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FILM REVIEW â?? Hale County, This Morning, This Evening

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Viewed by Larry Gleeson as part of the American Film Instituteâ??s 2018 AFI DOCS Film Festival.

Hale County, This Morning, This Evening written, directed and produced by RaMell Ross, and Winner of a Special Jury Prize at this yearâ??s Sundance Film Festival. Ross tells the story of two African-American males, Daniel and Quincy, born in Hale County, Alabama, and the diverse paths their lives take. *Hale County*, *This Morning, This Evening* breaks the mold of a traditional documentary with its cinematic language and use of montage.

In the filmâ??s opening sequence, an immediate distrust of the camera is highlighted in a bold directorial choice regarding one of the filmâ??s subjects, Quincy, who works at a catfish plant to support his young family. â??What is the orbit of your dreams?â?? sneaks into the lower left-hand corner of the film in a title, textual overlay. A transition is made revealing a small-town street lined with black folks sitting on they cars. Nice non-diagetic music accompanies the camera as it glides down the street. Apparently, them folks is impervious to what is going on â??round them. Welcome to the Deep South where race is constructed and dreaming is an everyday part of existence. RaMell Ross is a philosopher, a photographer, a teacher a high-school basketball coach and now a filmmaker.

Ross utilizes his photography skills to great effect capturing simple, elegant moments that juxtapose other images like a grown man heaping a large truck tire onto a fire while off-screen voices provide commentary on the color and density of the smoke rising up into the air. This telling scene was proceeded buy the title textual overlay, â??What is done when all the cotton is picked?â?? Ross is not sugar-coating the environment. This type of call and response brilliantly forms the crux of the filmâ??s narrative. In another scene a young girl who really hasnâ??t learned to speak is being questioned by a semi-literate grown woman. First she asked the young girl her name (though i couldnâ??t comprehend the pronunciation of the word name). When the girl didnâ??t reply she asked a few more time with each rendering becoming more intelligible only to be followed up with a â??How old you is?â?•

As a basketball coach, Ross has access to the filmâ??s second primary character, Daniel, a strong, physically fit basketball player longing to escape the confines of his environment. Part of the beauty of Rossâ??s cinematography and consequent cinematic language is the tight framing of Daniel as he practices his jump shot. While Daniel might be confined for now, this (basketball) is his way out, his way to freedom from confinement.

In my opinion, the film ended rather abruptly evoking a feeling of wanting something more and left my pondering what I had just experienced. The montage of imagery alone makes this film worth seeing. But Ross adds a deep, visceral element, coupled with philosophical interjections, that creates a work of art transcending the confines of the theatre. It begs to be experienced. The result is a highly compelling, experimental film seemingly influenced by Melvin Van Peeblesâ?? spawn of the Blaxploitation era, *Sweet SweetBackâ??s Baadasssss Song.* And, with a run time of a fast seventy-six minutes, itâ??s one you donâ??t want to miss! Highly recommended.



Category

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