The Black Survivor: Confronting Racism Through the Subversion of Archetypes in Get Out

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> "Americans believe in the reality of 'race' as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism–the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them–inevitably follows from the inalterable condition…But race is the child of racism, not the father."
>
> – Ta-Nehisi Coates

Barack Obama's first words as president epitomized a proud moment for the nearly 240,000 Chicagoans gathered in Grant Park, and an emotional first for at least 53% of the American voters but caused a barrage of apprehension and anxiety for me. America's history of murdering black leaders for their perceived threat to white power– Herbert Lee, Medgar Evers, Fred Hampton, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr.–had prepared me for nothing less. To my surprise, America's newly appointed leader survived the night and went on to instigate an intellectual discourse regarding race that finally gave worth to the minority voice. While a decidedly positive step in the right direction for race relations, much of white America misinterpreted this small advancement as a mountainous achievement, a sign that America had finally moved beyond race. With the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the epitome of white American elitism, as Obama's replacement, the hope of progressive dialogue has essentially been silenced. This new presidency and subsequent silencing of minority voices stands as a symbol of the reestablishment of a sociopolitical white dominance verifying the ridiculousness of a post-racial American dream.

In direct defiance of this renewed racial muzzling stands the "black survivor," the most recent incarnation of black characterization in horror cinema. While black characterization in film has, in large part, been limited to racially oppressive stereotypes of nonrecognition, victimization, and threat, such archaic tropes are magnified within the

grotesque macabre that epitomizes the horror tradition. Black protagonists in horror films exist only insofar as they appropriate the prevalent characteristics of the white male hero, effectively becoming a symbolic representation of white dominance through the physical and psychological assimilation of white culture. Horror films, particularly those produced from within the Hollywood apparatus, have refused to define a true black hero or any black character in defiance of these racist archetypes. In doing so, the collective history of horror cinema has become an accurate reflection of America's social masking of racial equality. The suppression of the black character is a direct parallel to the oppression of the civil rights of black Americans, the ugly history of a supposedly united state.

The polarizing effect of America's shifting socio/political dynamic regarding race has reinvigorated social activism and consciousness birthing a new black character on screen and an unprecedented wokeness off screen. In the same way slasher films of the 1980s legitimized a female hero who circumvented the tradition of a submissive presence and an objectification of the female body, Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) provides an increasingly diverse cinematic audience with the first authentic black hero, whose mere survival constitutes a subversion of genre standards. While cultural authenticity is often a signifier of racial difference, a means to establish uniqueness, here the term is used simply as an indicator of truth. An authentic black experience is not one that defines blackness superficially but instead recognizes blackness as a legitimate component of the American experience as a whole. For the purposes of this argument, the authenticity of the "black survivor" is determined by a black audiences' ability to identify with and feel affirmed by what they are seeing as well as a non-black audiences' ability to identify with and learn something of value about cultural similarities and/or differences. The black survivor, as

represented through the character of Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) is the product of a shift in the social consciousness of America that condemns the continued oppressive misrepresentation of black culture, demanding affirmation instead. He is the result of a black director's willingness to take risks while holding true to both the oral traditions of black culture and the traditional styling's of horror cinema. He is the corollary of Hollywood's recognition of lucrative possibility and artistic talent. The black survivor represents not only a change in the legacy of the horror genre, but also of an American ideology. He challenges the hidden legacy of hate in America and the overt legacy of misrepresentation in Hollywood by, "telling the story from the perspective of the black protagonist," an act that is subversive in and of itself. This subversive point of view– Philando Castile's, Alton Sterling's, Eric Gardner's, Freddie Gray's, and Michael Brown's– demands a continued dialogue regarding race in America. In the same way the legitimizing of a female hero in horror films reflected gains for the civil rights of women while rebuking the misogynistic gaze of the objectifying male, the black survivor denounces white innocence regarding contemporary race relations by refusing the continued adulteration of black culture in film.

It is important to first recognize how *Get Out* appeals to the modern, socially sensitive, if not socially conscious, cinematic audience. Laura Mulvey argues, "the patriarchal structure of film is coded intentionally for the visual pleasure of men and perpetuates a 'male gaze'" (Mulvey). The male gaze is derived from psychoanalytical theory, most predominantly, Freud's concept of scopophilia, the idea of taking other people as objects by subjecting them to a controlling and curious look idealized through the act of voyeurism. This gaze is predicated on the assumption that films, particularly

mainstream Hollywood films, are made for men, to be consumed by men. Character roles are narratively and stylistically coded as the active/male and passive/female to satisfy the dominant patriarchal order of American society. Therefore, the male audience, under the illusion of looking in on a private world, is allowed to identify with the active/male protagonist thus projecting repressed desire onto the passive/female performer. According to Mulvey, the man controls the fantasy while the woman is relegated to both the erotic object for the characters on screen and as erotic object for the spectator within the theater (Mulvey). While still relevant today, especially within the horror genre, the concept of the male gaze was certainly birthed from the socio/political conflicts present outside the movie theater post 1960. It would be ignorant to suggest modern films no longer suffer from the limiting patriarchal structures Mulvey defines, but cinema has changed and adapted in response to contemporary conflicts and social gains of minority groups. *Get Out* is symbolic of this change in that identification with on screen characters is complicated for viewers. It may be that *Get Out* is intended for male audiences, but the import of Mulvey's theory is dependent on its application beyond gender-based issues of spectatorship.

This concept of cinematic spectatorship is complicated within the horror genre due to the paradoxical nature of horror viewing in general. The viewing of horror films is paradoxical in that horror attracts through repulsion and provides pleasure by means of displeasing. The paradox is compounded for female and black audiences considering the archetypical treatment of female characters as objects of sexual desire and black characters as objects of racial contempt, begging the question, "Why Horror?" Noel Carroll asserts, to a large extent, that audiences are drawn to horror explicitly by curiosity, by their involvement in the process of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis, and

confirmation. Horror films cognitively engage spectators by, "being putatively inexplicable or highly unusual vis-a-vis our standing cultural categories" (Carroll). The monstrous antagonist, whether it be the expressionistically distorted Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (1922), the human embodiment of alien otherness in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), or the indefatigable psychotic able to inflict superhuman carnage on suburban teens in *Halloween* (1978) is the perfect vehicle for satisfying audience fascination simply because it violates the spectator's concept of natural. It is from this distinction, an almost counter intuitive attraction, that Carroll posits, "we are attracted to, and many of us seek out, horror fictions of this sort despite the fact that they provide disgust, because that disgust is required for the pleasure involved in engaging our curiosity in the unknown" (Carroll). In short, horror audiences are able to derive intellectual gratification from inquiry into the taboo.

