion be based on moving beyond differences, or on accepting and respecting the differences we bring to the table? What does The Blind Side finally say about this? What do other movies, books, TV shows say about this? Does denying difference deny cultural, ethnic and religious identity? Can difference build bridges as well as walls? What do we see in the Old and New Testaments about difference, inclusion, community that offers us guidelines to think about these questions?

The picture at the left is of the real life Touhys.

Michael Oher reflects, *"I know there are people who have a lot more talent than I do, but they never made it out. So if people hear my story they will know that if you give somebody a chance, there is hope for that person."*

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