

How does Jordan Peele's *Get Out* explore ideas of race?

Get Out, directed by Jordan Peele, is a horror movie set in America wherein the White Armitage family kidnaps Black people so they can transplant the brains of their peers into Black people's bodies for a price in what is known as the Coagular procedure. As a result, critical race theory, which explores the ways in which races are routinely disempowered in society, is an appropriate method to explore topics such as microaggressions and marginalisation in the movie. It's important to note that marginalisation "occurs when a person or groups of people are less able to do things or access basic services or opportunities," which results in them feeling powerless and insignificant (What Is Marginalisation); whereas, microaggressions are "subtle [behaviours] – verbal or non-verbal, conscious or unconscious – directed at a member of a marginalised group that has a derogatory, harmful effect" (Hopper). Within the movie, *Get Out*, Peele uses characterisation and setting in order to demonstrate the ways in which microaggressions and marginalisation disempower Black Americans.

First, through the use of dialogue spoken by various White characters, the movie demonstrates the ways that microaggressions 'Other' Black Americans. When Rose Armitage introduces her Black boyfriend, Chris, to her parents, Chris greets her father as "Mr. Armitage," to which Mr. Armitage responds by saying "You call me Dean and you hug me, my man." Additionally, during this first encounter, Mr Armitage asks Chris "How long has this thang been going on?". The term "my man" implies that Mr. Armitage is drawing upon stereotypes of Black people to navigate this interaction because the term has historically been associated with Black culture. This is further reinforced by the colloquial use of the word "thang" which is also similarly associated with Black culture in America. As a result, Mr. Armitage is characterised as somebody who treats Chris differently based on his assumptions about Chris's racial identity. Hence, the text explores microaggressions by exemplifying how White Americans can distance Black Americans by drawing attention to their race through the reference to stereotypes. Furthermore, during the Armitage's annual party, Rose introduces Chris to the guests. When introducing him to the Greens, Mr Green, a former golf professional, attempts to connect with Chris by stating that "I do know Tiger." Additionally, another guest uses the introduction to caress Chris's arms and ask Rose "is it true? Is it better?" in reference to sleeping with Black men. Mr Green's allusion to Tiger Woods, a celebrated mixed race athlete, implies that the character assumes Chris's support or admiration for Tiger Woods because he's a person of colour. Added to this, the use of the comparative "better" highlights that Chris is seen to be different because it categorises him as belonging to a group that deviates from a norm. Consequently, the guests at the party are characterised as people interacting with Chris based on stereotypes and assumptions about his race rather than as an individual. Therefore, the text explores microaggressions further by showing how a person can be made to feel like an outsider through the implicit messages of a dominant group. In sum, there are many instances throughout the movie where White characters say things that make Chris feel 'Other' because of his racial identity.

Moreover, the movie exemplifies the ways in which Black Americans are marginalised by developing settings that distance Black American characters. In the same sequence where Chris is being introduced to the Greens, there is a medium shot of their interaction. Within this shot, Chris, who is wearing a blue denim shirt, is situated in the final third of the frame. The

White characters that occupy the centre of the frame wear some form of red clothing, just like the other White characters in the scene. The composition of this shot, which places Chris at the edge of the frame, highlights Chris's status as an outsider because his position in the frame decentralises him. **What's more,** the mise-en-scene implies that Chris isn't welcomed by the community because the contrasting colours visually separate him from the White characters. **Thus,** *a setting wherein Black people are ostracised by the White community is established.* **This demonstrates how Black Americans are marginalised in a way that shows that they aren't welcomed into White social circles.** **Another significant setting in the text is the "Sunken Place."** The "Sunken Place" refers to a fictitious hypnotic state that allows a person to passively observe their surroundings without controlling their body. After Rose's mother induces this state in Chris, his position in the "Sunken Place" is depicted by an extreme long shot that depicts him at the bottom of the frame. Within this frame, he is presented as small and surrounded by darkness. The extreme long shot emphasises Chris's isolation because it depicts him as a small figure, helpless and alone. This sense of isolation is further reinforced by the negative space around him as it draws attention to the fact that he's removed from others and any chance of support. **Subsequently,** the "Sunken Place" becomes a setting that acts as a visual metaphor for Chris's abandonment and lack of agency. **As such,** **the text captures the marginalisation of Black Americans in a way that shows how their exclusion renders them helpless.** In short, Peele uses literal and metaphorical settings to explore the ways in which Black Americans are excluded from society.

Additionally, the movie exemplifies the ways in which Black people are marginalised by characterising Chris as somebody who is subjugated to the White Armitage family and their peers. The Armitage party is actually a guise for the auctioning of Chris. During the sequence wherein people are bidding to have their consciousness placed into Chris's body, there is a medium shot of Mr Armitage in a gazebo. Mr. Armitage stands in front of a framed picture of Chris, holding his hands up to communicate the current bid of those attending the human auction. The performance of facilitating the bidding for Chris elicits ideas of a slave auction because it replicates the historical practice of buying slaves in America. **Moreover,** the mise-en-scene of the framed photograph of Chris implies that he's a passive participant in this practice as photographs are things to be passively consumed. **Hence,** *Chris is characterised as an object to be exploited by the White characters attending the party.* **Subsequently,** **the text demonstrates the marginalisation of Black people in society by exemplifying how the individual Black experience is considered to be insignificant.** **Later on in the movie,** before the Coagular procedure is carried out, Chris is held prisoner in the Armitage's basement. During this sequence, there is a close up of him picking the cotton of the chair that he is bound to with thick, brown leather straps. This image of picking cotton evokes ideas of slavery through its historical allusion to Black Americans being exploited by slave owners to work on cotton fields. **Also,** the leather straps reinforce the association between Chris's situation and slavery via their connotations of bondage. *This characterises Chris as somebody who has been stripped of his agency and is subject to the control of others who want to use him for their personal gain.* **As a result,** **the text once again demonstrates the marginalisation of Black people in society via the depiction of a Black character who is disempowered by being forced into a position of submission.** In brief, Peele represents Chris as being enslaved by the Armitage family in order to comment on the ways that Black people are marginalised in society.

In conclusion, Peele's use of characterisation and setting in the movie *Get Out* captures the ways in which Black people are disempowered in society through microaggressions and marginalisation. The White characters, whether they are the Armitage family or the Party guests, are characterised as people who interact with Chris through stereotypical ideas and assumptions about him based on his racial identity. On the other hand, Chris is characterised as somebody who is stripped of his agency and objectified by the White characters. What's more, he exists in settings that isolate him and regard him as insignificant. As such, this interpretation of Peele's *Get Out* proves to be significant because it highlights the ways in which art captures the unjust experience of Black people in society.

References

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