In "Her Body, Himself," Carol Clover questions the assumption that viewers enjoy the particularly imbrued subgenre of horror, the slasher film, because they become implicated in the murderer's sadistic acts. Many cinematic critics assume that because women are the traditional abject victims, and that males are the traditional objectifying killers, that slasher films are "bad" to women. Clover however suggests that this misogyny typically reverses itself at the film's end with the triumph of the "Final Girl," a paradox created by the archetype of the final surviving female character (often the only surviving character) that ends the killer's rampage placing a female as both a victim and a hero. The viewer then, identifies more with the female victim who become the hero than with the killer, a conclusion contrary to popular theory. Clover's dubs this theory of viewer identification the "masochistic aesthetic," and uses this theory to speculate that viewers "cross-identify" because on screen gender specificity is not equal to off screen gender

assignments, it is far more fluid, "gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane" (Clover 46). This fluidity is apparent in films like *Halloween* and *Scream* (1996) where female heroes survive to be the final girl by refusing the archetypical passivity and diverting the sexualized male gaze. This act allows for a gender displacement that can, "provide a kind of identification buffer, an emotional remove that permits the majority of the audience to explore taboo subjects in the relative safety of vicariousness" (Clover 51).

In *Scream*, Sidney (Neve Campbell) is portrayed as a responsible, resourceful and courageous female, similar to Jaime Lee Curtis' role as Laurie in *Halloween*. Sidney, however, has a strength Laurie never showed. When she combats the monstrous duo of Stu (Matthew Lillard) and Billy (Skeet Ulrich) she doesn't just flee, she dominates. Intellectually she outsmarts the killers. Physically, she outmaneuvers them. She doesn't run away to hide, instead she runs for help or she runs to attack. She gains control of the game these killers have planned and wins. These qualities, typically associated with masculinity, are now associated with Sidney. She represents not a masculine female but an authentically powerful and cunning femininity. The fact that she, like Laurie, is ultimately saved by another doesn't matter because she has already dominated the scene. Clover maintains that slasher films, and by extension, the majority of horror films are more victim-identified than most critics and viewers perceive; we are "made to identify with men and against women" (Clover 43). But this female hero archetype, the final girl, confuses gender identification, turns the phallic symbolism of the monster on the monster himself; monsters typically being male. The final girl subverts traditions and expectations that pit her as victim by realizing her own strength.

When applied to racially-based issues of spectatorship, specifically the viewing of horror films that have historically misrepresented both female and black characterizations, an interesting parallel can be drawn. Supported by the ascendancy of Hollywood by white males, Manthia Diawara suggests that mainstream cinema "situates black characters primarily for the pleasure of white spectators" (Diawara). Parallel to Laura Mulvey's male gaze that sexually objectifies the female character, Diawara theorizes the existence of a "white male gaze" that racially objectifies the black character; a deracification of black male characters made less threatening to white audiences through the domestication of black culture or the depiction of black characters playing by the rules of white society. Films as early as D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) established a tradition of racism and classism in a Hollywood that refused to accept, provide, or encourage positive, or even realistic images of blacks. Hollywood co-opted black culture and sold it back the audiences in packages of "black presences bearing fanciful names of the coon, the tragic mulatto, the mammy, and the brutal black buck. All were character types used for the same effect: to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority" (Bogle 1). Each archetype reflects the pervasive racialized fear that dehumanizes blacks on screen allowing the maintenance of white superiority off screen. The consistency of these racist characterizations, even in modern Hollywood productions, confirms Diawara's theory and further complicates the act of looking for black audiences. Like female spectators who are encouraged to cross-identify sexually with a protagonist who appropriates a masculine sensibility, black spectators are compelled to cross-identify racially with a protagonist who appropriates whiteness or disavowal the representation of black culture in Hollywood cinema altogether.

As significant as seeing a black hero onscreen is for the black spectator, it is the way in which Peele authentically represents black culture that ultimately characterizes Chris as a black survivor. Despite being packed within the restrictive structure of horror storytelling, much of Chris' experience parallels the experience of black Americans and thus inverts traditional horror tropes for a black audience. *Get Out* does not capitalize on America's history of brutalization of the black body or the horrors genre's proclivity towards exaggerated visceral gore to generate horror. Such imagery is replaced with an atmospheric apprehension and dread of a cross-racial encounter that permeates the beginning of the film to create tension (Dango). The monstrosity of *Get Out* is not characterized through a Klannish villain that would facilitate the typical horror imagery, but is instead derived from a social structure that breeds racial terrorism. By organizing the narrative as such, Peele is able to authentically reflect the suddenness and unpredictability of life-altering or life-ending racial interactions faced by black Americans; stereotyping, segregation, and police brutality.

Overt images of slavery are immediately recognizable in the plantation-like appearance of the Armitage home, the gathering crowd bidding on Chris in a slave auction masquerading as an expensive game of bingo, and in Chris' ironic picking of the cotton lining of the arm chair he is cuffed to in heavy, antiquated chains. These primary cues act as an acknowledgment of the history of violent exploitation that constitutes the black experience in America. A secondary stratum exists allegorically through the perceived trendiness of black culture that consumes all conversations between Chris and the Armitage's guests, the prejudiced microaggressions hidden behind comments like "I would have voted for Obama a third time," "you'd be a fucking beast," and the appropriation and

corruption of stereotypical urban slang like "my man," and "thang," exemplifying a more modern exploitation.

Paramount to the authenticity of Peele's depiction of the black experience, and therefore the most important factor in the subversion of the white male gaze, is the manner in which Peele captures the chronic paranoia and fear of simply being black in America. Identified by W.E.B. DuBois as a double consciousness, this psychological phenomena forces blacks to not only view themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside white world. DuBois exemplifies this paranoia through the analogy of a black artisan:

> Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness,—it is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde— could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause (DuBois 13).

Self-questioning, self-disparagement, and self-contempt shapes Chris' experience in *Get Out* and by proxy, the black experience in America. This disassociation, symbolized in through Chris' viewing of the world through the lens of a camera, make it difficult for black Americans to reconcile their identities as both culturally black and culturally American; an accommodation innately provided whites through white privilege. There is inherent criticism of white America that stems directly from legitimizing black representation. The black survivor, in this sense, represents the death of white racial innocence. Like female and black spectators, white spectators are subversively forced to identify with the villain or cross-identify with a paranoid, non-white male hero, in direct defiance of the white male

gaze. The fear born of a double consciousness constitutes the primary subversion achieved through a black survivor and is introduced immediately in the film's opening sequence.

