

Higher Learning Helps Viewers Unlearn Prejudices

Jeff Wittmaier
Staff Writer

Fictitious Columbus University in "Higher Learning," is a microcosm for America in all its fractured multi-cultural diversity. The college campus offers ripe possibilities, throwing together unformed souls of every possible class, race and ethnic background. Mix these cultural collisions with the volatility and confusion of kids whose identities are still up for grabs, and there are enough explosive social issues for a half dozen dramas.

Writer, director and producer John Singleton ("Boyz n the Hood," "Poetic Justice") opens up the movie with a screen-filling image of the American flag and closes it with the flag again but with the word "unlearn" typed across the screen. Between those two shots is a movie filled with emotion, violence, peace, understanding, misunderstanding and everything else that goes along with a college campus. It is up to the viewer to decide what needs to be unlearned.

The three major players in the movie are: Malik (Omar Epps), a runner on a partial athletic scholarship who is not sure that he can cut it in the classroom and feels that his worth is measured only by his track performance; Kristen (Kristy Swanson), who is date-raped by a frat boy and then finds herself in sexual confusion; and Remy (Michael Rapaport), a loner from Idaho who can't quite find his place and is so desperate to fit in that he falls in with a group of skinheads. Each one is lost and looking for role models.

Malik, a chronic complainer, who feels that he is being discriminated against, gets little apparent sympathy from his political science professor (Laurence Fishburne). The professor is a stern mentor who rejects Malik's cries of victimization and pushes him to use his mind to discover his intellectual capabilities.

Another student, Fudge (Ice Cube), the unofficial leader of the black students, senses Malik's intellectual potential. Fudge challenges him not to be a slave to the university, but to learn to think for himself, because he realizes that only through intellect can you be free.

"Higher Learning" may take place on a college campus, but Fishburne is the only professor shown throughout the movie. The movie is more centered around the struggle students undergo to fit in, which may be the most challenging task in college, rather than



Professor Phipps (Laurence Fishburne) consoles Malik (Omar Epps) after a campus tragedy. classroom learning.

Press Photo

Remy, the outcast, can only find a place at the extremes: the campus skinheads. When Singleton unfurls those swastikas you know that there is trouble ahead, both for the characters and for the movie.

For the first portion of the movie, "Higher Learning" keeps you absorbed. It is accurate about the tribal instincts of students, and the way kids band together around music, style and ideologies. But there is one big problem, Singleton doesn't get inside these characters. He doesn't give his actors much breathing space and no buoyancy in the film making. There is no spontaneity in his college kids.

After Remy falls in with the skinheads, he falls apart. He starts believing all of the "white power" hype that blacks are given special

privileges in college, and that because of affirmative action he will be unable to get a job after college.

Malik, meanwhile, is being challenged by his professor to forget the prejudices that he thinks might exist and just learn, knowing that knowledge is the ultimate weapon against hatred.

Kristen, after the date-rape, goes into a time of sexual confusion: She's romantically torn between a wise lesbian political activist and a sensitive hunk, having sex with both.

In order to make sense of the potentially confusing themes, the viewer must pay attention carefully. This may be a conscious decision on the part of Singleton who is trying to get everyone to "Question the

Knowledge."

The message that Singleton is trying to send is that kids need to question all premises, to find their own answers, to "unlearn" the prejudices built into the system.

When Singleton lets the movie go the skinhead route, with fistfights, assassinations, gay bashings, an innocent black victim and vengeance, "Higher Learning" loses the focus that it had earlier in the movie and becomes overly dramatic.

Watching "Higher Learning" work itself up into a frenzy, you can feel the burden that Singleton's success has placed on him. He feels he has to address so many burning social issues and pump up a crowd pleaser, that he's left himself no room as an artist. Singleton is too young, and too talented, to trap himself in the

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Demon Knight Features Gore, Action for True Horror Fans

Frank Nieto
Staff Writer

A boarding house is turned into a battleground for the control of the earth in Demon Knight. The film opens with a car chase between the Collector (Billy Zane) and Brayker (William Sadler). The chase leads them to a small southwestern town where Brayker finds a boarding house to hide out in. Soon the Collector locates him and the battle begins.

The Collector is after an ancient key, which Brayker has, that contains the blood of Jesus and keeps the world from being overrun by demons. The blood in the key is the only thing that can protect Brayker and the six other persons in the house from the Collector and his demons.

In order to get the key, the Collector preys on the residents of the boarding house's insecurities and wishes. The Collector realizes that the residents' alliance with Brayker must be broken so that he can get the key. Since he can't physically get the key from Brayker, or even touch it, he needs to use one or all of the residents to take it from Brayker and give it to him. This is where most of the action occurs,

with the Collector trying to lure the residents away from their uneasy alliance with Brayker.

Demon Knight is like most of the *Tales from the Crypt* episodes, a few twists and turns but lots of action and gore. It also features convincing performances by Zane and Sadler, as well as Jada Pinkett as one of the residents, Jeryline.

Demon Knight is unlike most other horror movies because it has a plot that makes sense, and wisecracks that are actually funny. And it features real actors. (Some other horror movies seem to pick the actors from behind the counter of your local fast food restaurant.) It isn't excessively bloody, and none of the truly gory scenes are gratuitous. A lot of this can probably be attributed to director Ernest Dickerson, Spike Lee's protege and director of *Juice*.

This is a movie for horror fans. If you like the TV series, *Tales from the Crypt*, or horror movies you'll probably like this. If you don't like horror movies, you'll most likely want to skip this one.

Area Movie Listings...

- "Billy Madison" - Stars Adam Sandler, from "Saturday Night Live", as a man who has to repeat his entire education, in order to receive the family fortune. Playing at the Hampden Centre 8 and the United Artists Theatre at the Colonial Park Mall.
- "Boys On The Side" - Three mismatched females (one's a lesbian, one is HIV Positive, and the other might have killed her boyfriend) ride cross-country, in what will definitely be classified a "chick movie." Playing at the United Artists Theatre at the Camp Hill Mall, and at the Colonial Commons 9.
- "Higher Learning" - Deals with race relations on a college campus. Playing at the Capital City Mall Cinemas, and the Colonial Commons 9.
- "Immortal Beloved" - The mysterious love affair of Beethoven is brought to life. Starring Gary Oldman and Isabella Rossellini. Playing at the Hamden Centre 8.
- "The Jerky Boys" - Two guys from New York get themselves in and out of trouble by making crank phone calls. Playing at the Hampden Centre 8, and the Colonial Commons 9.
- "Legends of the Fall" - Sexy Brad Pitt plays in this nineteenth century story of three men in love with the same woman. Also starring Anthony Hopkins. Playing at United Artists Theatre at East Park and at the Hamden Centre 8.
- "Murder In The First" - True story of a man wrongfully convicted of murder, and tortured while serving his sentence in Alcatraz. Stars Kevin Bacon and Christian Slater. Playing at the Colonial Commons 9, and the Hampden Centre 8.
- "The Quick and the Dead" - Sharon Stone plays the ultimate cowgirl, co-starring Gene Hackman and Leonardo DiCaprio. Playing at the United Artists Capital City Mall and at Colonial Commons 9.

FOR MOVIE TIMES: Contact the appropriate movie theatre. Colonial Commons: 540-0806; Capital City Theatres: 761-1084; Hampden Centre: 731-0734; Colonial Park Theatres: 652-0312.



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