

Martin Scorsese, director. *Killers of the Flower Moon*. Apple Studios, 2023.

In the film adaptation of David Grann's book by the same name, renowned filmmaker Martin Scorsese explores the Osage Indian Murders and the 1920s "Reign of Terror" in Oklahoma. While the exact death toll is unclear, estimates place the number at over 100 murders between the 1910s and 1930s. Focusing on convicted murderers Ernest Burkhart and his uncle William Hale, the story is told primarily through the lens of white men. This narrative choice offers a window into the mechanisms of exploitation but simultaneously limits the depth of the Osage perspective. As the film garners accolades, it prompts reflections on the complexities of representation, underscoring issues not uncommon when retelling stories of native communities in America. Understanding the history is crucial to grasp the full impact of these events. The Osage Indian Murders were not random isolated crimes; they were part of a long history of displacement and systemic racism.

After the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Osage's 1871 relocation to northern Oklahoma marked their third displacement in forty-six years. This relocation was unique because the Osage purchased and owned their reservation outright. The land was then distributed to individual members, but mineral rights remained the collective right of the tribe. These mineral rights were allocated equally to each of the 2,229 Osage on the tribal rolls in 1907. When they found themselves at the heart of a massive oil boom, it was through these rights that profit was distributed on a per-member basis called a "headright." These headrights made the Osage incredibly wealthy, prompting the federal government to establish a guardianship system to "protect" their wealth. Unsurprisingly, it often became a racist tool, with non-Osage individuals appointed to oversee tribe members considered too incompetent to manage their finances. These headrights explain the motives for the Reign of Terror. Money attracts nefarious individuals like Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his uncle, William Hale (Robert De Niro).

Hale is a local businessman involved in town politics and shady schemes to exploit headright profits through the guardianship system. He manages to get Ernest married to Mollie Kyle (Lily Gladstone), a wealthy Osage woman. Shortly

thereafter, Mollie's family and several individuals from the Osage community began dying under mysterious circumstances. Predictably, their headrights are inherited by local white lawyers and businessmen. Ernest, in particular, benefited greatly from the deaths of Mollie's family, who were primarily women, because Mollie inherited their headrights. Ernest controlled much wealth as her guardian, with only one obstacle – Mollie.

At 3 hours and 26 minutes, *Killers of the Flower Moon* is for those who appreciate a detailed epic. It is a visually striking film, and the actors' performances, notably Lily Gladstone as Mollie, keep the viewer engaged. It is a recommended watch for anyone interested in history, true crime, and filmmaking. Despite the scope of its appeal, it has some shortcomings. Scorsese focuses on the viewpoints of Ernest and Hale. This relegates the direct experiences of the Osage people to the margins of their own story.

Often, the viewer feels compelled to sympathize with Ernest even though he is a vital cog in the machine enacting murder. It also portrays the Burkhart's relationship as one in which there is reciprocal love. Most people are of the persuasion that you cannot love someone while simultaneously trying to poison them for monetary gain. Here, Mollie's perspective would have been valuable. Scorsese never touches on why she found Ernest so safe or why she even married him. While pleading to authorities for justice, her suspicion was never directed toward her husband. Was she so blinded by love for this man that she believed him through the worst of it? Through Scorsese's lens, their marriage is essentially a testament to the powers of manipulation and self-deception. To be fair, perhaps Ernest's perspective is the most appropriate for this director to tell the story. At the same time, this brings up the issues of access and opportunity. It is hard to imagine that another director would have received free rein coupled with an astronomical \$200 million budget. While it underscores the challenges inherent in adapting complex historical narratives to film, this movie is still a compelling portrayal of a seldom-told period of history.

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