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Get Out: A 21st Century Reevaluation of Race

*“I can assure you, I don’t answer to anyone.”*

— Georgina, *Get Out*

In a world where accountability is increasingly being heralded as an integral gateway to justice, the aforementioned dialogue from the movie *Get Out* (2017), written and directed by Jordan Peele, encapsulates the arrogance of white privilege regarding itself above accountability. This movie came out at crucial moment in American history, in which America sees itself spearheaded by a political figure whose primitive principles threaten the social democracy celebrated by the former government; thus, this film can be regarded as a narrative critique of the microaggressions and casual racism persisting among white liberals in a post-racial America. **The strong plot of *Get Out*, aided by the usage of symbolism, imagery and irony, allegorically portrays the evolution of white supremacy following black slavery to the current social context of post-racial America.**

**The seemingly straightforward plot of *Get Out* reflects the undercurrents of casual racism in everyday life and the horrific form discrimination can take when pushed to its extreme.** The movie begins with a black man, later reintroduced as Andre Hayworth, getting abducted in a white neighbourhood; though it does not drive the actual narrative, this scene is key to the implicit meaning of the film as it establishes the racial premise of the movie through Andre’s discomfort and lack of safety in the affluent white neighbourhood. Building on this racial premise, the song “Run Rabbit Run” by Flannagan

and Allen plays in the background of the scene of the abduction, preempting the hunter-prey symbolism in the next half of the movie. The exposition of the plot begins when Chris Washington, played by Daniel Kaluuya, is seen packing for a weekend away to meet the family of his white girlfriend Rose Armitage, played by Allison Williams. From the onset of the film, Chris' discomfort at the prospect of meeting Rose' parents, Dean and Missy Armitage, is made known when he asks Rose, "Do they know I'm black?" and she dismisses his worries without a second thought. The disquiet around the subject of race is further built upon as Chris and Rose arrive at the Armitages' country house, which is strongly reminiscent of 19th century Southern American plantations. Chris' introduction to the Armitages is shrouded in awkwardness as their casually racist questions and comments form the basis of the discriminatory undertones that the rising action emphasises. In the rising action, Chris encounters a series of racist undercurrents at the hand of the guests of the Armitages' annual party. While these microaggressions contribute to the conflict, the central crisis arises when the party is revealed to be a facade concealing the pre-civil war like auction of Chris—orchestrated by the Armitages—to the members of the cult, The Order of Coagula, founded by the Armitage family. As Chris realises the sinister neo-enslavement at work in the Armitage household, he attempts to escape but is confronted and captured by the Armitages to be the next installment in the series of lobotomised black people in whom the minds of the cult members are preserved. Chris puts up a fight against the Armitages, killing Dean and Rose's brother. The climax of the movie is reached when Walter, the black groundskeeper working for the Armitage family, shoots Rose; Chris then tries to strangle Rose but ultimately cannot bring himself to kill her, despite her vileness. In the falling action, a police car approaches Chris hunched over Rose's struggling body; Chris, raising his arms in surrender, prepares to submit to the fate of yet another black man wrongfully convicted for a crime.

However, the man in the police car is revealed to be Rod, Chris' friend—the source of comedic relief in this movie, as well as the only character who has been skeptical of the Armitages from the get-go. The movie thus ends with Chris escaping the horrors of extremist racism unvindicated.

**Although character-driven, the various symbolisms in *Get Out* enriches the plot, adding sophistication and complexity to the simplistic narrative.** In a broad generalisation of the plot, the movie's premise of the hostile takeover of black people, their physical superiority in particular, by white people can be posited as a neo-nazi attempt to propagate a modern Aryan race; the symbolism throughout the film refines this theory, adding depth to the linear plot. Using the symbol of a deer, Jordan Peele explores the prison of helplessness and loss, the latter concerning the later revealed death of Chris' mother in a hit-and-run accident—the reenactment of this loss is seen with the deer. The first instance in which this symbolism appears is when Chris and Rose, en route to the Armitage house, hit a deer with their car. The audience sees Chris more affected by the deer's death than Rose as this incident conjures up the loss of his mother; however, a deeper analysis unveils Chris to identify with the deer, the prey, thus foreshadowing Chris' treatment as inferior. Extending this symbolism, the deer comes to represent black people when, upon recounting the incident to Rose's father, Dean Armitage disparages the animal species, likening them to vermin, and voices his support for their elimination. Jordan Peele parallels this scene to the reality of racial microaggressions and nuances of casual racism that black people face in white America; simultaneously, Peele attacks the preconceived notion that racism is perpetuated by the stereotypical conservative through presenting upstanding, white liberals, who would have “voted for Obama a third term” if they could, to be the perpetrators of this bigotry. Towards

the end of the movie, the act of Chris weaponising the taxidermied deer head and killing Dean is emblematic of him rising against oppression and reclaiming black power.

