

## ***Is They Cloned Tyrone a Warning?***

**By Melissa Marin**

Are we being controlled by the government through mind control? Are predominantly black communities meant to be kept "ghetto"? Do we have any say in our actions in society or is everything predetermined for us? These ideas were hardly considered in the black community until *They Cloned Tyrone* was brought to light. The movie uses a drug dealer, a pimp, and a prostitute as a heroic trio who unfolds a heinous government scheme that uses mind control and manipulation on minorities to keep them suppressed. *They Cloned Tyrone* by Juel Taylor is a movie every black person needs to see. Through the use of a fictional neighborhood with real world problems, the viewers are able to examine the disturbing reality of generational poverty/constant suppression and empower individuals to challenge the status quo.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The movie kicks off in a 1980-90s fictional neighborhood called the Glen, where it is clearly portrayed as lower class in a predominantly black community. Showing off his versatile skills, British actor John Boyega plays our main character Fontaine, a drug dealer. Fontaine is this tough, stubborn, "doesn't take disrespect" kind of character who we basically never see smile. Fontaine is shot and killed by a rival gang leader after collecting money from one of his customers, Slick Charles, the pimp played by well-known actor Jamie Foxx. Now Jamie Foxx did something with this character. There have been many pimps played in movies but his chatty, wannabe "hard pimp" character executes his lines so well with a charismatic charm leaving a memorable

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performance. Along with his stylish 70s fur and satin outfits, I do not think anyone could have played Slick better.

Questioning why they would kill the main character, we are cut to a scene where Fontaine then wakes up gasping for air as he checks his chest and is *alive*. He proceeds to repeat the same day (somewhat like *Groundhog Day*) without having any recollection of the night before. To convince Fontaine of his death the night before, the three now pursue to find the vehicle YoYo, the prostitute, saw take Fontaine's body. YoYo, played by Teyonah Parris is like an improvised Velma with a Nancy Drew heart making her the soul of this movie while using her impressive detective skills throughout. Foxx and Parris's chemistry is strongly shown throughout the movie, their comedic duo and charm is unmatched bringing a comedic relief to this sci-fi film. This leads them to an abandoned home where they stumble upon a freaky underground laboratory with a white technician in an afro. After accidentally setting off the alarms, YoYo and Slick try to grab Fontaine to rush out of there, until they all stumble upon a table with a black garbage bag over what appears to be Fontaine's dead body.

As Fontaine is contemplating life and his existence, the three further investigate around town, which leads them to another underground laboratory. This time they go in disguise, allowing them to fully explore the lab. But what they didn't realize was the size of this organization. They have stumbled upon the main entry to a whole underground operation/lab the size of the whole Glen controlling them through drugs, mind control and surveillance of the whole town. Through further investigation, they find a whole room of cloned Glen residents! This scene absolutely blew my mind. The dark violet and blue colors tones known to be related to introspection and

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supernatural elements were perfectly used in this to show just how crazy this operation is and the staggered emotions these three were feeling.

After Fontaine and Slick give up on pursuing the operation, YoYo tries to take matters into her own hands, causing her to get kidnapped by the organization. To save YoYo, Fontaine and Slick come up with a plan to fool the white-controlled surveillance that keeps a constant watch over their neighborhood. As Fontaine and YoYo are underground, Slick is rallying up the whole town with weapons to take over this underground facility, really uniting the community to finally take control over something. I really enjoyed this scene because it's rare to see everyone be heroes and come together as one to fight for what they believe in. Back underground, Fontaine is taken to the lead geneticist and mastermind, who is none other than the original Fontaine! OG Fontaine believes "genetic assimilation is better than annihilation," meaning he could slowly dilute black ancestry to create a predominantly white population where everyone is "truly equal." But after killing the original Fontaine, the rest of the Glen release all the clones from their kept capsules and let them wander around town as everyone comes together to reunite with their family and help the lost clones. We are then cut to this new Fontaine, new hairdo, new environment, and new clothes repeating a similar day like in the beginning of the movie. This time he is watching the news with some friends where the Glen is being broadcast, showing all the clones from the town. The TV shows a clone of Fontaine where it causes all of his friends to turn and look as one says "ain't that you Tyrone?" And the movie ends just like that ....