Get Out begins with a slowly tracked long shot pulling away from a dimly lit suburban neighborhood. An anonymous character walks out of the heavy shadows of glowing lights and trees lining the street, toward the camera. The camera follows the character as he turns down an intersecting corner, close enough for the audience to hear him describe his anxiety over being a black man lost in a white suburb. The character stops to notice a distinctly white car. Denying the editing cut, the camera continues to slowly circle past in synchronicity highlighting an foreboding aversion of the eyes and an expression of discomfort as the car passes. The camera now captures the alarm on the character's face in close-up; this fear is amplified when the audience notices the car's brake lights in the deeply unfocused background. Peele intentionally avoids a rapidly paced montage of colliding images relying instead on the uncut shot, tracking the camera around the character to intentionally guide spectator gaze. When the character responds, "Not today, not today," the audience empathizes because the disorienting apprehension apparent in the character's body and the tension of a long, continuous, uncut shot has been effectively transferred onto the audience. The audience looks as the character looks, through the eyes of an isolated victim, an affective outsider in fear. Maintaining the shot in deep focus, the audience sees the car door open, witnesses a violent attack and abduction, while never realizing the identify of the attacker whose face is maintained outside the frame. More importantly, the collective of black, white, male and female spectators, begin to realize the constant paranoia of being black in America; a fear of the loss of one's own body.

This control of perspective is a subversion of a popular horror trope established within the genre most effectively by John Carpenter in *Halloween*, what Peele calls, "stalker-vision." Stalker-vision traditionally forces audience perspective to that of the monster through the camera's positioning in the monster's point of view. In the opening sequence of *Halloween*, a handheld camera walks the suburban streets on Halloween night from the perspective of a young Michael Myers. The audience is forced to identify with Michael as he enters a home and commits murder as they see the world, figuratively, through his eyes. In *Get Out* however, the opening sequence welcomes the audience to view the racially charged interaction from the perspective of the victim, not forcing cross identification but encouraging it. The camera is positioned from the perspective of the character rather than as a replication of the character's eye allowing spectator's to consider the dynamic as a whole.

This base component of the black experience in America is further explored in a following scene; a scene emblematic of the extant racial conflict occurring off screen throughout the country. The sequence begins with a sudden car accident; Rose Armitage (Allison Williams) hits a deer on the drive to her parent's estate. This accident breaks the intimacy between the lovers established within the confines of the car. Chris exits the car and remains separated from Rose until the end of the scene. The camera follows Chris away from the stopped car and cuts to a close up capturing his reaction to the suffering and mangled deer dying in the woods lining the road; the deer reminds Chris of his mother's death and becomes a symbol for the black experience later. Peele then cuts to a similar close up of Chris standing at the front of the car still in contemplation. In the background and out of focus, it is revealed that the police have arrived and are questioning Rose regarding

the accident. Within the frame, Chris is separated from Rose by mise-en-scene, lateral blocking and depth. The officer requests to see Chris' license drawing him into the action. Peele cuts to a reverse shot positioning the officer in the foreground, Chris in the background, and Rose in between. Visually, Chris and the officer are blocked in diametric combat both on opposite sides of the frame and at opposite depths within the frame. Rose stands in the middle, heroically defending Chris against the unfair and seemingly racist requests from the officer.

Rather than the point of view shot used in the opening sequence, here Peele relies on a montage of shots from varying angles. Rose is visually paired with the officer in a two shot. She is then paired with Chris in a second two shot. Chris is also captured with only the officer in frame. This montage of cycling character blocks explores the emotional context of this interaction, allowing spectators to realize Chris paranoia with each stunned stare, irritated lip curl, and aversion of the eye. A final long shot pulls away from the interaction slowly, allowing the audience time to consider what they have witnessed, the feared threat of police violence on an unarmed black man. Not only does this sequence legitimize the black experience by realizing the fear of an attack on the black body, and introduce the concept of being haunted by past trauma, but it also elicits cross-cultural and cross-gender identification. The spectator is again encouraged to view him/herself within the synergy onscreen that portrays a black man as victim, a white woman as hero, and a white man as villain.

Master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock suggests the pacing of a film is made entirely by keeping the mind of the spectator occupied, "You don't need quick cutting, you don't need to have quick playing, but you do need a very full story and the changing of one

situation to another. You need the changing of one incident to another, so that all the time the audience's mind is occupied" (Gottlieb 270). Rather than use a montage of rapid cuts and quickly shifting shots and camera movements as, for example, Hitchcock does in the shower scene of *Psycho* (1960) where he employs fifty-two editing cuts from seventy-eight different shots in a scene lasting only forty-five seconds, Peele slows camera movements and holds shots in tight focus for uncomfortable lengths. Jordan Peele acknowledges giving his audience particular attention, a cognizance of the difficulty of cross identification based on gender, class, and race. As previously noted, *Get Out* is steeped in a tradition of instantly recognizable tropes–creepy suburban artifice, subversion of villainy, bizarre experimentation and horrific actions.

While there is a general atmosphere of anxious suspicion and distress manufactured visually through mise-en-scene and lighting, Peele also manipulates the tension through his presentation of the racial dynamic. Racial conflict is emphasized through narrative pacing, blocking, close-ups and a continually moving camera.

The best example of this narrative and visual manipulation occurs in a scene where Missy Armitage (Catherine Keener) hypnotizes Chris, a scene popularly dubbed the sunken place because of the powerful impression of the scene's imagery. Peele again utilizes the techniques of close-ups and reverses to establish a capacity for opposition and confrontation. Missy is positioned directly across from Chris framed in a diminutive and feminine chair and a natural lightness. The expanse of space behind her is visible through an open door creating an unthreatening calm as she daintily stirs her tea, clinching the silver spoon in circles, and begins asking Chris questions about his past. In contrast, Chris is seated opposite Missy in a warm but expressionistic light cast from lamps behind him.

