

My Picks for Best Films of 2018

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY
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As usual, the more than 150 films I saw this year includes all of those that populate most critics' top 10 lists. My own list of the year's best films includes some overlap—but once again five of the films on my list were virtually unrecognized by critics. I'm left savoring a gorgeous reflection on the life of a central but marginalized person; two distinct but game-changing depictions of black beauty and culture; a film that prioritizes indigenous perspectives on the history of this continent; a surprisingly honest depiction of an adolescent girl; a particularly astute examination of how racism affects what we perceive; an Israeli drama that examines patterns of violence; an under-celebrated historical drama with a feminist lens; a documentary that examines systemic injustice in food production; and a profoundly insightful story about one man's experience of conversion therapy. So here's the whole list, with fuller descriptions below:

1. **Roma**
2. **If Beale Street Could Talk**
3. **Hochelaga: Land of Souls**
4. **Eighth Grade**
5. **Blindspotting**
6. **Foxtrot**
7. **Mary, Queen of Scots**
8. **Eating Animals**
9. **Boy Erased**
10. **Black Panther**

1. Some years it is a contest which of my favorite films will make the top of my list. Not this year. "Roma" is one of the best films I have seen in any year, a

journey of the soul in which virtually every shot is suitable for framing and for fuller contemplation. Director Alfonso Cuarón has turned an examination of his own childhood memories into a model for contemplative seeing, situating his own story and that of his family in proper relationship to the perspective of a marginalized person, his nanny, here called Cleo (and played with real gravity by first-time actress Yalitza Aparicio). Centering Cleo's perspective not only illuminates what is true for others, but also demonstrates how central she actually is to everyone else's story. This film deserves the critical notice it is getting and then some; we'll see if the Oscars do more than pay lip service to its greatness with a slew of nominations. [In Spanish, Mixtec and English; rated R for graphic nudity, some disturbing images, and language; nominated for and should win Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Foreign Language Film; Best Director (Cuarón); Best Original Screenplay (Cuarón); Best Cinematography (Cuarón); Best Sound Editing; Best Sound Mixing; Best Lead Actress (Yalitza Aparicio); also nominated for Best Supporting Actress (Marina de Tavira).]

2. There is no one better than writer-director Barry Jenkins to bring black experience to the big screen. He has followed his celebrated "Moonlight" with an adaptation of James Baldwin's novel "If Beale Street Could Talk" that aches with beauty and sor-



Yalitza Aparicio stars as the live-in housekeeper Cleo in 'Roma,' a film that prioritizes the perspectives of those who are relegated to the margins. The film is no. 1 on Portland Observer and Opinionated Judge movie critic Darleen Ortega's best 10 films list for 2018.

row in appropriate measure, and that captures profoundly aspects of African American life that are most precious and hardest to name. Regina King's performance as the clear-eyed mother of one of two young people whose love is the focus of this film deserves the raves she has gotten—and she is surrounded by a host of equally fine and under-celebrated performances, including by those two leads (Stephan James and Kiki Layne), by Brian Tyree Henry, and by Colman Domingo, Michael Beach, Teyonah Parris, and Aunjanue Ellis. All of them outshine the still-so-white slate of Oscar nominees. Once again Jenkins has given us a taste of the riches we have been missing in terms of black stories and talent, buoyed by gorgeous cinematography and a score that also deserves an Oscar. More films like this, please! [Rated R for language and some sexual content; nominated for, and should win, Academy Awards for Best Supporting Actress (Regina King), Best Adapted Screenplay (Barry Jenkins), and Best Original

Score (Nicholas Britell); also deserved nominations for Best Picture, Best Director (Barry Jenkins); Best Lead Actor (Stephan James), Best Lead Actress (Kiki Layne), Best Supporting Actor (Brian Tyree Henry), and Best Cinematography (James Laxton).]

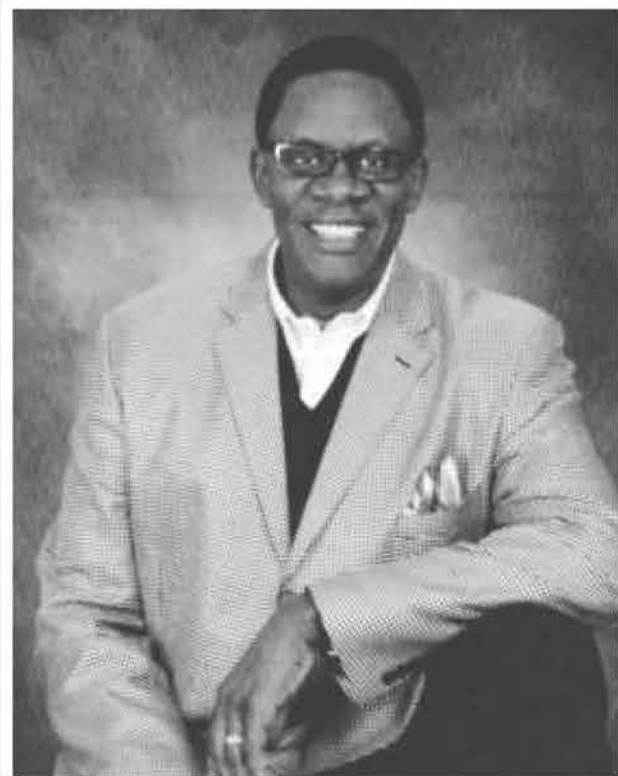
3. "Hochelaga: Land of Souls" never got a U.S. release and is hard to find here at all despite good critical notice in Canada—yet it profoundly altered my own consciousness about the indigenous peoples who populated this continent for centuries longer than the Europeans who all but destroyed their cultures. Prioritizing the perspectives of its indigenous characters in a way that I have not seen before, this film affords what were for me defining images of colonizing arrogance that refused even to treat indigenous cultures as cultures, and places current life into a more accurate historical arc. It speaks a language that Hollywood doesn't yet understand, and offers a perspective of current relationship with the past occupants of this land that we des-

perately need. Find a way to see this movie, and may it change you as it did me. [In French, English, Mohawk and Algonquin; not rated; deserved Oscar nominations for Best Foreign Language Film, Best Director (Francois Girard), Best Picture, and Best Cinematography (Nicolas Bolduc).]

4. "Eighth Grade" offers the most humane and truthful depiction of adolescence—particularly as experienced by girls—that I have ever seen. Kayla (an astounding Elsie Fisher) is a good kid lurching through eighth grade convinced that she is the only one who can't figure out how to pull off the perfect, air-brushed and Emoji'ed life that all her peers and everyone else on Snapchat seems to be enjoying. First-time director Bo Burnham, not even a decade past adolescence himself, gives us a compassionate and humane film that helped me understand how the current internet culture further complicates life for adolescents, and sparked a quality of reflection on my own childhood that most of us avoid. [Rated R for language and some sexual material; deserved Oscar nominations for Best Picture, Best Director (Bo Burnham), Best Original Screenplay (Bo Burnham), and Best Actress (Elsie Fisher).]

5. "Blindspotting" received nowhere near the attention of films like "BlackKlansmen" and "Sorry to Bother You," yet far outshone both those films in illuminating how racism endangers and kills black people and creates fissures of alienation amongst all of us that we can scarcely grasp, let alone heal. Co-writers and stars Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal

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Dr. Billy R. Flowers

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