*Wow.* This has got to be one of the best cliffhangers I have ever seen. Anything can be assumed after this ending, challenging the audience to think outside the box. Will there be a sequel explaining the different locations and clones' lives? Is there an OG Tyrone? Is there another

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mastermind in different locations? If Fontaine is a clone, is OG Tyrone the original? Is this potentially real!? With Tyrone finally being introduced it is implied that the director is trying to show that in “the hood” everything stays the same, no matter the location or time. There are ‘cloned’ personalities in our own communities like Tyrone. For example, in many lower income communities, there are gang members who go through similar aspects in their life leading them to all act and talk a certain way.

There are many stereotypical points made in the movie such as the choice and presentation in characters. The director chose to make the main characters a drug dealer, a pimp and a prostitute to standardize what kind of people live in these predominantly black communities. Their acting style as well was very dramatized and cliché to fit into the stereotype of how black people are expected to act and speak. Also, the brainwashing coming back to the church, fried chicken, perms, rap, were purposely used since they are all well-known items in black culture. The fried chicken scenario really stood out to me. It resembled the time when the Popeyes chicken sandwich first came out causing an outrageous demand which could have potentially been drugged. The director used predominantly black products like chicken to persuade you to be cautious of what you consume. Another example that stood out to me was the heavy influence of music, particularly rap on black people, which kept them in a trance that controlled their actions. The scene of the two men under a trance through music takes on a serious theme of the implication of violence through rap music. Music, mainly rap and hip hop, is a main part of a powerful cultural movement among the black community affecting the way they dress, speak, act and even think. Rap was originally used as a cultural response for oppression and racism dealt with for many years. But throughout the years, many view rap as less liberating and more dysfunctional as it impacts black culture more

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negatively than we thought. This film shows a different side on how our music is destroying us and causing more violence, attacking a real-world issue.

The first time Fontaine raids Slick's room, before he exits, Slick says “ why does it always have to be black on black crime. Black men are supposed to support they ni—as.” Throughout the film, we see how it touches on this dark complex topic of racial self-hatred usually seen in black communities. Since slavery, black people’s fight for social acceptability has been molded into their personality to hate themselves in order to fit into white standards. From perming their hair or changing one's skin complexion to even harming each other, as seen in the film, black people tend to fall into this self-destructive behavior just to strengthen their ego or be accepted. The film chose to make the original Fontaine, with the brain washed mentally that “white is right,” the mastermind behind the whole operation to show how blacks suppress their own kind. They use clones as a metaphor on how white people only accept black people if they conform to a white washed version of themselves to stay in their place in society. When introduced to Nixon (who cleans up messes for the organization), he puts Fontaine under hypnosis after he uses the phrase “Olympia black.” Nixon then tells Fontaine to point the gun in his mouth causing Fontaine to actually do it. He does this to show who's really in control and signify power, showing Fontaine his position in this whole situation. This movie shows how a white society resembles power, comfort and money. They keep power balanced by subjecting specific black communities to poverty and suppression.

As this movie allows you to perceive an idea of constant suppression and the negative mindset black people tend to have, it leans towards this idea of hope. The ending with all Glen residents uniting to destroy the underground organization is used to resemble a chance to break

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free of a cycle towards positive change. The movie uses a fictitious community to inform the viewers of the heavy influence of music, religion, and social norms in black communities. Sugar coating reality through an exaggerated version, it urges and empowers you to consider real world problems as we potentially make more cautious decisions.

Maybe it's the infectious acting from the three, beautiful color tones during important scenes, many comedic segments, confrontation of real world problems, or empowerment of hope but *They Cloned Tyrone* is a movie I would highly recommend for anyone to see!