

Outrageous Military Conduct

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was supposed to report to a friend of the assailant, whose personal career incentives counseled against pursuing the matter.

A woman who worked as an investigator before she was assaulted herself notes that most of the sexual assault cases were assigned to men for investigation because women were viewed as too soft to accurately assess them.

All of these elements make for a system that facilitates and supports sexual predators. The film deconstructs how this all works; military ranks include a higher percentage of sex offenders than in the general population and, in fact, until recently sex offenders could easily obtain enlistment waivers. The insular nature of life inside the Armed Forces enforces a culture of secrecy in which speaking out or putting pressure on the system exacts a personal toll. Indeed, some of the most moving footage is of male family members of two of the female victims, who decided to speak on

camera at the risk of their own military careers.

The film notes that shortly after its release in April 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta issued a directive making a small but significant change to the handling of sexual assault cases that effectively ended the practice of commanders adjudicating those cases within their own units.

But there is a hopeful postscript that you won't see when you screen the film. The New York Times reported in January that the film has been credited with both persuading more women to come forward to report abuse and with forcing the military to deal more openly with the problem, and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 included a number of improvements to the military's handling of sexual assault cases, such as barring recruits with felony sex offense convictions from receiving enlistment waivers, improved record keeping in cases of military sexual assault, and the establishment of comprehensive sexual victims units with specifically trained personnel to

investigate and prosecute instances of sexual assault.

The history depicted in the film does not suggest that the systemic corruption that has led to a culture of sexual assault in the military is likely to end quickly. But all in all, this film is a brilliant expose' of institutional oppression and a calculated move to dismantle it.

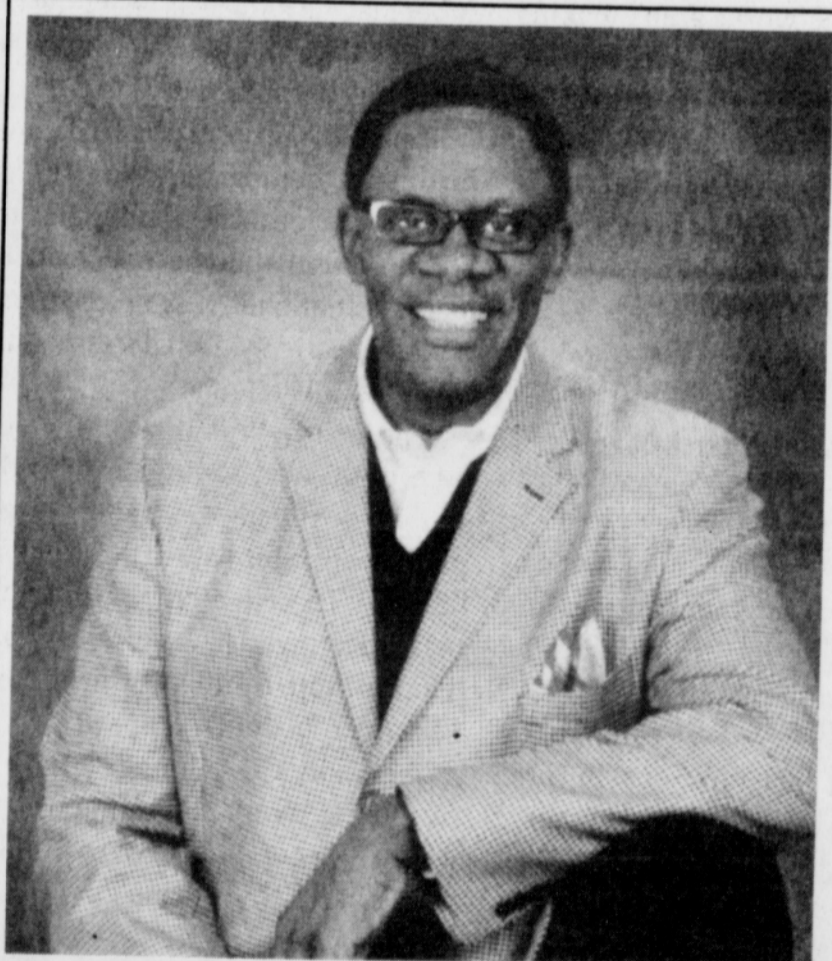
Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer. You can find her movie blog at opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com.

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