



FILM: **MOONLIGHT**

FDG RATING: 4.3 

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

Barry Jenkins: *Director*  
Mahershala Ali: *actor, Juan*  
Alex Hibbert: *actor, Little*  
Ashton Sanders: *actor, Chiron*  
Trevante Rhodes: *actor, Black*

DATE: January 22, 2017

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MOONLIGHT**

Moonlight peels away the macho layers of the “hood” to tell a tender, heartbreaking, very human story that questions the nature of manhood and explores emotional bonds. How tough are you supposed to be? How tender? Can you be both? And how are you supposed to learn? It is a powerful film that roused our deepest emotions as we watch 10 year old Chiron, known as “Little” struggle to find his identity and become a man while growing up in an impoverished Miami neighborhood. He is neglected by his drug addict mom, basically has no father, is surrounded by drug users and dealers, and is the target of school bullies who want to beat up the small, shy, soft-spoken boy who in their eyes is a faggot. Little is alone, vulnerable, withdrawn, and confused. But rather than the seedy underbelly of life, it is the tender human connections that dominate the film.

After shielding him from being attacked by school bullies, local drug dealer, Juan, (the epitome of “hood” buffed masculinity complete with gold teeth and ostentatious jewelry) takes Chiron under his wing. Juan and his girlfriend offer Chiron the warmth, nurturing care and protection that he didn’t have at home although Chiron is slow to trust this unfamiliar expression of caring.

In a luminescent pivotal scene, Juan teaches Chiron how to swim in the ocean which could just as well be a surrogate father’s lesson in how to live, how to trust.

Juan is contradiction personified, almost the ultimate sad resolution for a man who seems to have much more to offer and much more potential than his polluted life has afforded him. The same goes for Little. There really aren’t many options.

We witness the coming of age of “Little”, in 3 acts, first in middle school, next as “Chiron” in high school, and last as “Black,” when he is an adult in his late 20s/early 30s. Black has assumed the persona of Juan, the only mentor he had.

Sexuality is a rippling undercurrent as Chiron discovers who he is, experiencing his first (and only) intimacy on the beach with his one school friend, Kevin, and then in an extremely emotionally moving scene, reconnects with Kevin as an adult.

Undeniably, the acting of the entire cast was powerful and achingly compassionate. The film is filled with contradictions, revealing a soft core of inner city life we didn’t expect.

Some resident critics couldn’t buy into the final transformation of Little who looks like a big, tough drug dealer. But the rest of us saw the macho exterior as a mask for the real person inside who had been emotionally shattered when he was sent to prison for beating the boy who had bullied him. In prison, Chiron works hard to build himself into a tough, physically imposing man.

Captivating dreamy cinematography, gritty poetic realism, personal and intimate, with beautiful classical musical scores overlaying a tender emotional story, Moonlight is not at all what we expected. It’s a story that stayed with us when we left the theater.

We gave Moonlight a shining score of 4.3 that including numerous 5s on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer