

For Colored Girls evokes powerful stories

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The most popular kind of films that Americans love to experience in theaters usually include comedic romp-fests such as *The Hangover* or action-adventure films that continue to further push the boundaries of visual effects and camera tricks, like *Avatar*.

Many forget, though, that filmmaking is an art form and a platform that can expose the drama and social issues we as humans beings still experience to this day.

Last Friday, Tyler Perry's *For Colored Girls* debuted nation-wide in theaters. Perry, who is widely known for his slapstick funny movies such as *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, and *Madea's Family Reunion*, took on a big challenge to direct, write and produce this film.

Centered around nine African-American women in a urban city, Perry weaves together several women's stories to poetically reveal the social injustices and issues women of color face every day in society.

The film is based on the play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* by Ntozake Shange.

Lead by a cast of phenomenal African-American actresses, Perry made some very wise decisions in casting. His ensemble included Janet Jackson (Jo), Loretta Devine (Juanita), Anika Noni Rose (Yasmine), Thandie Newton, (Tangie), Kimberly Elise (Crystal), Tessa Thompson (Nyla), Kerry Washington (Kelly) and Whoopi Goldberg (Alice). Actress Phylicia Rashad plays Gilda, a landlord who observes all of the other women who come in and out of the apartment complex, while providing an all-seeing commentary.

Jackson's character, Jo, is an executive editor at a women's magazine who believes her husband is having an affair. Crystal works for Jo and is physically and emotionally abused by her alcoholic, war-torn veteran husband.

When Kelly, a social worker, comes to Crystal's door to check up on her children, you sense the powerlessness and fear of each woman as Crystal's husband verbally pushes away the social worker from his home.

As Nyla collects money from her hyper-religious mother Alice to pay for her dance college application, her estranged drug addict sister Tangie discovers that she's pregnant and plans to get an abortion.

Through their trials and dramatic events, all of the women become connected to one another by the end of the story.

Each actress's performance was outstanding as all of them are beautifully highlighted by their character's emotional and traumatic journey as women of color. Some of the best performances came from Jackson, Noni Rose, Rashad and Elise.

Critics are amazingly divided on the merits of this thought-provoking and compelling film. While the New York Times gave the project an editor's pick, Roger Ebert for the Chicago Sun Times panned it and gave it only two and a half stars.

His reason for a poor rating was due to his belief that the soliloquies (or as I would refer to as poetic monologues) were distracting and felt out of place. He claims in his review that "the audience is tugged back and forth between the stylized speech and the straight dramatic material."

Ebert fails to understand the purpose of these poetic moments. The "stylized speech" was designed to grab audiences' attention to these women's stories and think about the position they are in.

Plus, what each woman says comes from the original play. So, while it is intended for theatergoers, other audiences are experiencing the smooth power of dramatic poetry. If Ebert watched as many plays (especially alternative) as he does films, he would greatly appreciate the true meaning and motive of the text.

I would highly encourage anyone to see this film because it is a rare piece of media that gives light to all of the social problems women must still confront in today's world. Yet, I would like to caution potential spectators that the film is rated R due to violence and heavy subjects presented in the story.

What I saw in this film was the many hidden layers of identity of women of color and how their voices have been oppressed and overlooked for far too long.