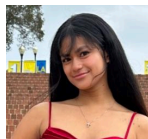


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## SIT BACK AND STREAM

# "YOU PEOPLE," REVIEWED: A SIMPLE ATTEMPT AT DEPICTING THE COMPLEXITIES OF INTERRACIAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

*Kenya Barris and Jonah Hill's new film struggles to show the struggle of a romantic relationship with different backgrounds.*



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In *You People*, director Kenya Barris and writer Jonah Hill attempt to navigate the interracial and interreligious soon-to-be marriage of Ezra (Jonah Hill) and Amira (Lauren London). However, parents from both sides stand as the source of difficulty for their future inlaws; Ezra's mother is tone-deaf and insensitive while Amira's father disapproves of a white man for his daughter. This movie attempts to find a balance between opposing family dynamics in viewpoints of race and religion, but leaves discomfort instead.

Right from the beginning, I questioned what was going on. It opens with a voice clip from the pop-culture and race-focused podcast Ezra co-hosts with his best friend, but the clip startlingly asserts an inharmonious living experience. The friend says that people have been trying too hard to be inclusive towards black people, and when the Confederate flag was taken out of Nascar she said, "no, let them have that." This entire movie follows Ezra, a white man, who gets engaged to Amira, a black woman, and their attempts at getting their families to understand them and each other. Beginning the movie with such a clear opposing stance left me in a state of confusion.

Ezra is single at the start of the movie and the only way he could describe himself is in what form of Drake he was embodying. He is *Views* Drake, then *Certified Lover Boy* Drake, then *Take Care* Drake, then even Pusha T (while he asks his friend to be "more Future to [him]"), then "Houstatlantavegas" Drake and finally back to *Certified Lover Boy* Drake. While this aligns with the nature of his podcasts, it drags on for far too long. Trying to show how 'in tune' with culture Ezra is, references are cringey and forced.

This is not the only instance where attempts at cultural references lacked the subtlety they needed to land well. During a Yom Kippur celebration in Ezra's Synagogue, the scene pans over the feet of the attendees, showing Ezra's bright blue Jordans against a sea of black dress shoes. A later scene shows Ezra and his friend discussing how Ezra needs someone who can "milly-rock with him," followed by

Amira's introduction by a pair of her turquoise Jordans. Later, the pair buys matching Air-Maxes as a symbol of their relationship - a relationship saved at the end when Ezra's mother lures Ezra back to the store by claiming a need for Dunks. The store the couple both buys the Air Maxes in and gets married is called "Kulture." Shoes become a symbol of connection between cultures, but this symbolism is blatant and boring. The superficiality of it mimics the surface-level characters that wear them.

The premise of this movie focuses on race and religion, but it overcompensates and reduces the characters solely to that. Lacking any depth - I could rewatch this movie without Ezra's Dad, Ezra's brother, Amira's Mom, and Amira's brother and feel nothing had changed. Even Amira herself, despite being half of this couple, was not delved into character wise. She mainly exists to provide a reason for the tension between Ezra and her father and a point for Ezra's mother to direct her insensitive comments to.



Despite these characters being merely outlines, they manage to be unlikeable. It's natural to find flaws in characters involved in a conflict, but these flaws feel too prominent. It's difficult to feel sympathy for a man that does not try to establish a genuine connection with the parents of the woman he loves, but compulsively lies to appear likable instead. Amira's father who existed solely as an unbearable instigator while Ezra's father can be summed up in one word: aloof. However, Ezra's and Amira's

parents try to act with their child's best interest in mind (even if it leads to adverse consequences) and Ezra and Amira earnestly attempt to get along with their narrow-minded in-laws (even if not by the most truthful method).

This film attempts to show the difficult navigation of interracial and interreligious relations that are shadowed by assumptions and racism. While it may stimulate discussion, that discussion would be based on the film's failure in effectively tackling these topics - from characters reduced to race and religion, to stereotypical representation of different people in media, to religious or race based scenes that are too uncomfortable for the viewer to watch.

The scene of Ezra in the Synagogue mentioned earlier is the only scene where Ezra interacts with Jewish people outside of his family, and snippets of those interactions include "You're not dating anyone? You don't like getting p\*ssy?" and "How's your penis?" Making the Synagogue feel as suffocating as possible is the assertion that Ezra's religion is too disconnected from him, but portraying Ezra as a non-devout Jew should have been done differently. This was a lousy and thoughtless attempt that can easily find itself in antisemitic discussions, which is ironic considering one of the goals of the movie is to build the bridge between different religions. Another unbearable scene was when the two families were arguing over whether or not slavery and the Holocaust were comparable over dinner, which is not only uncomfortable to watch as a viewer but it is also difficult to imagine this occurring in reality.





*You People* completely wraps up in the last ten minutes of the film in a manner that is too easy and too quick. Ezra's father antagonized Ezra for the entire film, yet his brother's comment that he was too harsh led to a sudden change of heart. The reconciliation between Ezra and Amira was even more laughable, for after the apology of their in-laws suddenly they were subjugated to the surprise wedding their parents had set up with minimal direct interaction with each other. The overly-quick conclusion suggests that issues of race and religion in relationships can be solved as quickly, when in reality there is so much complexity that requires much more effort.

I'm not completely surprised with this ending, for such surface-level characters lacked the depth to delve into something more complicated. *You People* pitted flat characters into forced conflict that was unable to mimic the struggles of interracial and interreligious dating - for Ezra and Amira's simplistic relationship, a simplistic conclusion can work, but this is nowhere close to reality.