



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on December 15, 2023

Barack & Michelle Obama Produce Netflix Apocalyptic Thriller Starring Julia Roberts

Planes falling out of the sky. Giant tankers crashing onto beaches. Swarms of self-driving cars colliding with vehicles on roads and freeways. Herds of deer spookily stalking humans. Ear-splitting sound waves from sonic weapons. People desperately fleeing cities. Drones dropping “Death to America” leaflets written in Arabic. These are but some of the frightening scenes from the apocalyptic thriller *Leave the World Behind*, released to streaming audiences by Netflix on December 8. You get the picture: chaos, death, destruction.



Netflix/YouTube

This new dystopian movie stars Julia Roberts, Ethan Hawke, Mahershala Ali, and Kevin Bacon, and is directed by Sam Esmail. But, perhaps the most interesting credits for the movie go to Barack and Michelle Obama, who are listed as executive producers. *Leave the World Behind* is the first fiction film to be produced through the Obamas’ Higher Ground Productions, which has previously delivered several award-winning documentaries and a Netflix children’s series.

Mixed in with the action, violence, mystery, and suspense is a propaganda subtext on race/class conflict and white privilege. “This is a rare story that deals with race, class, what it means to raise kids in today’s world, and how external events start to seep into our consciousness and create fears where maybe there shouldn’t be any,” Tonia Davis, who is head of film and TV at Higher Ground, said in the movie’s official production notes. “This is a story that doesn’t necessarily provide answers, but asks fundamental questions about how we live, how we think, and who we trust.”

The film is based on the 2020 novel of the same name by Rumaan Alam and reflects his obsession with (and hatred of?) wealthy white women. In interviews, Alam, the homosexual son of privileged Bangladeshi immigrants (dad an architect, mom a physician), expounds on the terrible white entitlement that he finds rampant in America. He talks much about his gayness, and with his “husband” has adopted two black boys. As with his first two novels, *Rich & Pretty* and *That Kind of Mother*, Alam writes from the perspective of wealthy white women who embody his idea of the systemic subliminal racism of white entitlement. In *Leave the World Behind*, Julia Roberts’ character Amanda fills the role of the white “Karen” that seems to dominate Alam’s view of American society today.

The Obama connection to *Leave the World Behind* does not portend a happy resolve for race relations in our country if Michelle Obama becomes the Democrats’ hope for the White House in 2024. A Michelle Obama run is very likely. Her ghostwritten 2018 autobiography *Becoming* was a bestseller; her national book tour was made into a 2020 documentary under the same title and is still being promoted and shown on Netflix. The Obamas have reportedly signed a multiyear, multimillion dollar deal with Audible, following up on their just-concluded multiyear, multimillion dollar deal with Spotify.



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