

"★★★ 1/2"

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DYED-in-the-wool New Yorkers looking for a fast, breezy trip to a very foreign planet should head straight for the Thalia, where "Crossing Fields" opens today.

No, this quirky independent isn't a high-tech, sci-fi flick, although entering the cloistered world of the Bradley family is like landing on Mars.

Carol Bradley (Reedy Gibbs) is a plumpish, 40-something Midwestern housewife who lives life by the book — the good book.

Life is lily white until Carol takes the bold step of inviting

a young, unthreatening African-American man named James (William James Jones) to board so he can save money for college.

The family's most liberal act ever quickly spells doom for their Waltons-like lives.

Mom's all-but-dead libido is slowly reawakened as she watches him doing outdoor chores — his shirtless, pumped-up bod melting away layers of oppressed sex drive.

Of course, she can't do anything about it and has to watch in painful silence as her rebellious teen daughter (Meadow Sisto) and her best friend (Gwynyth Walsh) end up seducing him.

Carol's fury over the affairs soon turns into curiosity, and she and James become close friends. But as her sexual angst grows, she's faced with the inevitable question of will-I-or-won't-I.

Writer/director James Rosenow could've taken the easy way out by using the film to make fun of this little world of "silent majority" oddballs.

But after a half-hour of letting us laugh at them, Rosenow grinds into high gear, letting the characters explain their quirks. At the end, we're all family. Few films these days have that kind of insight.

A lot of the magic is thanks to Rosenow's highly spirited cast, anchored by Gibbs and Sisto, who are also mother and daughter in real life. Gibbs' feisty yet fragile turn as a tortured matriarch ranks as one of the best female performances of the year.



Bill Hoffmann

CROSSING FIELDS

★★★ 1/2

Starring Reedy Gibbs, Gwynyth Walsh and William James Jones. Written and directed by James Rosenow. Running time: 101 minutes. Unrated, but contains nudity and salty language. At the Thalia, 250 W. 95th St. at Broadway.