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## Naz & Maalik

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## Naz & Maalik

### Abstract

This is a film review of *Naz & Maalik* (2015) directed by Jay Dockendorf.

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### Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



*Naz & Maalik*

(2015)

Written and Directed by Jay Dockendorf

Coming of age is a difficult time in a young person's life for just about everyone. Sexual awakening, relationships with family and friends, peer pressure, religion and cultural influences, and trying to figure out what you want the future to look like are all elements in the process which we call "coming of age." We hope that young people can get through this process without too much long term damage.

But, if you live in Brooklyn, are black, gay, and Muslim, coming of age takes on an entire set of new obstacles. And this is where we find Naz and Maalik, trying to figure out who they are and where they are going as two young black men, who are both gay and Muslim. And, all of this is complicated by the fact that Naz and Maalik have come under suspicion by the FBI and the NYPD, just because they are black and Muslim. Are they terrorists? Are they associated with any terrorist organization? Are they planning any violent attacks on the United States of America? *Naz & Maalik* examines issues of religious identity and sexuality, during a time of heightened suspicion and ever growing threats of terrorism.

All of this could be dealt with in one overly dramatic moment after another. But, the movie presents more of a slice of life, a real life as *Naz & Maalik* is based on true events. It presents Naz and Maalik in the situations we would expect them to experience in a rather ordinary way. This does not make coming of age any less difficult, but it does give the viewer a better sense of how Naz and Maalik experience the elements of their lives that will determine what their futures will be like. This gentle approach to the lives of Naz and Maalik does not gloss over the difficulties they face, but it does keep the focus upon two young African-American Muslim teenagers coming of age under unusually difficult circumstances.