



WOKING FILM CLUB

The Main Feature

Season 43 – Issue 15 – Screening 25 April 2024

Till

USA, 2022
130 mins, Certificate 12A

Director	Chinonye Chukwu
Written by	Michael Reilly, Keith Beauchamp, Chinonye Chukwu
Cinematography	Bobby Bukowski
Editing	Ron Patane
Production Design	Curt Beech
Music	Abel Korzeniowski

Cast

Danielle Deadwyler	Mamie Till
Jalyn Hall	Emmett Till
Frankie Faison	John Carthan (Mamie's father)
Whoopi Goldberg	Alma Carthan
Sean Patrick Thomas	Gene Mobley (Mamie's boyfriend)
John Douglas Thompson	Mose "Preacher" Wright (Emmett's uncle)
Darian Rolle	Willie Reed (eyewitness)
Haley Bennett	Carolyn Bryant (accuser)

NAACP Members (National Assoc for the Advancement of Colored People)

Kevin Carroll	Rayfield Mooty
Tosin Cole	Medgar Evers
Keith Arthur Bolden	William Huff



Our presentation this evening is based on the true story of the racist murder of Emmett Till in rural Mississippi in August 1955, and his mother's pursuit of justice.

Mamie Till lives in relative prosperity in Chicago. A widow, she works as a clerk for the Air Force (the sole black employee in the office) and dotes on her sassy, livewire 14-year-old son, Emmett. He is off to spend summer with his relatives in Mississippi. Mamie gives him a stern lecture about the "Jim Crow" rules there – he should defer to all white people and "Be Small." At a white-owned grocery store, Emmett flirts (innocently) with the young wife of the owner (Carolyn Bryant). His companions immediately flee worried about retribution. Sure enough, a few nights later Emmett is dragged from his bed by Bryant's husband and his half-brother. His nude body is found in the Tallahatchie River. He had been brutally tortured and shot before being dumped in the water. Mamie demands that his swollen and disfigured corpse is returned to Chicago. Deeply traumatised, she insists on the body being photographed and arranges for an open casket at a public funeral, garnering national headlines across the US. The two white men

are charged with murder. With the support of the NAACP Mamie travels to the trial. The defence asserts that the body cannot be confirmed as Emmett (despite Mamie's identification and the presence of his late father's ring); there is a suggestion that it's a fraud to encash two life assurance policies. Mamie leaves before the inevitable verdict from the 12 white male jurors. At a subsequent NAACP rally, she lambasts the Mississippi justice system for victim blaming and the US for failing in its promise of equal justice. Post-credit captions state that Mamie's actions spurred the Civil Rights Act of 1957 (which authorised the Department of Justice to intervene in local law enforcement when individual civil rights were being compromised). Mamie dedicated the rest of her life to fight for civil rights. She died in 2003.



The end-credits also record that - protected against double jeopardy - the two accused men admitted in a 1956 interview with *Look* magazine that they *had* tortured and murdered Emmett - but had no regrets and "had done nothing wrong." They sold their story for \$4,000 (ten times the value of the life assurance payout that was queried at the trial).

The film spent many years awaiting a green light. The Bond co-producer Barbara Broccoli tried from 1994 onwards but met indifference. She recalled in a 2023 article that "they were saying: 'Why would you want to tell this story, it's depressing?' People don't want to talk about this history' ... They just weren't interested. They didn't think it was worth making." Keith Beauchamp made a well-received documentary about the case in 2005 and helped write the final screenplay. He explained that he hoped to "educate viewers about Black history in the same manner that Spielberg has brought awareness and education to Jewish history."

The film was released in the autumn of 2022 to universal critical acclaim, with particular praise for Deadwyler's performance as Mamie; and for the restraint shown by Nigerian-American director Chukwu in leaving the details of the murder to the imagination.

But the film was a major box-office disappointment. *Variety* suggested that post-COVID audiences initially shied away from virtuous/prestige films to lap up the vacuous escapism of comic-book movies. Maybe – and Till wasn't the only under-performing "serious" film that year. It is not a comfortable watch. It showcases a largely self-sufficient Black community without the need of "white saviours" and is carefully unsparing in its depiction of casual racism whether in a Chicago department store or the Mississippi Courtroom. Deadwyler was surprisingly ignored in the Oscar nominations prompting director Chukwu to criticise the film industry for "upholding whiteness and perpetuating an unabashed misogyny towards Black women."

A final word from *RogerEbert.com*. "If nothing else, see it for Danielle Deadwyler's incredible performance. She truly is unforgettable."

Eugene Smith



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 1 May 2024
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

US Racism on Film

Eugene Smith considers seven (very different) takes on racism towards African-Americans.

