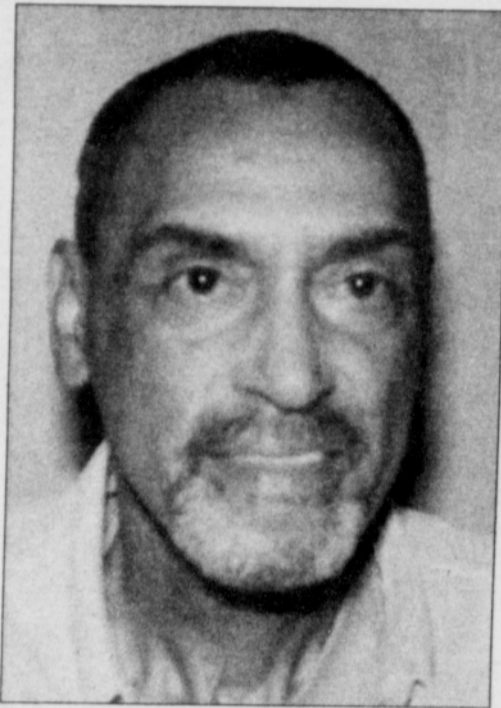


In Loving Memory

William Ernest Penson

William Ernest Penson, a track star at Jefferson High School and a member of the championship team of 1962, died April 17, 2013 from complications of lung disease. He was 70. His look was peaceful as he left our presence to be present with the Lord.

He was born April 15, 1943. He had a knack for spreading laughter no matter what life brought his way or what path he took.



He leaves behind many memories, mostly in Colorado, Arizona and Portland where he returned to reside for over two decades. He was preceded in death by his parents, Dorothy Mae and John Lee Penson; and siblings, Nettie Marie Penson-Westbrook, and John Lee Penson Jr.

He is survived by his oldest sister Barbara Penson-McDade of Denver; children, Tamara Kay Penson-Tolbert, William Shawn Penson,

Corwin Deon Jack-Penson, all of Vancouver, twins Deborah Jane Penson-Sampson and Gregory Wayne Penson, both of Portland, and William Derek Penson of Philadelphia; 10 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins; an honorary daughter Nadine Bolden of Portland; and a host of friends and acquaintances.

Remembrances may be made in care of Bank of America. A memorial celebration will be held Friday, April 26 at 2 p.m. at Celebration Tabernacle, 8131 N. Denver, with Pastor Mondainé officiating. Please join us!



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Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Mind. Altering

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lar capacity for telling stories with immediacy, our movies recount the history of slavery from a certain historical remove. We tend to soften the inhumanity, for example, with prominent white heroes (as in "Lincoln," which I did admire very much, or "Amazing Grace," about the movement against slavery in England). As important as these stories are, they don't confront us with the legacy of past oppression.

With "Django Unchained," Tarentino has used his admiration of and facility with such discounted genres as spaghetti westerns and blaxploitation films to lure multiracial audiences (and in places like Portland, largely white audiences) to invest nearly three hours looking at aspects of our relatively recent past that we have declined or even refused to face. As he has himself pointed out, one cannot make a film as lurid as slavery was in reality. Slaves are whipped; chewed to death by dogs while bystanders watch; made to walk, chained, on bare bloody feet for days; and kept in burning holes to die of thirst.

Watching the film, I found myself reflecting on where I might have fit into the diabolical social hierarchies enforced among slaves based on their physical attributes.

Would I have been one of an army of house slaves, working above all else to blend into the machinery? Would I have been a virtual farm implement, toiling in the fields but subject to sexual exploitation at a moment's whim? Would I have lived in relative comfort and been dressed as an elaborate sexual toy, only to have children ripped from me and later to be cast off when my beauty faded? This is how humans being treated as property lived a mere 150 years ago, and it's brutal.

Also, in giving us a black hero who provokes audiences to cheer as he mows down white oppressors (who are the ancestors of many of us), Tarentino may well have subliminally provoked us to notice that no such vengeance

ever occurred and given us the experience of wishing for it.

Further, his film not only depicts something never before imagined on screen; it conveys some things about how oppression works. A lurking question that troubles many people about slavery is why the black slaves didn't simply rise up and kill the whites; Tarentino puts that question (stated ironically) in the mouth of a vicious slaveholder and then devises a freedman superhero to do just that.

But the film also demonstrates the real answer to the slaveholder's ironic question: that the system of oppression functioned so as to ensure that such a freedman superhero (or even a

another version of the necessary white hero in a story about black oppression.

Schultz is a German and he is not out to fight slavery. This is not his fight; he is out to make money. He winces at slavery's brutality because it is not his brutality; he is not part of this system in the way an American necessarily would be. His motivation to collaborate is less heroic, more practical and more believable. He is not a stand-in for white Americans. He is necessary to the plot (he buys and then frees Django), but the essential fight belongs to Django.

As Tarentino has matured as a filmmaker, he has begun to turn his penchant for filming violent revenge stories to more ambitious purposes. In "Inglorious Bastards," he created a clearly fictional revenge fantasy against the Nazis, which was dangerous enough -- but that story is not our American story in the same way this is. Here we are the subject of the vengeance, we root for that vengeance. In this movie, we -- that is, Americans who benefit from our history of brutal slavery -

The mechanics of that system are depicted with uncommon insight; a hierarchy of white enforcers maintained and benefitted from the system in varying degrees.

modest uprising) would never happen. The mechanics of that system are depicted with uncommon insight; a hierarchy of white enforcers maintained and benefitted from the system in varying degrees.

Even more remarkably, we also see a player who has not been portrayed with this kind of perspicuity: the head house Negro Stephen, played by Samuel L. Jackson. The white vileness in "Django Unchained" is more familiar, and is certainly chilling -- but Jackson's character is a revelation. Far from a sympathetic Uncle Tom, his ruthless collaborator can also be an essential ingredient of oppression. He is terrifying; he also rings true.

I disagree with those who see in King Schultz (the character for which Christoph Waltz won his second Academy Award) just

- are the bad guys.

The first time I saw "Django Unchained," I was profoundly shaken by what I had seen. That seems to me an appropriate response to American slavery. I'm glad to have experienced it through the lens of this filmmaker; and to have sat in a theater of mostly white Americans who experienced it too, even if they may have not reflected on it as deeply as I did.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the worst and most unacceptable parts of slavery actually happened. To pretend that it didn't just get harder.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. A movie reviewer for over a decade, her column appears regularly in the Portland Observer. You can find her movie blog at opinionatedjudge.blocspot.com.