Get Out and Talk It Out

On Wednesday, January 31st, students gathered to watch the Oscar nominated film, Get Out, with the UMass Racial Justice Coalition. The event, titled “Get Out and Talk It Out” was orchestrated to discuss the impacts of racism on individuals and communities at UMass. Students, faculty, and staff alike came together to watch the film and were treated to pizza, popcorn, and drinks.

The Film

Get Out, written and produced by Jordan Peele, was advertised as a horror film and for the first few minutes appears to be just that. Within the first few scenes though, it is apparent that the film is more than just another film and is, in fact, an expose on racism in America. In an interview with National Public Radio, Peele discussed what the social impact of the story. "It was very important to me to just get the entire audience in touch in some way with the fears inherent [in] being black in this country," Peele says. "Part of being black in this country, and I presume being any minority, is constantly being told that […] we're seeing racism where there just isn't racism."

The film itself centers around a young, mixed-race couple, Chris Washington and his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage. Chris is to meet Rose’s parents as they travel back to her family home in the secluded wilderness for the weekend. Clearly anxious, Chris asks Rose if her family knows that he’s black. Rose assures him that her family is not racist.

Many scenes throughout the film provide a realistic look at life for a person of color in America and the micro (and macro) aggressions that are faced. When Chris and Rose hit a deer, a white cop asks to see Chris’ I.D although Rose was the one driving. Later in the film, Rose’s father tells Chris that deer are destroying the environment and every time he sees a dead one, he thinks, “That’s a start.” This scene is symbolic of Mr. Armitage’s outlook on people of color.

Another chilling scene depicts a silent auction for Chris’ body. This scene is a not-so-subtle nod to slave auctions. The entire crowd is white and Chris’ body, much like the bodies of lives of many black people in history, is sold to the highest bidder.

The well placed subtleties and deplorable ironies from the first half of the film are replaced in the latter half when microaggressions turn to horrific macroaggressions. Though I won’t reveal the ending, I will assure you that this film is a must-watch. The most disturbing part of this film is the reality it portrays.
**Dialogue**

The most important part of the evening was the facilitated dialogue upon the film’s conclusion. The dialogue was led by members of Student Bridges and the Racial Justice Coalition. Stephanie Evarose, former Secretary of Diversity for the UMass Student Government Association and member of RJC told those present that the dialogue was, “an opportunity for people to talk about Get Out [and racism in general] in a clear, clean, and safe place.” Nurayn Faris, a sophomore at UMass and a member of Student Bridges, said that she was “not surprised [by the film.] Many people will watch this movie and think it’s exaggerated but it’s not.”

Members of RJC and Student Bridges asked attendees about microaggressions that appeared in the film that reflect microaggressions they had faced or had seen on the UMass campus. A discussion of stereotyping came up, remarking on the comments of the white family friends in the film. Faris said that, “Black people were and are exploited for their bodies. People of color are still treated with racism but others still want to be them.” Faris was discussing appropriation of black culture. She noted that white people appropriate black culture, often because it’s seen as cool.

Education was a strong talking point of the night- education by the university as well as self-education. Some students suggested that UMass Diversity requirement was outdated. They stated that while Martin Luther King Jr. is a hero of the Civil Rights movement, they wanted to learn more about modern heroes stating that many events from the 1960s are still happening in contemporary America. Additionally, many students of color expressed exhaustion over feeling the need to continually educate people and their lives and their struggles. “It’s hard to keep trying to educate people who don’t want to be educated,” said Faris. Students of color in attendance also remarked on being singled out in class when topics of race came up.

One of the last topics of conversation was mental health. Students and staff discussed what micro and macro-aggressions do the mental health and confidence of people of color. In the film, Chris Washington, and many other people of color, are sent to the “Sunken Place” through hypnosis by Rose’s mother. This Sunken Place is seen as supernatural but was really a play on the feelings caused by racism- depression, helplessness, and paralyzation. Students called on their white allies to stand up. An unnamed student remarked that, “It, of course, hurts to acknowledge that you have privilege, but you have to.”

The Racial Justice Coalition meets every Monday in Wilder Hall Room 102 from 1-2PM. They aim to raise awareness about racism, raise consciousness about white supremacy and other systems of oppression, promote coalition building and support community building while providing a safe space for productive conversation about racism.
All students from the five college consortium are welcome. To join their email list, please email Ghida El-Banna at: gelbanna@umass.edu. You can also like us on Facebook and join us on Campus Pulse.