

Review: BlackKkKlansman

[Jasmine Onstad](#) is won over by Spike Lee's latest film about an African-American police officer infiltrating the KKK

Sunday 26 August 2018



Image: Universal Pictures

9/10

Director: Spike Lee

Starring: John David Washington, Adam Driver, Laura Harrier

Length: 2hr 15m

Rating: 15

It is very rare that a movie theatre remains deathly silent and still after the film credits start rolling. Normally, there are sounds of shuffling, sweet packets being crumpled and murmurs about needing the toilet; not often at the end of a film do you witness a couple hundred people collectively holding their breath. This was the atmosphere *BlackKkKlansman*, Spike Lee's latest joint, created. Unapologetically political and hard-hitting, Lee is (as ever) not afraid to throw a few punches to the gut in pursuit of telling a heartfelt and honest story.

Based on the memoir of Ron Stallworth (John David Washington), the first black cop in Colorado Springs in 1979, who infiltrated his local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan by pretending to be a white man over the phone. He even befriends the Grand Wizard (and national director) of the Klan, David Duke (Topher Grace), illustrating Dave Chappelle's aphorism that every Black American is bilingual- able to code switch expertly in order to get by.

Ron enlists his Jewish-American colleague Flip Zimmerman (Adam Driver) to keep the ruse going, leading

to some tense and almost unwatchable scenes where Flip must prove just how much he hates Jews to gain the Klan's trust. What results is a humorous but sobering story, which breaks down the walls between the past and the present.

Lee was very conscious about making a contemporary period piece that blurs the boundaries between then and now. Some of the dialogue nudges the audience to put the pieces together for themselves, especially David Duke's slogans which include 'America first' and talk about making America great again. The point is driven home when we are shown a real clip of present day David Duke, no longer under the banner of the KKK but that of a President Trump supporter. In contrast to the slightly cartoonish presentation of the hillbillies in the local chapter, Duke's character is refined and professional. His resemblance to modern brushed up politicians is uncanny, even when he comes out with statements like "I can always tell when I'm talking to a negro" over the phone (spoiler: he really can't).

BlackKlansman oozes with the style and playfulness that is characteristic a Spike Lee joint. It is shot on 35mm film, giving it a richness and nostalgia that couldn't have been achieved digitally. The bass heavy score pulsates through each scene, stringing them all together with urgency. Lee's signature double dolly shot is expertly used to catapult the audience from the fictional world of the film into modern America. The ending plays back to back news clips of the Charlottesville riots where Heather Heyer was killed in an act of "homegrown cherry pie American terrorism"- in Lee's own words. The chants of the Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' protestors ("Jews will not replace us") echo almost exactly the sentiments of the fictional KKK members. This is not a film made to bring us together and bridge divides, nor is it a film that stokes anger and hatred. Lee has told a story as authentically as he knows how, and now it is up to the rest of us to wake up and act.



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