

A Film to Seep into your Consciousness

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ly to the music, which includes a disturbingly buoyant 1930s hunting song (“Run Rabbit Run”) and whose introduction to Chris’s world is accompanied by Childish Gambino’s admonition to “stay woke” in the song “Redbone.” A haunting original song by Michael Abels (who created the excellent and creepy soundtrack) opens and closes the film, entreating a “brother” in Swahili to listen to the elders, listen to the truth, run far away, and save himself.

A few other things to notice: Watch Chris manage, submerge, deny, and apologize for his fears and misgivings, especially to Rose. In most cases, those very moments contain clues of what’s

to come, yet the impulse to address his experience turns to ash in Chris’s mouth. Chris’s behavior felt very familiar to me; far from a foolish horror-movie protagonist, Chris is simply doing what people who are othered typically do because of the high cost of naming or even recognizing the truth of their experience. Perhaps if we were to right-size our expectations, “staying woke” would mean recognizing that for a marginalized person to minimize his observations of his own experiences in this way is to act like a foolish horror-movie protagonist.

Watch also for Rod’s struggles to advocate for Chris. A scene where he attempts to enlist help from three police officers of color is especially painful. Notice how

the black woman cop uses her own adoption of a “uniform” to dispute Rod’s diagnosis of what is happening.

The film contains several examples of trade in black bodies. This is a particularly resonant part of black experience, yet we are not at all alert to it in this culture. Michelle Alexander has explained how state-sponsored oppression of black people has morphed from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration; this film suggests that we ought to be alert to a similarly resilient practice of trade in black bodies.

Hypnosis figures prominently in the film as a means of controlling black people’s response to oppression. This struck me as profoundly resonant. In what ways do

we instruct and train black people to, in a sense, marginalize themselves?

Finally, the film contains the idea of a “sunken place” from which a black person retains a limited ability to see what is happening to him or her but cannot respond. I have been stewing on how that metaphor manifests in real life, how it is that black people and other people of color can lose the ability to see their own oppression and to act to interrupt it. At times it feels like they have allowed themselves to be enlisted by white supremacy; I have also often experienced a kind of silencing that I did not at all sign up for. Whatever your social location, reflecting on the means that are used to silence black people and other marginalized folks has the potential to

be an important part of your own awakening.

Peele has accomplished something that is worthy of your most focused attention. See the film for fun -- but don’t stop there. Allow it to seep into your consciousness and to trouble you.

Recognize that when black folks exit the theater, they walk back out into a world where they face real danger -- even and in some ways especially -- at the hands of well-meaning white people. Listen to the elders; listen for the truth.

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CALENDAR March 2017

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

19 <i>Swallows Return to San Juan Capistrano</i>	☾ 20 1st Day of Spring <i>Louis Sachar born, 1954</i>	21 Children’s Poetry Day National Teen-Agers Day Single Parents’ Day	22 National Goof Off Day National Sing-Out Day United Nations World Water Day	23 Toast Day <i>Political Leader Patrick Henry declared, “Give me liberty...”, 1775</i>	24 <i>Harry Houdini born, 1874</i> <i>Exxon Valdez runs aground (1989)</i>	25 <i>Pancakes First Made (1882)</i> <i>Sculptor Gutzon Borglum born, 1871</i>
26 Make up Your own Holiday Day <i>Poet Robert Frost born, 1874</i>	● 27 <i>Alaska hit by 8.4 Earthquake (1964)</i>	28 <i>“Greatest Show on Earth” formed 1881</i> <i>Doreen Cronin Birthday</i>	29 <i>Coca-Cola was Invented in 1886</i> <i>Armed Forces left Vietnam (1973)</i>	30 Doctor’s Day <i>Artist Vincent van Gogh born, 1853</i>	31 Tater Day <i>Mathematician Rene Descartes born, 1596</i>	