Chris sinks into his chair, overwhelmed by its size. The frame encloses Chris tightly in close-up detailing this unblinking angst. Peele cuts back and forth between the characters moving closer to Missy's face in smooth, almost unnoticeable gradations as her interrogation deepens, to Chris' as he agonizes over each response; from Missy's swirling spoon back to Chris' fingers clutching the overstuffed arms of the chair. Audiences begin to consider the insidiousness behind Missy's apparent act of concern as the look on her face remains emotionless while Chris' becomes wet with terror. Slowed movement amplifies the visceral nature of Chris' breakdown and his ultimate loss of control over his own body as he falls under her spell. This loss is made even more powerful by a sudden shift in imagery to the sunken place.

The softly lit space and sounds of gently falling rain are immediately distorted by an overpowering darkness as Chris is shocked into hypnosis. The drastic contrast places Chris in a sunken place, a metaphoric world of isolation and separation. A cold incandescent light reflects off his face and body. A close-up capturing the terror on Chris' face cuts to a longshot emphasizing the depth of the void into which he is falling and an overhead shot pits him deep within, surrounded by a dark nothingness. The stark imagery of Chris' helpless descent evokes compassion from the audience as he has become a helpless victim. The held image effectively occupies spectators with thematic questions of white dominance and manipulation, black submission and fear, and the dehumanization of the black body.

Peele notes that women and black Americans share a sort of manipulative insecurity derived from being told, "we're not seeing what we think we're seeing" (Gross). Narratively, this doubt drives the story by keeping the protagonist involved in the conflict longer; the character spends time attempting to justify actions rather than recognizing them

immediately as sexist or racist. Visually, this doubt is amplified through long, uncut shots and reactionary close-ups that allow slight facial movements to tell their own story. Chris' concerns about meeting the parents of his white girlfriend and his fear of their reaction to finding out he is black, for instance, instigates a sympathetic concern from the spectator as its revelation is intentionally slowed. This psychological and emotional response from the audience compounds as Chris faces an unethical police officer, witnesses the odd behavior of the Armitage' maid and groundkeeper, and is unwillingly hypnotized. But it is most discernable in Chris' interactions with the crude whiteness of the Armitage guests.

Peele frames white microaggressions, subtle instances of marginalization or unintentionally derogatory statements of prejudice, as a masking real dehumanization. Potential buyers disguised as party guests and friends of the Armitage family commodify Chris by hiding their assessment of his physical, sexual, and intellectual attributes in a manner of conversational interest. Chris is first introduced, with the protective support of Rose draped on his arm, to an elderly white couple only interested in his ability to play golf like "Tiger Woods." He is then introduced to a second elderly white woman and her silent and handicapped husband who are more overtly interested in his sexual prowess. Later he is engaged in a conversation where he is asked to speak universally for the black experience in the modern world. Each disingenuous conversation plays out in the same pattern of shot-reverse-shot highlighting white racial innocence and black otherness. Again close-ups are employed to capture Chris' growing discomfort and the guest's ignorance of the discomfort they have caused.

It is also important to note that in each of these instances Chris is blocked as an outsider either through spacing within the frame or through the forced perspective of

looking through Chris' camera lens; Chris is a professional photographer. Through out the scene Chris holds his camera as a comforting tool, allowing him to observe without engaging. The scene is played out essentially through a series of looks; white wealth objectifying Chris through possessive gazes reflective of the archetypes identified by Robin Means Coleman, "marking black people and culture as other–apart from dominant (white) populations and cultures in the US" (Means Colman 2). Chris also looks, through his camera lens, in anxious suspicion of the pointing and gesturing guests reflective of a passive-aggressive racial profiling. Through this controlled point of view Peele now forces white audience members to meditate and weigh the demoralizing the effects of racism on the people it targets. This intentionally slowed development, as opposed to the visceral shock and grotesque awe typical of the horror genre, allows for conflict digestibility for the white spectator and promotes cross identification with the black victim as much as with the white antagonist, a deviation reflective of the shifting consciousness of contemporary American culture. American racism is displayed on screen through microrealities making it bearable but undeniable to white spectators while allowing black viewers an oppositional gaze.

The tropes that distinguish horror from other genres tend force a disconnection, an instant recognition of an abnormal normalcy. Rather than find pleasure through some masochistic gratification or vicarious projection, the disaffected viewer can instead find satisfaction by becoming active witnesses to an abstract reality. The ability to find visual pleasure through the critical analysis of this abstraction, in the case of black Americans it is a distorted and racist characterization of black culture, is identified by bell hooks as the "oppositional gaze." bell hooks suggests black Americans have been, and continue to be

subject to a white supremacist ideology through media through the commodification of a black spectacle. To stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage in its images, is to engage its negation of black representation, "That all attempts to repress our black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze" (hooks 117). Defined simply, the oppositional gaze is grounded in a cultural denial of looking. Slave owners punished enslaved blacks for looking which continued after the abolition of slavery through Jim Crow laws and continues to inform black spectatorship today. This repression of a black American's right to gaze affectively produces an overwhelming longing and rebellious desire to look. This desire to look, coupled with a critical awareness of the misrepresentations being observed, constitutes an "oppositional gaze," an agency of resistance that allows black spectators to experience visual pleasure through the critical analysis of black misrepresentation rather than through a forced identification with racist tropes. Power is found in the critical practice of deconstructing racist archetypes.

What distinguishes *Get Out* and this newly defined black protagonist, the black survivor, from previous iterations of heroic black characterizations such as George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) is the encouragement of black spectators to gaze oppositionally. Despite Romero's insistence that *Night of the Living Dead* was not an intentional social statement, the historical context within which it was conceived and produced makes it as much of a socio/political statement as it is a horror film, regardless of intent. If racial conflict wasn't on the minds of the film's creators, it was most certainly on the minds of the spectators. Penned and filmed amidst the riotous conflict of the Civil Rights Movement, Romero's first thought was that his film would be unreleasable, that

Ben's (Duane Jones) death and the coincidental assassination of Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. would cause distributers and certainly audiences to reject the violent climax and resolution. Contrarily, this coincidence was crucial to the films success.

George Romero challenged the white male gaze in *Night of the Living Dead*, presenting for the first time in horror, a black hero. In *Night of the Living Dead*, Ben finds himself trapped inside a Pennsylvania farmhouse with a disparate group of white people fleeing the rampaging convergence of zombies. Barbara (Judith O'Dea), the hapless leading woman, no doubt the intended object of the male gaze, quickly becomes paralyzed by fear inside the farmhouse and is secured only by Ben's quick thinking and resourcefulness, characteristics the white male spectator finds admirable. A man of action, Ben begins boarding up windows and doors with makeshift supports, he improvises weapons, lighting a recliner on fire and pushing it into the yard to keep the attacking zombies at bay. In his most heroic display, Ben refuses the archetypal representation of the black buck, "big baaddd [sic] niggers, over sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh," and softly reassures Barbara who ultimately succumbs to the zombies that have broken into the house (Bogle 10). The following morning a militia of local police officers, National Guardsmen and resident hillbillies, arrive to shoot and burn the decrepit walking dead. Ben hesitantly emerges from the farmhouse, the lone survivor, only to be mistakenly shot. The irony of a mob of white men hunting a black man is highlighted in the final frames that capture the image in newsprint, recalling a history of white on black violence.

