

Reviewing 'Killers of the Flower Moon'

Anya Farwell dives into the rich history of this movie

by Anya Farwell, Editor

When buying a ticket to see "Killers Of The Flower Moon," I had no idea the story I would be leaving with. The new movie directed by Martin Scorsese, and adapted from the book "Means Well" by David Grann, is based on the true story of a dark and shameful time in American history. With a run time of over three hours, and a star-studded cast of Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, and Robert De Niro, this Western drama is nothing short of spectacular.

The movie follows the Osage Native American Tribe, and the murders and crimes waged against them in the early to late 1920s in Fairfax, Oklahoma. The Osage tribe, before settling in Oklahoma, resided in Kansas, but after American settlers encroached on their land, they negotiated and came to a settlement with the Cherokee, buying 1.57 million acres of land.

The Osage, after moving to Oklahoma, were troubled with the infertile land but struck gold when they discovered natural oil reserves in the early 1900s. During this time, many tribes held mineral rights and were sought after by many of the white people living in Fairfax, adding additional tension between the differing social classes.

The story, adapted to the screen, follows an Osage woman named Mollie Burkhart, played by Lily Gladstone, and Ernest Burkhart, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, at the time of the murders. Ernest is a discharged soldier who comes to Fairfax in search of a job and is helped by his Uncle, played by Robert De Niro.

Throughout the entirety of the film, the Native American representation is outstanding, having upwards of 8 indigenous actors starring in the movie. When watching the film, you feel as if you have been transported back in time. The costumes, made by Jacqueline West, are superb; representing Native American heritage with bright colors that are authentic to the time, as well as simple Western clothing worn by many of the men in the film.

Much of the film was shot in Osage Nation land, and Washington County, namely the towns of Pawhuska, Bartlesville, and Fairfax, the original town where the murders took place. Set designer Jack Fisk brought old Fairfax to life, focusing on innate details fitting for the time. Director, Martin Scorsese, has spoken out about his passion for this movie, and the story behind it. Making the vision into a stunning work of cinematography that audience members can live through.

It is believed that during the time of the Osage murders, between 1910 to 1930, more than 60 Osage people were murdered. When these crimes first began, many Osage sought help from the government, trying to hire private investigators, but no help was spared until the late 1920s, when Allen White a Federal agent, played by Jesse Plemons, was assigned to the case. The Federal Bureau of Investigations was established in 1908, but it wasn't until the Osage murders that the bureau dealt with a case as large, speculating that this case gave birth to the FBI.

Although rave reviews followed the premier of the movie, many members of the Osage Tribe who were in attendance at the film's premiere have spoken out about their disappointment with its release. The entirety of the film follows the lives of Ernest Burkhart and Mollie Burkhart. Although the film takes into account the perspectives of both these characters, many Osage were troubled with how the story of their history was told, saying that much of the movie was from the perspective of Ernest Burkhart, a white man, not Mollie, an Osage woman.

Although they give much thanks to director Martin Scorsese for telling the story of the Osage, drawing the country's attention to this dark time in American history, they wish the story was told by one of their own entirely, as well as directed by one. From the Oklahoman, according to the language consultant for the movie, Christopher Cote, the film was not intended for an Osage audience, but more to educate others on the history of the Osage. Another piece done by NPR interviewed current members of the Osage Nation about the impact the movie had on them. Many said that the movie gave them a way to revisit the past and face their grief.

Looking at past Native American representation throughout Hollywood, the feelings of the Osage Nation only make more of a message. With movies based usually around historical events, such as "Killers Of The Flower Moon," only a small percent of the cast is actually Native American or has Native American descent. Hollywood over the years has made meager progress in how Native American representation is portrayed on screen.

If you take a look at the Disney movie Pocahontas; although the story is centered around the twisted love story of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, who in the movie goes by the name of John Smith, a white American settler, Native American characters in the movie are closely portrayed as violent savages.

The movie gives an inaccurate account of her life, being a child bride, along with romanticizing the trauma and destruction colonization did to the Native American population. This film, as well as others, follows the pattern and the centric views and stereotypes that have shaped the outlook people have on the Native American population in the film industry.

"Killers Of The Flower Moon," I can say with certainty, is a movie that rivals the stereotypes of old Hollywood. Taking into account the small size of the Native American cast, the movie still rivals many out there. Scorsese, throughout the entirety of the movie, did an outstanding job telling the story of the Osage Nation, depicting each scene from the tellings of the book, as well as history. With its gripping story, characters, costumes, and setting, this film is everything including a step in the right direction.