

Detroit: Film Review

Written by Kam Williams
Thursday, 24 August 2017 13:12



Claustrophobic Docudrama Revisits '67 Riots through the Prism of Infamous Interrogation at Algiers Hotel

Detroit's '67 riots broke out in the wee hours of July 23rd, in the wake of a police raid on an unlicensed bar where folks had been toasting a couple of vets who'd recently returned from Vietnam. Word spread like wildfire through the Black community that the cops had arrested all 82 people they found inside, and it wasn't long before mobs began looting and firebombing stores all around the 'hood.

The rebellion would last five days and result in over 1,000 injuries and 7,000 arrests, while also claiming 43 lives. In terms of property damage, about 2,500 businesses were destroyed and hundreds of families were left homeless.

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The insurrection was quelled by the Motor City's police force in conjunction with the state of Michigan's National Guard as well as federal troops from the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions. While the arrests at the speakeasy ostensibly served as the flashpoint for the civil unrest, the revolt was really the result of long-simmering frustrations with the poor quality of housing, employment and education in the ghetto.

Directed by two-time Oscar-winner Kathryn Bigelow (for *The Hurt Locker*), [Detroit](#) revisits the '67 riots by telescoping tightly on events which unfolded at the Algiers Motel on the third night of the rebellion. The picture features an A-list ensemble that includes John Boyega, Anthony Mackie, John Boyega, Will Poulter, Jacob Latimore and John Krasinski.

The trouble started when a sniper seemed to be taking pot shots at the police stationed a block away from the Algiers. Truth be told, it was just 17 year-old Carl Cooper (Jason Cooper) firing a harmless starter pistol.

Nevertheless, reasonably assuming they were under attack, officers returned fire before storming the hotel's three-story annex. Emptying the rooms, they found a dozen guests, two 18 year-old white girls and 10 Black males, including members of The Dramatics, The [Motown](#) group whose biggest hit was "Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get."

The guests were herded into a first-floor hallway where, over the next several hours, they were threatened, humiliated and sadistically beaten during a prolonged interrogation being directed by Patrolman Krauss (Poulter). The White females were stripped naked, and called "whores" and "[N-word] lovers."

No gun was ever found, but by the end of the torture three Black teenagers lay dead: Cooper, Fred Temple (Latimore) and Aubrey Pollard (Nathan Davis, Jr.). Newspapers reported that they were snipers who died during an exchange of gunfire. But autopsies revealed each had been shot from behind at very close range.

Detroit is very difficult to watch, since it's basically a searing snuff flick which forces the audience to witness the deliberate persecution of innocent civilians at the behest of a racist

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redneck with a badge. Riveting revisionist history setting the record straight in a way which will undoubtedly resonate with the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Very Good (3 stars)

Rated R for graphic violence and pervasive profanity

Running time: 143 minutes

Production Company: Annapurna Pictures / First Light

Distributor: Annapurna Pictures

Detroit DVD and Blu-ray release date is estimated for November 2017. It will be available on amazon.com, co.uk and .ca

About the author of this review: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the *New York Film Critics Online*, the

NAACP Image Awards Nominating Committee

, and Rotten Tomatoes. He is a contributor to TheLoop21.com, eurweb.com and so on. He is also a columnist for our webmag

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. One of his interviews made the cover of *Heart and Soul*

magazine last fall. One of Kam Williams' interviews with Spike Lee is included in the 2002 book entitled

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. This book collects the best interviews of Lee. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese, French and Spanish. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the

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. In addition, he has been honored at the U.N. (for BMORENEWS GLOBAL FORUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT) on June 15th 2012 by the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations (FSUN). Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a BA in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, and a J.D. from Boston University. Recently, he was featured on this website:

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