**Through the use of colour as a motif, *Get Out* unveils the subconscious manifestations of ingrained prejudice to enhance the undertones of discrimination in the movie.** This is most distinctly observed in the scene of the Armitages' annual party when black cars pull up in the driveway like a funeral procession, an allusion to the death of Chris's autonomy as this party is later revealed to be an auction of which Chris is the central and only constituent. The artistic choice of keeping the guests' attire on the darker end of the colour spectrum portrays how the overtones of segregation are understatedly expressed in a status quo that is past the social and cultural context in which such gestures were the norm; moreover, the deliberation of choosing mostly black and dark coloured attire speaks to the growing trend of white people "acting black" and appropriating black culture despite holding strong reservations against the African-American race. Moreover, the Armitages and their guests are noted to be donning a red accessory or piece of clothing, which is construed as a juxtaposition to Chris's blue apparel; in addition to being possibly allusive to the political connotations of conservatives vs. liberals, this element hints at the significance of the colour red as a symbol of secret societies. This significance of the red accessory is later affirmed to the audience as it is revealed the Armitages spearhead the cult the Order of the Coagula; furthermore, this revelation ties back to the political connotations of the movie as the intentions of the Order of the Coagula can be construed as a parallel to the Ku Klux Klan's principles of perpetuating the abolishment of autonomy.

**Furthermore, the symbolism and imagery of "The Sunken Place" bring to light the plot's parallelism with the theme of slavery and the movie's depiction of it as a modern reimagining of slavery.** The concept of "The Sunken Place" is introduced in the

scene where Missy hypnotises Chris under the guise of getting him to quit smoking; a horror-struck Chris is seen falling in an oppressive, ceaseless empty space—almost drowning in his detachment from the real world. In the events leading up to the climax, when Chris is moments away from having his body hijacked by a white member of the cult, “The Sunken Place” is clarified as being a state of mind in which the sunken person’s existence in their own body “will be as a passenger, an audience.” The notion of “The Sunken Place” is allegorical to the black person’s experience with oppression from the political and social system as it reflects the dissociation of black people from their own affairs—silenced by a majority that has not lived the black experience but continues to dictate black people’s rights, expressions, and experiences. This concept is evident in the whitewashing of the lobotomised black people serving the Armitage family—Walter, Georgina—as well as Andre, the man abducted at the onset of the movie. Although these individuals’ characterisation is such due to their bodies being enslaved by the minds of much older white people, their mannerisms—such as their awkward speech Andre’s ignorance of the African-American experience when questioned by Chris—are nonetheless allegorical of black people having to renounce their identity, or part of it, to assimilate with the white crowd. Once a person enters “The Sunken Place” they are essentially enslaved to their loss of autonomy: it a sign of submission—usually circumstantial due to constant exposure to white ideals, however, in the instance of *Get Out*, Chris is forcibly trapped in “The Sunken Place”— to their own marginalisation, a modern enslavement to the force that oppresses them.

**Additionally, the nuanced use of irony in *Get Out* fortifies the broad themes portrayed in the movie.** The first instance in which the movie employs irony is when Chris voices his concern over meeting the Armitage family—jokingly worried he will be “chased off the lawn with a shotgun.” The irony of this dialogue is not lost when nearing the climax,

it is Rose who enacts Chris' fear, bringing to light the theme of appearances *Get Out* is heavily based on as well as revealing to the audience Chris' greatest antagonist all along was the one he least expected to be. As a supplement to the motif of slavery, we see Chris pick the cotton of the armchair to which he is shackled to avoid being hypnotised; it is an instance where the movie inverts the trope of "picking cotton" to act as Chris' saving grace, the only circumstance under which the roles that characterised slavery benefitted Chris. Equally important, the source of the most significant ironies of the movie is the supporting character Rod, Chris' best friend. In addition to being the root of the movie's comedic relief, Rod is the only character in the film hypercritical of white people, serving as Chris' voice of caution every time Chris relays the absurdity of his milieu. The scene in which this irony is evident is when Rod, a TSA officer, reports to the police his suspicions of the events happening to Chris. Rod essentially foreshadows the crisis and gives away the plot of the movie in his report, however, the police dismiss his concerns as ridiculous; the irony, evident not only in Rod's suspicions being actualised, is also highlighted in the dismissive manner of the police's reaction to black people's fears—how their problems are undermined and not paid attention to as significantly as their white counterparts. While not a prominent feature of the film, the instances where irony is employed is crucial as it reinforces several of the movie's themes in a nuanced manner, parallel to the mechanism of how microaggressions work to emphasise the broad-strokes of racial discrimination.

**Through strong symbolism and narrative structure, the movie *Get Out* tackles several themes of prejudice festering in modern-day America.** The nuanced integration of these subjects in the simple narrative adds sophistication to the movie and lends itself credibility in the cinematic sphere. The various methods employed to address the singular issue of racism reinforces the weight of this issue and instils in the audience a sense of

empathy for the struggles faced by the protagonist—this in itself is a testament to Jordan Peele’s excellent storytelling.

Works Cited

*Get Out*. Directed by Jordan Peele. Performances by Daniel Kaluuya and Allison Williams. Blumhouse Productions, Monkeypaw Productions, QC Entertainment, 2017.