

'Get Out' Best Film of 2017

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films about people facing ethical and moral questions at moments of crisis or loss. This is their best work yet, in my view, a suspenseful story about a young doctor, Jenny, coming face to face -- in a way that most of us avoid -- with the importance of facing the truth of one's actions.

Early in the film, Jenny is riding her intern hard about being too soft; she is feeling her power, about leave her practice working with struggling working-class people in order to accept an appointment in a prestigious practice. One night, just after office hours have ended, someone rings the bell of the office, and seems frantic; the intern moves to open the door but Jenny stops him, asserting harshly that the caller is too late. A few days later police inform her that a young woman was found dead near her office, and it turns out from the security tape that it was the woman ringing the bell.

Jenny immediately feels responsible for not letting the woman in and wonders if she may have contributed to her death. Her attempts to talk to the intern fail; she finds that he is about to quit medical school, giving Jenny another reason to feel terrible. She eventually admits, to him and to herself, that she too wanted to open the door that night and that she had prevented him from doing so only to get the upper hand. This is the kind of self-assessment most of us avoid.

Jenny decides not to take the prestigious job and, for the rest of the film, goes to great and frequently dangerous lengths to find out what happened to the dead girl. She encounters a succession of people who did things they are ashamed of that may well have contributed to the girl's death, and most of them are experiencing some kind of health problem

-- back pain, stomach pain, infections. It's subtle but clear. Many are angry with Jenny for asking questions, and she puts herself in some real danger. But she is compelled to pursue the truth; she can't get the woman out of her head.

The film is exceedingly wise about how people work, and about systemic injustice.

3. **"The Florida Project"** is the work of writer-director Sean Baker, whose "Tangerine" was on my

guts and quick flashes of anger, and their life together is achingly precarious. Yet Moonee feels (and is) loved (or what passes for it in Hailey's conception), and slams through her world with the utmost ballsy confidence, armed with Hailey's lessons in hustling, grabbing what she wants and leaving carnage in her wake.

As he did in "Tangerine," Baker helps us to linger inside a world of the marginalized that most of

with a 10-foot pole; I left wrecked, and grateful.

4. **"Whose Streets?"** deserves much more attention that it has yet achieved. Its smart director, Sabaah Folayan (a black woman), and her co-director, Damon Davis, clearly fought like hell to tell the story of the protests in Ferguson, Mo. in the aftermath of the police shooting of Michael Brown from the perspective of the black citizens who sought to challenge what had happened. The contrast to the narrative that carried the day in the mainstream media is so

acting with agency. We need more of that kind of filmmaking.

5. **"Coco"** is the most joyful film on my list, and this most Mexican of stories is inspiring as an example of how even a major studio can honor a community outside the dominant culture from a place of curiosity and admiration, and without centering whiteness. I imagine lots of mistakes were made in the production process -- I've read about some of them, including that Disney made an early effort to trademark "Day of the Dead" -- but the studio evidently righted itself enough to enlist some of its most vocal Mexican-American critics as advisors, prioritized Latinx voices in the cast and crew, and emerged with a beautifully realized celebration of Mexican culture. They even released it in Mexico first, where it quickly became the highest-grossing film in Mexican history. What a joy for Mexicans to see Hollywood-level resources devoted to presenting a feast of color and story and in-jokes that first speak to what is theirs -- and what a joy for me and other Mexican-Americans and Latinx people here in the U.S. to see pieces of our culture legacy celebrated with such joy and dignity. We exist! We are gorgeous! And there is music, and spiritual wisdom, and a brilliantly imagined world of the dead here to thrill and teach and entertain anyone ready to enjoy them. This is for all of us.

6. **"Abacus: Small Enough to Jail"** does an excellent job of breaking down a particularly clear example of structural bias, even if director Steve James ("Hoop Dreams") doesn't completely understand what that is. He and a terrific production team put their storytelling talents to good use in laying bare the complicated story of the one bank that was prosecuted as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis: a small family-owned bank that serves an underserved community of Chi-

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The 2017 documentary "Whose Streets" looks at how the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. inspired a community to fight back and sparked a global movement.

list of the best films of 2015. Here again, his compassionate focus is the underclass of people who live on the edge of destitution, next door to la la land -- in this case, Disney World. Six-year-old Moonee (played by the irrepressible Brooklynn Prince) lives with her mother Hailey (still a child herself) in a week-to-week budget motel painted in bright pastels and sporting discount fairytale trappings, originally built to house park visitors and now housing the virtually homeless. Hailey is a profoundly neglectful parent, plainly having experienced only neglect herself; she manages her untenable circumstances with

us would avoid, and avoids the temptation to romanticize or solve its unsolvable problems. Here he also imparts a picture of childhood that is parked on a precarious and thrilling edge; by filming largely from Moonee's viewpoint, Baker allows us to experience her childhood both as she does and as we would from a safer adult vantage point, a view largely embodied by Willem Dafoe as the longsuffering and resignedly compassionate caretaker of the motel. It all builds to a final scene that is as devastating as any I can remember seeing. Baker knows how to lead audiences to wrestle with truth they normally would not touch

telling; this film is a master class in allowing the marginalized to speak their own truth. My second viewing occurred shortly after seeing Kathryn Bigelow's film "Detroit," about the 1967 uprising, and I was struck by what a better film this documentary is. "Detroit" depicts the suffering of black people, but never shows them acting with agency, and its director and writer miss completely how problematic it is for white people to control how that story is told. "Whose Streets?" is directed by a black woman who understands the importance of depicting not only the suffering of black people but also of showing them



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MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

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"Fats" Domino, 1928-2017 (best-selling R&B artist)

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Marian Anderson, 1897-1993 in Portland OR (opera singer)
Polar Bear Day

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Public Sleeping Day
Charles A. "Bubba" Smith, 1945- (NFL player: actor)