What could have been a groundbreaking portrayal of a black character in *Night of the Living Dead* becomes a paradigm of blacks in film. Ultimately Romero buckles to the Sidney Poitier Syndrome, the cinematic packaging of "a good boy in a totally white world,

with no wife, no sweetheart, no woman to love or kiss, helping the white man solve the white man's problem" (Guerrero 73). The white male spectator identifies with the black hero only superficially, as he adopts a white sensibility in speech, action, and thought; a white male concept of hero. By the end, the white male spectator is satisfied because white dominance is clearly reestablished, paralleling the suppression of black activist of the civil rights movement by the dominant white mainstream. At the same time the black spectator is denied the oppositional gaze, is in fact punished for looking at all. The authenticity of the film's ending inspired opening night responses from black audience members like, "Well, you know they had to kill him off" and "Whitey had to get him anyway" reflecting the general ideology of the time period (Hervey 115). Unlike Romero, Peele provides a characterization able to circumvent this ideology.

As previously mention, the black survivor is the racial equivalent of the final girl. The final girl characterization is very loosely defined as the last girl left alive to confront the monster, climaxing and resolving the horror film's narrative through her final struggle. More specifically, "the 'Final Girl' is introduced at the beginning and is the only character to be developed in any psychological detail. We understand immediately from attention paid that hers is the main story line" (Clover 44). The final girl is notably different than other female characters in horror films in that she is intelligent, resourceful, observant, and mindful of the circumstances of the developing plot. While the final girl may equal other characters aesthetically, she is not merely an object of physical consideration. She is an active protagonist who deduces the scope, amplitude, and possibility of the threat. In the closing scenes of the film the audience, male and female alike, identifiably espouse her perspective. She ultimately reflects the rise in feminist activism and the resulting changing

attitudes towards women that continue to evolve today through a subversion of the stereotypic characterization. The final climatic sequence of *Get Out* highlights the black survivor's parallel subversion. The final girl exists through a case of gender displacement while the black survivor exists through a similar case of racial displacement.

As the moniker suggests, a black survivor must obviously be black, that is, he cannot be portrayed by a white man in blackface as Laurence Olivier's portrayal of the title character *Othello* (1965), as an appropriation of black culture as Jamie Kennedy's portrayal of Brad 'B-Rad' Gluckman in *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003), or as an alien or supernatural "other" as David Prowse's and James Earl Jones' portrayal of Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* saga (1977-). Additionally, a black survivor must survive, that is, he must out last, overcome, or withstand of his own will and device. Historically, for a black character to become even remotely heroic he must appropriate the white male concept of the hero; he must adopt a white male sensibility and white male characteristics. The black survivor however must deny this whitewashing through an outright rebuffing of the conceptual double consciousness. The black survivor rejects the appropriation of white culture in the same way the final girl rejects masculine denotations of femininity, and in doing so, maintains his veritable blackness and in a sense, "keeps it real."

The black survivor is similarly the last black character left alive to confront the killer. In *Get Out* this character evolution is only realized in the film's final sequence beginning with a redefining of character dynamic. This reversal is supported visually through a divergence from established technique as well. Chris' fear leads him to discover pictures of Rose's former boyfriends; previous men she has lured into the Armitage house for their experimentation. Chris and Rose begin to be framed separately rather than the

intimately close blocking of previous scenes. Even when sharing the frame, Chris and Rose are divided by lateral space and depth. Pacing is sped up through rapid and frantic cutting of Chris packing his bag, Rose searching for her keys, and the rest of the Armitage family gathering around and trapping Chris. A single shot replays the character positioning of the previous scene with the police officer only now, Rose no longer stands heroically between Chris and the villains. She has become the villain herself. Darkened lighting, heavy shadows, and low camera angles capture the true monstrousness of the Armitages, but it is Rose's pathological, emotionless stare that truly repulses. A single shot reduces Chris to a continuation of the oppressive, archetypical characterizations that make up the tradition of horror cinema. Black spectators rejecting the Armitage's racial "wokeness" have their experience confirmed. White spectators identifying with the Armitage's racial innocence are forced to self-question.

Unlike Romero, Peele subverts archetypical misrepresentation by allowing Chris to survive. Chris utilizes his environment to his advantage, ripping cotton from the arm of an overstuffed chair's arm to deny the hypnotical chiming of Missy's silver spoon, effectively subverting previous victimization. He uses a deer head mounted on the wall to kill Dean, the man who overtly identifies the animal as a scourge in need of elimination, effectively subverting previous invisibility. He shatters the gaudy and ostentatious teacup, effectively subverting previous inferiority. He triggers his camera's flash to momentarily stun Walter (Marcus Henderson) and free himself, effectively subverting the punishment for looking. His violence is now regarded and encouraged as an acceptable means of survival rather than a threat to white dominance, subverting previous portrayals of blacks in horror films.

This subversion is amplified through a reversal of the cinematic techniques used previously to convey fear and paranoia. Long, uncut shots occupied by emotive and powerful imagery are replaced by a more rapidly paced collision of oppositions. Decelerated zooms are abandoned for stationary frames. The previously utilized two shots blocking Chris with Rose against all others now hold Chris in frame alone or distanced from other characters. Stalker-vision is deserted for quickly cut montages of threatening objects, looks, actions and reactions. The intentional slow development of story that encouraged spectator consideration is dropped for fast paced, visceral violence that subverts the intellect. Unlike Romero, Peele doesn't punish the opposition gaze. Instead he rewards it by providing the black survivor. His refusal to accept the traditional misrepresentation of blacks in horror is directly correlated to America's growing refusal of ignorance; an evolving dogma that elevates and validates the black experience.

