

## **‘Detroit’ examines a powerful, disturbing tale of injustice**

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
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**Rating: ««« out of 4 stars**

**Running Time: 143 min.**

The 1967 Detroit riot was one of the largest displays of violent civil unrest in the United States up to that point in history. Motivated largely by racial discrimination and mistreatment, mobs formed in the streets, leading to clashes, confrontations and devastation. The new film *Detroit* comes 50 years after the real-life incident and specifically deals with the horrific and disturbing actions that took place between police and citizens taking refuge at the nearby Algiers Motel.

Admittedly, the opening is a tad more awkward than it should be. There's an animated intro setting up events in US history, then a raid that ultimately led to the unrest, loads of news footage as well as additional scenes of looting and protest. Obviously, the intent early on is to put perspective on proceedings and establish a tone of chaos and instability. However, it's a lot of material, some of which isn't entirely necessary. In fact, a little more trimming wouldn't have hurt the film. It feels like a good 20 plus minutes before all of the central players and story come into focus.

Still, if one can be patient through the somewhat choppy early sections of the film, it soon becomes incredibly compelling. Once the story introduces viewers to the participants in more detail and places them at the motel, the film turns into a completely harrowing experience. Those involved include an aspiring singer Larry (Algee Smith), his friend Fred (Jacob Latimore) and Viet Nam veteran Greene (Anthony Mackie).

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After a fake gun is fired within the property, local police, state troopers and armed militia Guardsmen arrive to assess the situation. A violent, racist officer named Krauss (Will Poulter) takes control, brutalizing the hotel guests and intimidating other officers into following his lead. Unwilling to get involved, the outsiders keep their distance as events spiral indoors. Local security guard Dismukes (John Boyega) attempts to alleviate the tensions and ask for cooler heads to prevail. Alas, no one on the side of the law listens.

The cast are uniformly excellent and its impossible not to identify and empathize with the protagonists as they are tormented and tortured by Krauss. He's as nasty as it gets and lacks some subtlety. However, it is interesting to witness how amidst flawed and fearful characters, one particularly awful and aggressive individual can take control and manipulate a situation. There's a palpable sense of dread almost like a horror picture throughout the middle of the film. However, the situation is far more disturbing and brutal because of its feeling of authenticity. Director Kathryn Bigelow ( *The Hurt Locker* ) excels at amplifying the tension and handling the action beats, resulting in a truly visceral experience.

Dismukes is also a detailed and multi-faceted character, as he tries to walk a tightrope between doing his job, trying to minimize the damage as well as stay on the good side of authorities, which ultimately backfires and ends up getting him in trouble. Again, there is unending drama and danger for most of the people involved, with devastating consequences for those held under martial law.

This is certainly a button-pushing experience, bound to provoke anger and indignation at the injustices that were committed for no discernable reason. The ugliness on display is difficult to sit through at various points. Sadly, it is also a story that is still relevant today. Overall, *Detroit* is a distressing and brilliantly acted feature and it's hard to deny its emotional impact. Hopefully, it will also promote empathy, understanding and discussion amongst viewers.

***By Glenn Kay  
For the Sun***