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'12 years a Slave'

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toll -- the challenge, for example, of maintaining any dignity or personal power while living subject to the whims and caprices of those who hold ultimate power over one's existence and define one as subhuman.

McQueen's focus on neglected stories also fits the story of American slavery itself. The number and quality of films exploring Hitler and the Nazis is practically encyclopedic in comparison to the relative paucity of films addressing slavery with even peripheral interest. If anything, American films reflect a tendency to minimize this foundational aspect of our history so pronounced that it rises to the level of a collective character disorder.

McQueen's film, then, represents an important corrective, handled with subtlety and courage. It will guide you to a kind of legitimate suffering, requiring you to not only observe moments of devastating brutality but also to absorb how unremarkable such moments were to slaves and their owners.

One of the more profound mo-

ments in the film involves a long, hot afternoon in which Northrup hangs from a tree at the very brink of asphyxiation, while slave children play in the background and the plantation abides in pastoral quiet. You may find, as I did, that the film holds you in a state of nauseous unease. As well it should. McQueen knows how to take a subject like this that is hard to look at, and to give you a reason to look. Each frame reflects a quality of intention that makes most Hollywood fare seem flippant by comparison, and John Ridley's screenplay (again, unlike most Hollywood fare) resists any temptation to explain or soften this challenging material. Ridley never relieves you of the obligation to grapple with complex truth.

McQueen uses longer shots than most films use, to direct your attention to things one needs to understand in order to absorb the human suffering in a difficult story. It is a kind of ministry of presence that the subject deserves from us but which few filmmakers attempt to evoke.

The film provides us with the means to reflect, for example, on what slavery did to the souls of even kindly slave owners, and

on the legacy of the many mixed children who emerged from slave households.

It provides a picture of the slave trade as it was really practiced. It offers a couple of potent examples of how plantation wives participated in the oppression of slaves, and provides an array of windows into a slave economy, finally putting the lie to the romantic illusions about the old South that Hollywood and, indeed, American history have pedaled for generations.

To watch "12 Years a Slave" is to participate in a collective deepening of consciousness that we desperately need in order to make sense of our present circumstances. It is art that asks something of the audience, for sure -- but it rewards that attention with images that will unsettle you in the way that only the best art does.

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.

Reception for new College Leader

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led PCC Voices of Soul Choir, a student processional highlighting the range of PCC programs and services, poem reading by faculty Michael McDowell, greetings by college faculty, staff and students as well as from the business and education community, gifts presentations and Brown's presidential address.

"It's a great honor to be here and participate today, and welcome Dr. Jeremy Brown to Portland and to the leadership of this great educational institution," Gov. Kitzhaber said. "Having served in leadership roles with major colleges and universities on the East Coast, I think Dr. Brown brings an impressive background to his new role as president of Port-

land Community College. He brings a very strong appreciation of the vital role that community colleges play here."

Brown took the reins of Portland Community College on July 1 after the retirement of Preston Pulliams.

A native of Manchester, England, Brown previously served as president of Dowling College on Long Island and Edinboro University in Pennsylvania, part of the state's public university system. An academic by training, Brown earned both his bachelor of science degree and his doctorate in physics from the University of Birmingham, England. His doctoral work in experimental nuclear physics was conducted at both the University of Birmingham and the University of California-Berkeley. He spent two

years at Indiana University pursuing physics research, followed by a faculty position in the physics department at Princeton University.

During his address, Brown said his father dropped out of school at the age of 13 so that he could help support his family financially and his mother did not attend college until she was nearly 40 years old. But both parents emphasized and recognized the value of education, so that their children, Brown, his brother and two sisters, would aim high and excel academically.

"I've come farther than I could have ever dreamed possible because of the opportunities offered to me through education," Brown concluded. "And I want those opportunities for as many future generations of students as possible."

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