Interestingly, Peele writes and films a correlative alternate ending for *Get Out*; one that finds Chris arrested and jailed for the murdering of the Armitage family with little hope for any reprieve or recourse. Peele said he, "originally did intend this bleaker ending, to remind people who voted for Obama that they weren't living in a post-racial world." Conversely, Peele became convinced by public outrage over police shootings that the movie needed to counter public anger and pain with an ending that "gives us a hero, that gives us an escape, gives us a positive feeling when we leave the movie" (Moore). Rather than let the white spectators off the hook as Romero does, Peele's released ending shows Chris maintaining control as the black survivor. Contrary to audience presumption, he is not killed, arrested, or even rescued by a white male police officer. Instead, he is finally reunited with his friend Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howrey). He survives as an authentic representation

of blackness. Uncertain of audience reception, of the sincerity of America's change in social consciousness, Peele rewrote and refilmed this final scene no fewer than six times varying the dialogue to infuse humor and effectively temper the connotative power of this new characterization.

Despite its position in a genre of film dominated by white male directors, white male actors, and white male audiences looking to be affronted by the horrific, *Get Out* was well received universally. By the nature of its direction, its leading role, and its intended audience, *Get Out* represents a different and transformative reading of the typical horror narrative that appeals to a modern, racially diverse, non-gender specific audience; an audience that condemns the continued oppressive misrepresentation of femininity and black culture. Most importantly, *Get Out* is successful because it is a genre piece first. *Get Out* appeals to the traditional horror fan because it is saturated with allusion to canonical predecessors providing instant access but is also tends "to celebrate the outsider or the other," effectively including the minority audience as well (Gross).

As a horror fan himself, Jordan Peele wrote and directed *Get Out* with an understanding and appreciation for the established conventions of the genre as well as a popular knowledge of the history of horror films. Jordan Peele cites David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and John Carpenter's *Halloween* as films that really affected him growing up (Ebiri). He is a credentialed horror fan and brings an apt mindset to his own production, incorporating recognizable structures, and allusions identifiable by even the most base of horror fans in order to not only captivate but also sustain the intellectual curiosity that horror fans seek. The audience of traditional horror

fans would, for example, immediately recognize the title as an allusion to *The Amityville Horror* (1979) where a house, haunted by the memory of its murderous past, demands the new owners to "Get Out!"

The allusions continue throughout the film maintaining and playing on the inquisitive intellect of spectators. The opening sequence depicts a black male, who we later find out is Andre Logan King (Lakeith Stanfield), a prior victim of the Armitage plot, walking through a suburban neighborhood looking for the house of a presumed acquaintance before he is attacked, choked unconscious, placed in the trunk of a car and napped by a masked assailant. This narrative structure references popular horror films like *Psycho* (1960), *Halloween* and *Scream* where the technique of deliberately misleading the audience with action seemingly disconnected to, or outside the main plot of the film is deployed. Particularly adroit horror fans might even recognize the song playing in the background of this scene as Peele makes another genre connection to Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) by blasting "Run Rabbit, Run" from the assailant's white car stereo. The feelings of paranoia expressed by Andre Logan King as he navigates the unfamiliar territory of white suburbia and Chris as he interacts with the seemingly innocent but noticeably uncomfortable whites as the film progresses, mimicking the slowly developing paranoia driving Rosemary Woodhouse (Mia Farrow) to try an escape from her husband and the Devil worshipping cult housed next door in *Rosemary's Baby*. Similarly, this developing fear that people aren't exactly who they seem to be, or are at least motivated by some unknown or hidden intent echoes the plot of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* where human bodies are taken over by aliens becoming evil version of themselves.

Part of the brilliance of *Get Out* is the degree of risk with which it was actualized. The history of white power that caused me to watch President Obama's first speech through the gaps between the fingers covering my eyes and the continued racial conflict overwhelming the headlines suggests that America would be unwilling to be critical of race, and unwilling to accept a newly defined black hero. Peele spent years conceiving, months writing, and twenty-three days shooting a film he wasn't sure would be released. Not only is *Get Out* a film that circumvents genre tradition, but it does so from within the Hollywood system that has defined said traditions.

Get Out also works as social commentary, a circumstance that constitutes the initial risk taken by Peele. *Get Out* was conceptualized through a questioning whether or not a horror film can impel "wokeness," that is, can a genre of film that is traditionally scorned as base cinema incite social awareness? Can a horror film compel not just a cognizance of current events but a true understanding of the realities of race in America? In short, the answer is yes, "horror converts a hovering sense of crisis in the real world into something we can see before us" (Dango). Peele looks to a specific subgenre of horror, what he calls the social thriller, in an attempt to give a structure to the feelings prevalent in Amercian society and to provide a set of expectations for "when and where to find hate, fear, and distress (Dango). A social thriller is a horror film where the monsters are not made up fantasies but are derived from very real, human, conflict. It is predicated on the idea that monsters transcend metaphor; they are part of the genetic code of the American experience, ciphers that reveal disturbing truths about everything from colonial settlement to the institution of slavery, from anti-immigrant movements to the rise of religious fundamentalism in recent American politics. "Monsters have been manufacturing complex

meanings for four hundred years of American History. They do not mean one thing but a thousand (Poole XIV). When interpreted analytically, America's monsters go beyond a simple symbolic representation of fear; they exist through a mythology of white supremacy, an institution of violent oppression, and a systematic attack on the human body. Monsters, specifically those found in social thrillers, are not representative of the individual but of a foundational social system, a despotic canon designed to maintain the preeminence of the white male.

Peele lists *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and *Rosemary's Baby* as inspirational social thrillers in that they, to varying degrees, analyze gender issues through a horror lens criticizing the suppression of women's rights, the physical attack on the female body, and the perceived threat to masculine potency thus validating Peele's idea to, "tackle race and horror in a similar way" (Guerrasio). *Get Out* is a social thriller born of the same system of limitation, reduction, and injustice but substitutes race for gender as the discriminating aspect. Instead of gender-based inequalities, *Get Out* criticizes the suppression of black voices, the physical attack on the black body, and the perception of a post racial America. This assumed kinship is the lens through which the black survivor is born; a parallel plight of a previously hushed minority. Rosemary Woodhouse maintained true feminine strength by refusing the control of the male gaze. Through her eyes audiences see how the female body is manipulated, and empathize with her struggle; cross gender identification made possible in the end because, for the love of her child, Rosemary submits to male dominance. Equivalently, Chris Washington maintains black authenticity by refusing the control of the white male gaze. Through Chris' eyes the audience is forced to witness the racism hiding behind seemingly innocent behaviors and interactions, ultimately empathizing with Chris'

struggle through a cross-racial identification made possible only through an encouraged and not forced perspective. Through the eyes of the black survivor the audience begins to scrutinize the advancement of, or the lack of advancement of racial politics off screen. The black survivor stands as a direct challenge to America's and Hollywood's tradition of white male dominance perpetrated through the white male gaze, and thus constitutes Peele's second risk.

