

‘Little’ Squanders Its Comedic and Social Potential in an Attempt to Play It Safe

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on April 14, 2019 - 3:08pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – After a typical late night, deep dive of the internet, I found something terrifying. Around the 60’s, creating dinners in Jello were popular for some reason. Although I liked every individual ingredient, seeing the way they fit together was a less than appetizing. Watching “Little” reminds me of this experience except after the film, I was left with a bland, spiceless taste in my mouth.

With a strong cast of black, female actresses, I had certain expectations when going into this film. Obviously, I had hoped that there would be a message of female empowerment at the forefront, especially since the three main actresses have recently been part of productions that have emphasized that, most notably Regina Hall in last year’s indie hit “Support the Girls”. I’m ecstatic to report that this aspect was more than well-represented, which made the baffling part about why the black perspective was so underplayed/underutilized. Don’t get me wrong, you do get more than a few jokes at the expense of white people, and while those jokes were funny, they were ultimately the equivalent of low-hanging fruit.



Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Each of the three mentioned main characters has been in shows or films that are at the forefront of depicting the black experience, especially

for women. Regina Hall, Marsai Martin, and Issa Rae are all part of productions that not only comments on the disparity among the races, but also the inequalities that plague women even today, with films like the underrated "The Hate U Give", and TV shows like "Insecure" and "Black-ish". The few jokes that were about race lacked any of the potential social bite that you have come to expect from the talent involved and instead felt placating and toothless.

In a comedy, you're only as good as your jokes, and while there are a few gut-busters, many felt like empty calories. Screenwriters Tina Gordon and Tracy Oliver both have experience writing roles for strong, black women with films like "What Men Want" and "Girls Trip", respectively. Many will go into this film expecting the latter, but getting the former. "What Men Want" provides a perfect example for why "Little" fails, and that's because they both use essentially the same, safe comedic formula. The jokes have no edge, which could have easily been gotten if either film pushed the social commentary in their films. That is why "Girls Trip" is far superior because it wasn't afraid to break stereotypes or play into the cliches that we have come to expect from comedies.

When it does come to the little attempts at social commentary that "Little" does offer, it mostly separates the gender from the race. The emphasis is clearly placed on the female perspective with the main plot of a female CEO having to be twice as brutal as her male counterparts to achieve close to the same level of success. This is undeniably true, but you know what would have made it even more relevant? Incorporating the fact that she struggled not just because she was a woman, but a woman of color, making her achievements that much more incredible. Instead, they start off by framing adult Jordan Sanders (Regina Hall) as a typical, classist rich person that uses terms in a pejorative context like "ghetto" or "hood", especially when referring to other people of color. The film seems to be afraid to fully talk about the black experience probably because of how abrasive it may come off to white theater-goers. The example that sticks out in my mind the most is the continued gag of having white people touch little Jordan Sanders' (Marsai Martin) hair. Sure, she angrily slaps their hand every time but not once does she ever explain (for the audience's education) why you not only never put your hands on another person without their consent, but also the long, racist history of why you never touch a person of color's hair.



Photo credit: Universal Pictures

This is Tina Gordon's sophomore entry as a director, but like her debut film "Peeples", she shows us that she has mastered the art of broad comedy and nothing else. The pacing feels uneven, mainly because the jokes that are meant to keep the tempo feeling brisk contains many slumps. At almost 2 hours, the film feels at least half an hour too long for the tepid resolution at the end. Not even the gorgeous outfits and muscular eye candy is enough to keep us from checking out watches throughout. The few musical sequences do liven things up, but they are too few and far between. Even the dated film influences like "Big" don't do "Little" any favors, but just provide the stale template that the film ends up following.

That being said, the performances are the only things that give this film any sense of uniqueness. Although most of the characters consist of played out tropes we've seen so many times before, actresses Hall, Martin and Rae create the perfect comedic couplings that keep this film moving. Each of them adept at comedic timing and joke delivery, their individual personalities help naturally punch-up every joke, even the ones that would have otherwise fallen flat. Their presence made a BIG difference in the film, but it was all the LITTLE problems that overwhelmed and ultimately dated the film. I'm sure if everyone could go back and do things differently, they would.

"Little" opened everywhere on April 12th. Featuring Regina Hall, Issa Rae, Marsai Martin, Justin Hartley, and Tracee Ellis Ross. Directed by Tina Gordon. Written by Tina Gordon and Tracy Oliver. Rated "PG-13"



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