

EN 211: College Composition II

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True Satirical Horror: A Cultural Analysis of Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

It's a dark and quiet evening in a predominantly white suburban neighborhood. A cool breeze rustles the leaves in the trees, crickets chirp, and a family dog barks in the distant background. It paints a scene some of you might know all too well. It's peaceful but almost too peaceful. A man walks down the street talking on the phone, to someone we can only assume is his girlfriend. Distant headlights get closer to the man until the car eventually slows and stops next to him. His heart rate increases and he picks up his pace, but not before he is beaten and thrown in the trunk of the car. This is the opening scene of Jordan Peele's 2018 debut film *Get Out*. Right off the bat, we are left with a gut wrenching ominous feeling that sets the mood for the rest of the film.

In 1968, *Night of the Living Dead* was one of the first films to make a social statement in the gruesome, nail-biting genre of horror. Now in 2018, Jordan Peele attempts to do the same with his debut film *Get Out*. *Get Out* takes on a satirical format in which racism and racial stereotypes are challenged. *Get Out* hit the box office in February of 2018 and quickly became a success and blockbuster hit. The film's release came shortly after the election of President Donald Trump, who was aided by multiple neo-Nazi syndicates and the Ku Klux Klan. It was a time when racial tensions were inflamed. Audiences left the theater educated and invoked with a feeling of wokeness instilled in them by Peele. Peele makes his social statement toward the white liberal of "post-racial" America following the presidency of Barak Obama with the use of satire, whiteness, and true horror.

Jordan Peele is a renowned comedian and is widely known for the Comedy Central show *Key & Peele*. Peele, turned Hollywood movie director in early 2018, after writing and producing *Get Out*. The film, labeled a horror-thriller, had a budget of 4.5 million dollars and grossed over 200 million dollars. *Get Out* received not only one Academy Award nomination, but four: Best Original Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Picture, and Best Director. The film went on to win the Academy Award for Best ScreenPlay. This made Jordan Peele the first African American to win the award. As an African American growing up in America Peele wanted to include experiences and racial stereotypes he faced in his movie *Get Out*.

Get Out follows Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) and Rose Armitage (Allison Williams). Chris and Rose are finally in the meet-the-parents stage of their relationship. Rose takes Chris to her family's estate for a weekend getaway to meet her parents Dean and Missy Armitage (Bradley Whitford and Catherine Keener). Chris and his best friend Rod Williams (Lil Ray Howery) are hesitant about the trip due to Chris's interracial relationship. After some reassurance from Rose, Chris decides to go. Ensuing a series of disturbing events, Chris finds himself trying to get out.

As stated earlier, *Get Out* was listed under the theme of horror-thriller. The theme of horror-thriller is too broad of a genre and does not represent the themes displayed in *Get Out*. *Get Out* was such a powerful movie with deep elaborate ideas that it has led to its own genre of truthful horror. "Truthful horror" lacks a strong and narrow definition. In "A Review of *Get Out*: On White Terror and the Black Body", Henry Kevin Lawerency, Jr. argues that Peele's work "is set to engender a broadening of the "horror" genre to that which has a specifically articulated niche—race relations" (Lawerence, pg. 1). The idea of truthful horror as stated in the article can be articulated to be a genre of horror exploring and exposing race relations issues within our

society. In an interview with “All Things Considered” Peele said, “I felt like the race has not been dealt with in, you know, my favorite genre which is horror” (Martin, pg. 3). Truthful horror gives a name to exactly what Peele accomplished in his film. The genre of truthful horror may not be used in many other films, but it is clear that it works hand in hand with the theme of the movie to expose racism and racial stereotypes.