Over time, the final girl has proven to be a transformative characterization widely accepted and celebrated by audiences seeking more accurate gender representation in horror cinema. The second question Peele addresses is whether or not the same character subversion present in the final girl's denial of traditional gender coding can occur for racially coded characterizations. The black survivor is different from other black characters in horror films in that he challenges stereotypes. He may adopt cultural identifiers in the form of language and dress but he is fundamentally different in the way he perceives and understands. Like the final girl, the black survivor is an active protagonist, alertly surmising the possible threat and rationally questioning the motivation of the monster. While his perspective is not comfortably identifiable, it is recognized and ultimately accepted as that of the audience. As a social thriller, *Get Out* achieves what most mainstream films attempt to achieve, "it may not appropriate the mind's eye, but it certainly encroaches on it" (Clover 43). It is intended to be an identifiable representation of modern social assemblage; and therefore reflects the most basic and established social constructs of gender and race. The gender and racial identities of the main characters are to be read as accurate portrayals of these classifications: man is man, woman is woman, white is white, black is black. It seems a rather obvious distinction, but the characterizations of black Americans have been

historically misrepresented. If he is to withstand criticism and academic analysis it is critical that the qualities of a black survivor be interpreted as authentic regardless of the absurdity of the circumstance he finds himself in. The believability of the Armitage scientific experimentation and their victimization through hypnosis and lobotomy is less significant than the legitimacy of Chris' blackness.

Get Out is a film that authentically represents blackness from within a Hollywood system that has an established history of misrepresenting blacks on screen and of denying films made by black artists. This distinction between "blacks in horror films," and "black horror films" is reflective of the dual consciousness experienced by black Americans and constitutes the final risk taken by Peele (Means Coleman 5-8). Blacks in horror films, typically those written, directed, and produced by white males through the Hollywood mainstream, serve as the personification of the racialized fear of black power. *Candyman* (1992), serving as an example of blacks in horror films, tells the story of Daniel Robitaille (Tony Todd), a sophisticated black man violently terrorized by a lynch mob because of his love affair with a the daughter of a wealthy and white land owner who survives only as a vengeful urban legend. Such characterization reinforces the prevailing racist narrative of America by shaping the spectator's concept of evil as black; The Candyman, "code(s) the monster as racial other associated with a powerful savage religion" and personifies the fear of miscegenation and the disintegration of racial boundaries (Means Coleman 6).

Decidedly different, *Blacula* (1972) serves as an example of a black horror film, a film created by a black director. *Blacula* tells the story of Prince Mamuwalde (William Marshall) who confronts Count Dracula (Charles Macaulay) in an attempt to end the systemic oppression of scores of enslaved African people. In a reinterpretation of the

master/slave dynamic, Count Dracula transmogrifies Mamuwalde into a vampire, renamed Blacula, with a single bite, and condemns him to an eternity without his true love. Like The Candyman, Blacula shapes the spectator's concept of evil as black, but does so from a sympathetic black perspective that grounds his monstrosity in backstory. Such characterizations act as markers for understanding how racial injustice operates within both the confines of film, and the American psyche. "Black film is about black experiences and black cultural traditions–a black cultural milieu and history swirling around and impacting blacks' lives in America (Means Coleman 7). The gross misrepresentation of black culture on screen as typical of Hollywood productions bolsters prejudice off screen, leading black directors, cinematographers, writers, and actors to an independent means of black film production

From the beginning, American imagination has been shaped by monsters. Critical analysis of these monsters reflects an imagination that very clearly, sees in color. The awareness of black representation in film has only recently begun to gather serious academic attention, but has incited a resistance of racial misrepresentation in standardized cinema and a denial of the fraudulent post-racial consciousness promoted by the mainstream media. The black spectator has become a resisting spectator who looks to production modes independent of Hollywood in order to take the responsibility of framing blackness away from the dominant Hollywood apparatus. "Hollywood has increasingly attempted to maintain its contested hegemony by co-opting and incorporating emergent and dissonant styles, oppositional images, and resistant films into the framework of its vast commercial enterprise; it doles out African American directors, actors, and technicians a meager portion of its colossal industry (Guerrero 6). It has been the position of Hollywood

that films, whether they are examples of blacks in film or black films, are non-commodities. It has been the position that Hollywood deems racism economically beneficial.

As previously detailed, cinematic audiences consist of, at least traditionally, middle-class white males. Also mentioned previously, these middle-class white males, at least in America, hold to a deeply rooted ideology that promotes exclusion rather than inclusion. Beyond the paying audience, the economic system supporting the production and distribution of American films and therefore the money of Hollywood is coded white, that is, it is a possessive investment in "whiteness of film and media–a tradition that highlights the social, cultural, and political currency attached to white identity, a tradition promoting the supremacy of whites and the victimization of nonwhites" (White Ndounou). Black films, or films with predominantly black casts do not receive the financial backing of major studios and distributers such as Warner Bros., Sony, Disney, MGM, Fox, Universal or Paramount for domestic production and/or international distribution because they are said to "lack diversity" and therefore have "limited market appeal." Potential appeal is determined through a subjective comparison reliant on past performance. This artificial categorization and evaluation of film is based on a history and tradition of white male spectatorship and economic principles that guarantee films by underrepresented minorities are devalued (the same argument could be made for films directed by and starring a predominantly female cast for example).

As an example of this color-coded bias, Monica White Ndounou attributes George Lucas' struggle to find even a limited international release of *Red Tails* (2012), a movie he produced, to the fact that "there were no major white roles in it at all." Lucas himself states that studio executives describe *Red Tails*, a film about the racial segregation faced by the

Tuskegee Airmen during WWII, as "not green enough" (White Ndounou). Because it is not deemed lucrative, filmmakers turned to production outside the mainstream, the independent, minor, or specialty distributer, to create authentic black representations. The Independent film market places the framing of blackness directly into the hands of black writers, directors, and producers such as Spike Lee, John Singleton, Allen and Albert Hughes, F. Gary Gary, and Rusty Cundieff whose film *Tales From the Hood* (1995) stands as one of the few examples of independent, black horror films. Independent of Hollywood, these directors reframed black culture and experience as both realistic and positive.

