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The Sleeping Negro

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Abstract

This is a review of *The Sleeping Negro* (2021), directed by Skinner Meyers.

Keywords

Racism, Woke

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The Sleeping Negro (2021), dir. Skinner Meyers

Several films in this year’s Festival have been about identity, one’s own or that of others. This film is a welcome addition to the list of identity films. The “sleeping negro” is one whose identity has been coopted by the white world. The sleeping negro seems to be integrated into the white world. The sleeping negro seems to be successful, but only in the terms of the white world. The sleeping negro fails to understand how different he or she is from the white world, even while believing that they are doing well. The sleeping negro is disengaged from the struggle of Black people in an unjust world.

The opposite of the sleeping negro is the “woke” negro. The woke negro is someone who is aware of the systemic injustice in American culture and all that such injustice means to people of color. The woke negro recognizes injustice and the damage such injustice does to Black people, even when they think they are doing well in a white world.

The main character in this film, identified only as “Man” in the credits, finds himself living successfully in a white world. But he also cannot be himself in that white world. When the Man recognizes that he is not himself living in the white world, he must face the task of finding himself in the world of injustice. He is, like most human beings, struggling to find a place in the world where he can be comfortable, where he can be himself and not the person others want him to be. The movie suggests that this struggle, for all of us, is an ongoing struggle. It is life.