Lawrence defines whiteness as a “socially constructed, yet materially manifested ideology, practice, and positionality—operates to secure its symbolic and structural advantage, its dominance, by devaluing, debasing, and dispossessing that which is constituted as black” (Lawrence, pg. 1). In other words, whiteness is the ideology that being white will always reign supremacy over any member of the BIPOC community. Peele toys with this ideology in *Get Out* during the party scene. During the party scene, where Chris is forced to attend a party thrown by Rose’s parents, we see Peele’s interpretation of the white liberal of “post-racial” America. We see these elite members of society come up to Chris and say politically incorrect and racial comments. Such as, “Black is better” (*Get Out*, 41:37) and “Fairer skin has been in favor for the past couple hundred years. But now the pendulum has swung back. Black is in fashion” (*Get Out*, 43:41) These comments are ruthless and obscene. However, Peele has used the theme of whiteness and reversed it to allow audiences to see the racism and racial comments present in today’s society. Whiteness is often practiced by the white liberal of “post-racial” America. We can attribute this theme in the film to scenes that often denounce the notice of race or the notice of inequality between races. Choosing not to notice, a term often referred to as color blindness, is inherently racist and exhibited within the film repeatedly to draw controversy over the white liberal of “post-racial” America. It comes as no surprise that Peele included whiteness as a theme in *Get Out* to break down how it is harmful to the BIPOC community.

Oxford Languages defines satire as the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices. Satire is Peele's biggest weapon in attacking the white liberal of "post-racial" America in his film *Get Out*. Satire in a horror film can seem like a conundrum to the viewer who only associates satire with comedy. Satire in horror films is often overlooked as comedic relief, to add a sense of humor after an intense or disturbing scene. Peele's use of satire in *Get Out* may have provided comedic relief amongst some viewers. But make no mistake, Peele's intended meaning goes much deeper. The use of satire in this film is used to deliberately bring attention to the white liberal of "post-racial" America. Jillian Boger says, "Many of the same techniques that work in comedy such as exaggeration and bodily revulsion function similarly and just as well in horror. With that in mind, if comedy can be satirical, there's no reason for horror not to be (pg. 2).

If you aren't closely paying attention to the film or are unaware of Peele's true meaning behind *Get Out* these satirical remarks will sneak right past you. "By the way, I would have voted for Obama for a third term if I could," (*Get Out*, 18:56) and "I Know Tiger," (*Get Out*, 43:00) are ways of satirically mocking how the white liberal of "post-racial" America and racism. This mention of knowing and or supporting important black figures is only a small step towards battling racism, yet it is used as an example of not doing any real work so to speak. Real work means changing racist behaviors, calling others out, going to rallies, and supporting BIPOC. Peele uses these examples as a way to make fun of prominent white figures who believe they do not contribute to racism just because they voted for Obama, or know a black golfer.

Those who viewed *Get Out* as just another blockbuster horror movie, they left the theater entertained and maybe even a little frightened. But, the people who watched, and I mean truly watched and digested the movie as a whole, left educated and instilled with a feeling of

wokeness. Wokeness, defined by Oxford Language is to be alert to injustice in society, especially racism. Jordan Peele attacked the white liberal of “post-racial” America but he also educated millions. You can’t have change without education and representation. Peele's use of satire, whiteness and true horror in *Get Out* allowed the audience able to identify the racism and racial stereotypes brought on by the white liberal of “post-racial” America. Since the release of *Get Out* in 2018, Peele has written and directed *Us*. In *Us*, Jordan Peele targets self-destructing America. Peele has also just set a release date for his new movie *Nope*. Peele will continue to promote social justice or wokeness with his clever satirical format and a new genre of true horror.

In conclusion, *Get Out* inspired and invoked millions of people across the globe. A first-time director with only a budget of 4.5 million created a blockbuster so huge it created a new genre of horror. Jordan Peele called out and educated viewers on the white liberal of “post-racial” America. Peele's use of satire intricately woken into the plot of the movie to show the audience how the white liberal of “post-racial” America works and operates in society. Backed by the supporting themes of truthful horror and whiteness create a concrete argument on why racism and racial stereotypes, especially that of the white liberal of “post-racial” America, need to be confronted.

Works Cited

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