

Revisiting “Moonlight”

A Film that Challenges Toxic Masculinity with Beauty

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Four years ago, Barry Jenkins released *Moonlight*, a film that was praised for its heartbreaking yet beautiful story of a young man trying to find himself and coming to terms with his own sexuality. In a time where discussions of representation and social matters continue to prevail, I would like to revisit one of the best films that tackle this topic head on.

For me, *Moonlight* is a work of art. It is one of the best films I have seen that deals with complex social issues, yet is tackled and portrayed elegantly. *Moonlight* deals with some heavy stuff pertaining to race, gender, sexuality and class. But considering the fact that these are hot and controversial topics in contemporary society, this film could not have come out at a better time.

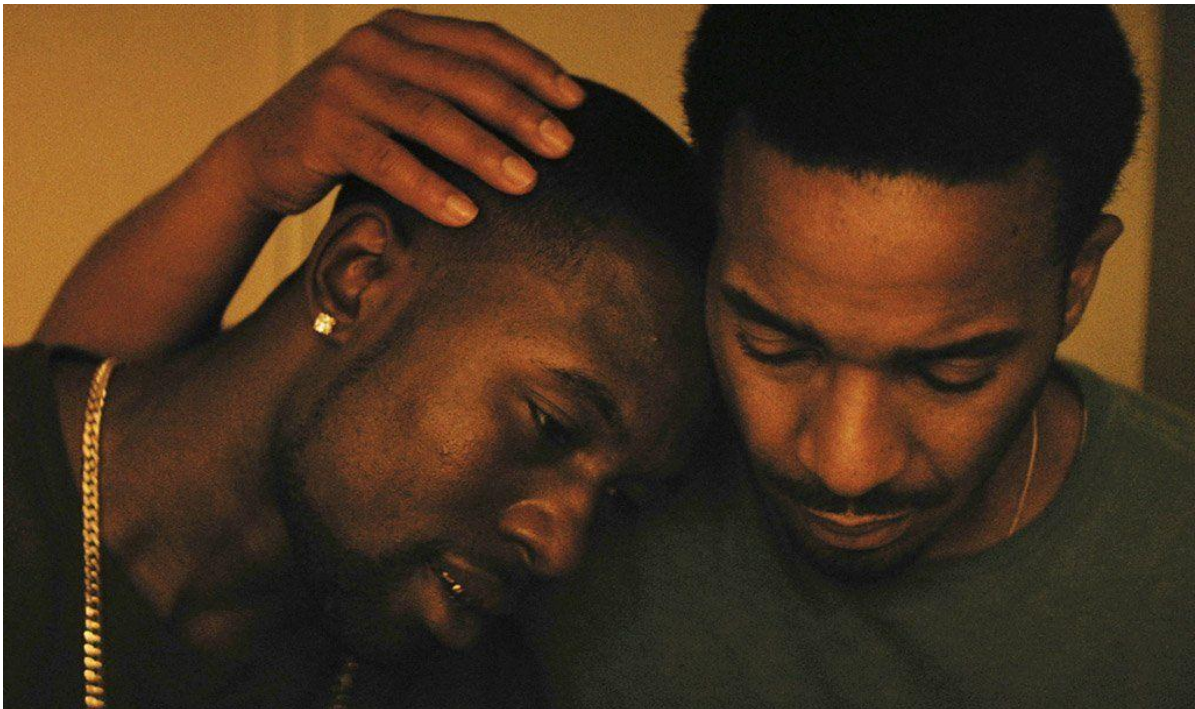


Juan teaching young Chiron how to swim.

Jenkins cleverly structure of the story, which is a significant aspect that shapes the film's message. The film is divided into three acts, pertaining to the stages in the main character, Chiron's life. Throughout these acts, Chiron undergoes profound changes and growth in his character. He transforms from a small quiet boy, to an awkward unsure teen, and then to a muscular, withdrawn and mature man. His relationship with his own sexuality and masculinity greatly evolves, and his story challenges many notions that have long been enforced by Black toxic masculinity. As such, Chiron's

evolution is a pertinent example of how a film such as *Moonlight* can have such a powerful impact for having nuanced portrayals and discussions of sexuality and gender roles. If the film was not structured in such acts, I feel there would be a lot missing in terms of nuances because no such evolution would be visible.

Jenkins' specific aim in telling the story of *Moonlight* was to challenge the way Black males have long been represented, and also to challenge how Black men are expected to behave within their own community. The film "queers" Black masculinities to show that there is such thing as gay Black men. That the story of gay Black men should be told. Likewise, the way Jenkins queers Black maleness in this film allows people to move away from simplistic and dichotomous reductions of Black men, and to broaden an understanding of the complexities of masculinity. I found that this film does an excellent job at prodding at the very subtle things that we take for granted with regards to our own ideologies surrounding gender, that is actually causing much harm. It shows the very toxic nature of hegemonic masculinity for what it is. Then, it flips it and tells a different angle of it that has not been told before. *Moonlight* shows that, beneath the mask that Chiron has to wear to survive in the world he lives in, is a sensitive man who yearns for intimacy.



Kevin comforting Chiron.

Moonlight's aesthetics and cinematography are astounding. Jenkins' cinematography shows that, despite the many disadvantages and negative experiences that the characters face in the film, there are still great moments of beauty and intimacy that

are motivated by the need for love. That even despite the most painful things, there can be moments that are joyful and beautiful. Jenkins' tackles a bleak and depressing social issue with a romantic and sensual aesthetic approach.

The astonishing visuals with bold and bright colors and dreamy soundscapes all fit with the emotional nature of this film. For example, the ocean sounds, the images of two men together in a car, one person's head resting in another's hand, are all used as visual and aural motifs to create a hypnotic rhythm and to add emotional texture. I would love to see more films with as much thought put into it like *Moonlight* be released. This film shows that there is a critical need to rewrite the narratives of masculinity in popular media. Jenkins does not hold back in showing what the characters truly feel in the film. He shows vulnerability, and shows the sides of a person that no one typically sees on screen.

This film is a wonderful example of how aesthetics and technical aspects of a film can be extremely powerful in framing new ways of what a human can really be.

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