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A black man's experience of racism is powerfully portrayed by Daniel Kaluuya in 'Get Out,' an unconventional new horror film.

A Film to Seep into your Consciousness

'Get Out' awakens the soul

"Get Out," the first contender so far for my list of the best films of 2017, is essential viewing. Writer-director Jordan Peele has accomplished something entirely original and, I dare say, astonishing: He has used horror film conventions (along with some welcome humor) to powerfully address a black man's experience of racism. The menace and fear experienced by the film's main character, Chris (played with real depth by Daniel Kaluuya), contains important insights into real life for black folks and others who experience othering.

See this film even if you don't like horror films. Peele obviously knows the language of horror and is deliberately employing it here -- but the film is not likely to scare you in the same way that a typical horror film does. It's not about things that go bump in the night, or evil spirits, or ghosts, or slashers. Peele classifies "Get Out" as a "social thriller," which strikes

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY
DARLEEN ORTEGA



me as a better description. He has found a way to depict something very true, very hard to express, and genuinely scary.

The first time I saw the film, my heart pounded through most of it, and I was agitated for two full days afterwards. The night I saw it again, I had a nightmare involving an actual experience of othering that has happened to me many times. After all that, I still went to see the film a third time because it so validated my own experience in the world. I rarely see art that so accurately depicts such difficult parts of my own reality.

I must hasten to recognize that the film is primarily about black experience. I am not black, and can't claim to know what it's like to live inside a black body. This film deepened my understanding of black experience, and is worth seeing for that reason alone.

It also resonated with my own experiences of being othered -- and I hope you'll see it even if what you really are looking for is a more conventional horror film experience. It's clever, and smart, and even entertaining. If you are black or a person of color, you may well find it triggering -- and yet you will be glad you saw it. If you are white, I hope you will engage with a bit of your own heart on the line, and realize that this film has some things to teach you that you don't already know.

One of the conventions of horror films is that the audience sees danger coming that the protagonist doesn't see, and wants to yell, "Get out!" It's part of the fun. By centralizing black experience in a

way we rarely see, Peele affords people of color, particularly black folks, an advantage as viewers; they know in their bones where the land mines are. His employment of the horror genre to do this feels wonderfully subversive, given the long history in films and literature of depicting black men as a threat to white women. This is a story of an entirely different kind of jeopardy.

If you're white, recognize that your experience of the film will be very different than a black person's experience -- and how could it be otherwise? How often do we see films that really centralize black experience in a truthful way? Chris's friend Rod (my favorite character, astutely played by comedian LilRel Howery) is the stand-in for "woke" black audience members; he is the truth-teller who most people would see in real life (as in the film) as hysterical at worst and as comic relief at best. And one of the most painful aspects of being othered is that one can't talk about one's experience without sounding crazy or hysterical.

It's best to go into the film blank, and I aim here to avoid spoilers while encouraging you to pay closer attention than you might be inclined to do. So I'll say only that the story involves a weekend trip by Chris and his Caucasian girlfriend Rose to visit her parents for the first time. Peele has packed the film with intentional cues that reward attention and repeated viewings; listen especial-

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