

Professor Justin Rice

Philosophy of Film

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### **Get Out**

Jordan Peele's 2017 directorial debut, *Get Out*, was terrifying at its initial release and has grown to be even more terrifying as its subject matter becomes more relevant and apparent in society by the year. *Get Out* tells the story of a black man, Chris, traveling with his white girlfriend, Rose, to meet her family for the first time. While this can be an intimidating step in a relationship for anyone, the fears are heightened for Chris because Rose has not mentioned to her family that Chris is black. Their weekend away at her family's home begins smoothly, as Rose's family is very gracious and welcoming towards him. However, the weekend takes dark turn after dark turn, as Chris begins to unravel the disturbing truth about Rose's family. While seemingly open-minded and liberal, the Armitages reveal themselves to be a sadistic, sociopathic unit existing in a cult of affluent white people. This cult, called the Order of the Coagula, kidnaps black people and lures them into brain surgery that allows the brain of a white person to be put into the body of a black person.

This movie not only utilizes seamless horror techniques that chill audiences to the bone, but also filters the entire film through a lens of satire that pinpoints both microaggressions as well as overt racism in order to bring racial tensions to the surface. Peele's masterful blend of horror with a comedic undertone make this film so critically-acclaimed, socially-discussed, and difficult to categorize. It doesn't quite fit neatly into one genre - Horror? Check. Psychological thriller? Check. Comedic elements? Check. Racial tensions? Double-check. Needless to say, *Get Out* defies typical genre labels.

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However, in the context of Noel Carroll's definition of horror, this film does not fit the description. Carroll defines horror as a combination of fear and disgust. Further, a central part of this theory involves a monster, which can be defined as a physically impossible being that is impure. To Carroll, monsters are "threatening creatures not thought to exist by modern science", in the context of a movie's respective narrative. Therefore, *Get Out* cannot be considered a horror movie, by way of Carroll's definition. While the film strikes significant fear and disgust in its audiences, the notion of monster is much more layered and conceptual than Carroll's idea. In *Get Out*, the Order of the Coagula and the Armitage family are clear villains, however the "bad guy" of the film is broader than that. The monster of *Get Out* is society - the deep-seated racist notions that are woven into the fabric of humanity, whether we're conscious of it or not. Even the most educated, socially-aware, open-minded person has work to do within themselves to recognize the systemic racism that they innately play a part in perpetuating.

I feel that this idea is terrifying enough in itself to be categorized as horror, but when coupled with Peele's unsettling and ironic criticism of society as well as the twisted plot of the movie, it fills the audience with very visceral fear. Regardless of Carroll's definition of horror, *Get Out* can be considered a horror movie, among other things. It takes on the genre of horror through an entirely new perspective - that of an inherently racist society and those it disadvantages. Rather than discussing racism in obviously violent ways - lynchings, the KKK, and the like - this film points the finger back at the audience and forces us to put ourselves under the microscope to scrutinize ways that we personally reinforce a system that is so brutally harmful.