



FILM: **KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON**

FDG RATING: 4.5 😊😊😊😊😊

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

Martin Scorsese: *director*
Lily Gladstone: *actress, Mollie*
Robert de Niro: *actor, William "King" Hale*
Leonardo DiCaprio: *actor, Ernest Burkhart*

DATE: December 17, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON**

Lots of Oscar buzz for the 2023 historical, Western crime drama, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, directed by Martin Scorsese and featuring a stellar cast including Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert De Niro, Jesse Plemons, Brendan Fraser, and lesser known actress Lily Gladstone. who will deservedly be nominated for an Oscar for her stand-out performance. (She won best actress Golden Globe). Gladstone was raised on the Blackfeet reservation in Montana for the first decade of her life. She plays, Mollie, a member of the Osage Nation, who tries to save her community from a spree of murders fueled by greedy white opportunists who want to steal the mineral rights to the Osage oil rich land.

In the early 1920s in Fairfax, Oklahoma, after oil was discovered on tribal land, the Osage tribe became the wealthiest group of people in the country per capita. William King Hale, (outstanding performance by De Niro), a charismatic but deceitful, wealthy white cattle rancher, who prefers to be called "King", schemes to take over their wealth by marrying into the Osage families and murdering the women. He poses as a friendly benefactor of the Osage, speaking their language and bestowing gifts, gaining their complete trust as he assumes the role of resident sheriff. He convinces them they need life insurance policies to protect their wealth and lines his pockets with their insurance payments. One published film critic describes Hale as "the kind of sociopath who can sell murder with a smile: He doesn't stab you in the back. He looks you in the eyes as he does it."

The story plays out in a very long 206 minutes but is continuously compelling as we watch how methodically and deceitfully Hale carries out his unscrupulous self-fulfilling scheme. Hale summons his nephew, Ernest Burkhart, (Leonardo DiCaprio), a World War 1 veteran, to come to live in Osage county, knowing he can be easily manipulated. Ernest starts as a driver for the wealthy Osage, which leads him to being a driver for Mollie. The two marry just before Mollie's family and other members of the Osage population are murdered one after another. Mollie travels to DC to ask for an investigation into the murders but it seems as if no one is interested in investigating. Eventually, agents from the Bureau of Investigation (BOI) arrive on the reservation just in time to rush Mollie to the hospital since she had been extremely ill in bed, under suspicious circumstances. This finally triggers the BOI (now known as FBI) investigation into Hale and Burkhart's crimes which leads to the ensuing trial.

Several discussion participants commented that watching the film felt like we were observing from within. Another said it felt like we were complicit because we could do nothing while the horrendous injustices were blatantly taking place in front of us. We all agreed the cinematography was outstanding with each scene beautifully captured. The costumes and sets looked very authentic. And the amazing scene when a house on the reservation explodes in a wall of flames; it seemed as if shadows that appeared in the flames were of Osage ancestral spirits. There were other visually powerful scenes with ancestral spirits such as when Mollie's mother sees the owl foreshadowing death. We really liked Mollie's character: proud, stoic, strong, rarely showing any emotion.

It was very uncomfortable watching Mollie repeatedly needing to request permission from the white conservator when she needed to use her own money to buy medicine for her ailing mother or to travel to Washington, DC to speak with President Coolidge about the murders. These scenes underscore the guardianship that Mollie and the Osage Nation were living under since the Osage natives were declared "incompetent" because they didn't pass a competency test introduced by Congress in 1921. Extreme racial prejudice permeates many scenes when the white folks are gathered, such as at the dinner table when one man comments, "Look at the little savages."

The ending was unexpected, showing a radio show in the 1940s recounting the events that became known as the Osage "Reign of Terror", but sadly, all the emphasis is on the heroics of the Bureau of Investigation agents as the American government used the investigators' solving of the murders as a way to further bolster its organization's reputation and power.

An epic film depicting the devastating brutal murders, injustice, mistreatment, and theft of wealth and property suffered by the Osage nation, at the hands of greedy, unconscionable, white opportunists, *Killers of the Flower Moon* collected a bold 4.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com