Peele however, did not circumvent Hollywood nor was it the result of his ability to subvert by using his "star power." Instead, *Get Out's* success, is the result of social/political pressure for the inclusion of authentic representation of blackness because it has proven to be lucrative, if not just. Recent films like *Straight Out of Compton* (2015), *Hidden Figures* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018), and *Get Out* are all examples of what Peele calls "the missing piece;" the willingness to take risks that embody the changing landscape of entertainment as well as the awakening social consciousness post Obama. Cinematic spectatorship has evolved to reflect a more racially diverse and conscious audience. Hollywood now perceives this audience as lucrative.

Hollywood's co-opting of off screen politics to drive onscreen plots is nothing new. The election of Ronald Reagan to office in 1981 and his ensuing change in policy brought significant cuts to job training and school programs, tightened requirements for welfare programs, and the related disappearance of job prospects and federal programs designed to help working and middle class youth. Audiences, on the verge of adulthood, faced a bleak and dangerous world where adults offered little help, less intervention, but a significant

counterproductive betrayal. Not only was the economic situation devastating, as evidenced through both rising unemployment rates and the increasing cost of higher education, but the responsible adults were seemingly unaware of the harm they had created. As noted by Kara Kvaran, this socioeconomic crisis ushered in the era of slasher films, "slasher films can be seen as a counterpoint to the dominant ideology, one that through incredibly violent allegory represented the failings of the modern economy" (Kvaran). A similar predicament in the mid 2000s resulted in the crash of the housing market, doubling unemployment rates and increases in college tuition ushered in a resurgence of slasher films that had been dormant. Hollywood exploited youth anxiety over perceived future doom in the same way it is currently capitalizing on the distressing adversity of American race relations.

The extension of authentic black characterization into popular film franchises outside the horror genre and shifts in the technical production of cinematic imagery from a tradition designed to beautify and humanize whiteness to "lighting, coloring, and framing that elevates the aesthetic quality and prestige of black images" may even suggest that Hollywood recognizes not just an opportunity for financial gain, but a necessary shift in cinematic production allowing for discourse beyond representational politics (Gates). The first three films in the *Star Wars* saga, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), relegate racial diversity, specifically black representation, to the form of the villain Darth Vader, double crossing minor characters like Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams) or to the "other" in the form of monstrous aliens and limit gender diversity to the role of Princess Leia (Carrie Fischer). The second three films, *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), continue to limit racial diversity by adding the minor characters of Mace Windu

(Samuel L. Jackson) and Jengo Fett (Temuera Morrison), incorporating another alien other, Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best), and again limits gender diversity to the role of Princess Amedala (Natalie Portman). But the most recent iterations, *The Force Awakens* (2015) and *The Last Jedi* (2017), mark a shift reflective of the times by offering a heroic black lead in Finn (John Boyegal) and a heroic female lead in Rey (Daisy Ridley), and a wealth of characters more accurately representative of humanity. The Academy Awards, Golden Globes, BAFTA, and Screen Actors Guild all recognized the aesthetic and emotive power of black imagery and storytelling with acclaim for *Moonlight* (2017), effectively continuing the trend of a more bona fide representation of blackness. Hollywood is finally adapting to modern circumstance by allowing for alternative approaches to storytelling and a visual appeal to a more heterogeneous aesthetic.

Get Out is, perhaps, such an effective means for criticism of race relations in America because the history of black Americans has been relegated to an oral tradition dependent on emotive rhythms, imagery and symbolism. Obviously, the history of blacks in America is derived from the oral tradition given that slaves could neither read nor write and were prevented by law and custom from learning to do so. The tools for a written history, pen and paper, would have been luxuries few slaves could afford. Even the few who had both the training and means to record their narrative would have remained effectively illiterate for fear of discovery by their masters. Jordan Peele holds true to this narrative tradition by allowing the image to tell the story; Chris after all, is a photographer known for the "brutal" and "melancholic" nature of the images he captures. Images have an ubiquitary power to communicate beyond the divisive confines of culture. In this sense, the posterized close-up of tears dancing down Chris' tensed cheeks, his fingers frantically clawing the

padded arms of the leather chair directly across from Missy Armitage's (Catherine Keener) emotionless gaze as she hypnotically leads him into the "sunken place" has a universal impact.

For the black spectator, the evil purgatory into which Chris falls is immediately recognizable as a symbolic representation of the black experience in America. It is representative of the same systematic silencing of voices that inspired the *Black Lives Matter* response to police brutality and continued racial inequities, the *Me Too* response to sexist bigotry and the continued assault on the female body, and the *Never Again* response to gun violence and the continued discounting of youth. The image metaphorically captures the marginalization and oppressive traditions that continue today in the form of federal redlining, a school to prison pipeline, and the prison industrial complex. For the black spectator, the "sunken place" is a poignant corroboration.

The same image, for white spectators, is equally evocative in its abolishment of white innocence; "the delusion of those whites who fancy themselves and the country as post-racial: that there has been a sea change in racial attitudes, thanks to President Obama's tenure, and we are going to bury racism in a dustbin, and racial identity and distinction have become passe" (Brody). The dichotomy of white power and black pain forces even the most radical supremacist to reconsider the ideal of racial equality and the most liberal sympathizers to scrutinize their chastity. Faced with the image of the black survivor, innocence is inexcusable.

The advent of this most recent archetype is as much a confrontation of white America's polite and impolite racism as it is a criticism of black America's collusion with polite and impolite racism. It has become abundantly clear through the election of Donald

Trump to office and the rise in pro-white activism that the divisive intentions of white supremacists, white nationalists, and other fringe hate groups are to reestablish white power in America. The campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again" is a slap in the face to all progressive thinkers because it calls for a return to national traditions that thrive on the oppression of the minority voice. The tenure of President Obama and the awakening of this minority voice presented a viable and formidable threat to the alt-right agenda of reestablishing a racial divide and continues through this new characterization.

The black survivor stands in defiance of this regression by urging the realization of black empowerment; a reimaging of self worth and an active refusal of continued injustice. His authentic cultural representation of blackness and his heroic survival within the horror mythos is effectually equal to the final girl's attack on chauvinist men who objectify women as well as passive women who bend to the look of men. His existence attacks the overt custom of white privilege, the covert racial innocence prevalent in white liberalism as well as the indifference symptomatic of the systematic oppression of the minority. The black survivor disavows racism by promoting authentic representations of race. The black survivor not only demands change from his audience, but he demands a new chapter in the cinematic history of both blacks in film and black film.

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