The Influential One - that Glorified (and revived) the KKK

Birth of a Nation (1915/Directed by D W Griffith/195 mins/12/IMDb score 6.1)

The consequences of the US Civil War in the lives of two (white) families. The pioneer of panoramic long shots, iris effects, still shots, night photography, panning shots and the staging of battle scenes where hundreds of extras were made to look like thousands.... but which portrayed Black people as over-sexed and ignorant.

The One that was my O-Level English Literature Set-Book in 1977

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962/Robert Mulligan/129 mins/PG/8.3)



Adapted from Harper Lee's novel. Gregory Peck plays Atticus Finch, a widowed lawyer in Depression-era Alabama, who defends a black man against an unmerited rape charge, and tries to educate his young children against prejudice. Won 3 Oscars.

The One Banned in South Africa

In the Heat of the Night (1967/Norman Jewison/110 mins/PG/7.9)

A black Philadelphia police detective (Sidney Poitier) is suspected of a local murder while passing through a racially hostile Mississippi town. After being cleared he is reluctantly asked by the police chief (Rod Steiger) to investigate the case. Famous for Poitier's slap of a racist white man. Won 5 Oscars including Best Film.

The One with the Barber's Chair

Mississippi Burning (1988/Alan Parker/128 mins/15/7.8)

Two FBI Agents with wildly different styles (Gene Hackman, William Dafoe) arrive in Mississippi to investigate the disappearance of 3 civil rights activists. Crackles with tension. Opening film of 11th WFC season in 1990 (score not available).

The One about MLK

Selma (2014/Ava DuVernay/128 mins/12A/7.5)



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. "A powerful, absorbing and thought-provoking film." Shown by the Club in 2016 (score 8.03).

The Top-rated film of our 2019 Season

Green Book (2018/Peter Farrelly/130 mins/12A/8.2)

A working-class Italian-American bouncer (Viggo Mortensen) becomes the driver for an African-American classical pianist (Mahershala Ali) on a tour of venues through the 1960s American South. "Pathos and humour in equal portions made a wonderful film."

A Spike Lee Joint

Do the Right Thing (1989/Spike Lee/120 mins/15/8.0)

On the hottest day of the year on a street in the Bed-Stuy section of Brooklyn, everyone's hate and bigotry smoulders and builds until it explodes into violence. The film Barack Obama took Michelle to on their first date.

Honourable mentions – Malcolm X (1992);

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967);

BlacKKKlansman (2017); *Get Out* (2017);

Loving (2016); *12 Years a Slave* (2013)

Comments and reactions to: **Top Gun: Maverick**

No of reaction slips received = 27

Average score = 7.41

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	2	2	4	4	9	2	4

Didn't want to see it but glad I came. Thoroughly enjoyed it!

All very slick, but where's the art house movie when you need one?

An excellent movie. Great storyline and a terrific end

Very exciting, in a non-involving way

Good action sequences. Usual Tom Cruise type of film. Enjoyed seeing it but wouldn't bother to again

Excellent. Enjoyed watching it for the second time

Not my sort of film but thoroughly enjoyed it

Enjoyed the film. It was a thrilling airborne ride

Great film. Pays homage to the original with exciting action and great cinematography. Effective characterisation and dynamics between the characters. More blockbusters, please!

It was good to see the film on a large screen but I found the elder Maverick character only slightly less annoying than the younger one. Not my sort of film.

The first Tom Cruise film I have seen. I'll not be rushing to see another

My first ever Top Gun movie and surprised how much I enjoyed it

A "boy's own" fantasy. Yet despite the stretched credulity (miraculous mission, old geezer flying at high g-force), clichés (football on the beach as team-building, enemies becoming friends) and broad-brush characterisations (Maverick by name..., grizzled veterans, old flame) a thoroughly entertaining and amiable film, best seen on a big screen.

Exhilarating

A blast from the past

Thoroughly enjoyable

Excellent film!! Love Film Club

Enjoyed this film immensely

Amazing flying

Position	Film	Average score
1	Where the Crawdads Sing	7.83
2	Living	7.62
3=	Mrs Harris Goes to Paris	7.58
3=	Downton Abbey – A New Era	7.58
5	Empire of Light	7.46
6	Top Gun: Maverick	7.41
7	The Lost King	7.38
8	Dog Day Afternoon	7.15
9	The Banshees of Inisherin	7.06
10	Parallel Mothers	6.83
11	Rams	6.40
12	Three Colours: Blue	6.18
13	Vagabond	5.88
14	Decision to Leave	4.59



Forthcoming attraction: 9 May 2024 – **The Guilty**

A masterclass in wringing breathless tension from just a few key ingredients.

The Observer

Taut abduction thriller The Guilty pares drama to its bare bones and fires up the audience's imagination in the process. Daily Mail

Godard said that all you need to make a film is a girl and a gun. Well, with his smart and mercilessly gripping abduction thriller, the Danish director Gustav Möller has pulled it off with a middle-aged man and a hands-free phone.

Guardian