



FILM: **JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH**

FDG RATING: 3.1 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Shaka King: *director*
Daniel Kaluuya: *actor, Fred Hampton*
Lakeith Stanfield: *actor, William O'Neal*

DATE: July 18 20, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH**

Judas and the Black Messiah is actually a dual bio-drama focusing on the true story of assassinated Black Panther activist Fred Hampton (chairman of the Illinois chapter) and his "Judas", William O'Neal, a former petty criminal who had been arrested and "turned" by the FBI with instructions to rise up through the Black Panther ranks and provide inside information. He's the ordinary guy who came from the same streets as Hampton, but gets in over his head. One published critic described him as "sympathetic or even romantic in his patently doomed career of treason: visibly thrilled to be taken to dine by FBI Roy Mitchell, for a lavish steak-house lunch on the Bureau's tab or invited to Mitchell's house and allowed to drink his scotch; never in denial exactly, in fact excruciatingly aware of the danger, but never facing up to what he is doing." A convincing portrayal of O'Neal, Lakeith Stanfield was nominated for 2021 best supporting actor.

Daniel Kaluuya won the 2021 Oscar for best supporting actor in his portrayal of charismatic Fred Hampton, on a mission to unite a "rainbow coalition" of people of all races against a common enemy.

One published film critic noted that Fred Hampton's preternatural ability to bring potential enemies and rivals together made him dangerous to an America all too happy with the racist status quo.

O'Neal tells his handler, Mitchell, that Hampton could sell salt to a slug. But one film discussion participant was shocked that his performance merited the award and others agreed that Kaluuya's enactment lacked charisma. It was hard for us to imagine the film version of Hampton amassing such a strong following leading us to wonder why Kaluuya got the best supporting actor Oscar

Of course we meet the Martin Sheen version of J. Edgar Hoover, who took an active role in trying to squash any type of Black attempt to force the country to provide equality. Rogerebert.com panned this portrayal saying "under so much makeup he looks like a melted candle, and he gets the film's worst scene, stopping the momentum cold with dialogue that references the Korean War, protecting one's family and the possibilities of Mitchell's eight-month-old daughter dating a Black man."

Another resident reviewer was uncomfortable with the subject of the film as well as the on-screen violence admitting it is definitely a tragic story. On the flip side, one discussion participant said it was a solid film that educated us about Fred Hampton if we weren't familiar with his life; the dual nature of the story, following two people at the same time with pretty much equal attention was interesting, well done with strong acting by the two main men as well as the other characters.

We get to see a little flirty romance between Hampton and Deborah Johnson but several discussion participants thought this love interest was the weakest part of the film.

As for Stanfield's performance, several discussion participants thought his representation of O'Neal was more compelling than the actual person. Evidently, he was very young when recruited to be an informant. It would have added a deeper layer of insight into the psychology of betrayal if we had a better understanding of O'Neal's dilemma.

According to some participants, the second half of the film is more interesting. That's when the FBI 14-person heavily armed raiding party burst into the apartment, firing almost a hundred bullets at the nine Panthers inside. Hampton was assassinated on December 4, 1969, exactly 20 months after the last "Black Messiah," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed.

Lots of violence, confrontation, and brutal scenes made a couple discussion participants stop mid film and turn it off. We protested this historically significant, violent story about betrayal, praised by many but not all renowned critics, with a weak 3.1 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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