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OPINION

Selma puts Lens to our Past, Present and Future

Depicting a shared legacy



BY TESSARA DUDLEY

The movie Selma is a story about the power of people. Ava DuVernay's portrayal of the historical Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights brings a much-needed human touch to our national remembrance of the Civil Rights Movement, infusing a story about politics, disenfranchisement and brutality with irrepressible spirit.

People from all walks of life celebrate and honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., watching his speeches, reading his letters, and writing about his dream. But in all of this, the man gets lost. His radical politics disappear beneath the comforting illusion of successful integration; and his personal struggles are erased.

The United States government also celebrates King, but with little acknowledgement for its own complicity in the hardships he encountered. DuVernay's film asks us to look at this shared legacy in the face: While we share his dream, we must also recognize the actions of our own government in deferring that dream.

In the first minutes of the film, we see Dr. King being presented with a Nobel peace prize. At the same time, a group of young girls are seen walking laughing and talking as they go down the stairs of a church. The viewer realizes with a sinking heart what is to come. The scene is shattered as the bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., unfolds.

The (thankfully) failed bombing attempt of the Colorado

Springs NAACP office only three days before Selma opened in theatres calls into question whether we have really advanced quite so far as many believe. The recent public scrutiny over police killings in cities across the nation also has parallels with the past that are hard to ignore.

However, the most compelling story of Selma is not the bombings, the peace prize, or the repression. What DuVernay has done is to foreground humanity. This film is about the flaws and struggles and sorrows and hopes of people; not just Dr. King, nor John Lewis, Bayard Rustin, or Hosea Williams. Selma is also about Cager Lee, James Reeb, and Annie Lee Cooper. It is about living. It is about fear. It is about courage.

In Selma, we see not only Dr. King, the legend, but Martin, the man; a human being subject to depression and anxiety, to sorrow and fear, to doubt and frustration. Here we see a young John Lewis, young in his adulthood, but already no stranger to struggle. And we see individuals like Annie Lee Cooper, Jimmie Lee Jackson, and Cager Lee; ordinary people engaged in struggle because they have no other choice. The pain of beatings and loss of loved ones is endured because it must be.

In this political moment, we are faced with a similar struggle, facing similar pain. As the world has watched the U.S. this past year, our citizens are once again being subjected to brutal police repression—to tear gas, to beatings, to senseless death. Watching Selma now evokes the pain and fear many have been living with daily.

During the film, one audience member responded vocally to the events playing out on screen, expressing visceral reactions to the trauma. These moments of pain are a part of our collective history, for good or ill, and the goals of the Civil

Rights Movement remain as relevant today as they were on Bloody Sunday.

While it would be possible for a film about such heavy topics to dwell in the pain, DuVernay's film instead ends on a victory note, with Dr. King's speech in front of the Alabama Capitol, the certainty of struggle balanced by an assurance of commitment.

The road to justice, though long, will lead us all to glory if we are willing to start, to take that first step, and the next, and all the steps after it. Working together, we can bring change.

At one of the Portland screenings of the film on the day it was released, the audience ranged in age from young people just entering adulthood to prominent members of Portland's black community who lived through the civil rights era. To a young activist, it felt vital to share that space with people of different experience levels. As Common raps in the film's anthem, "Glory," "No one can win the war individually; it takes the wisdom of the elders and young people's energy."

Despite the police violence rocking our nation today, Selma suggests that we can win if we root our struggle in the path laid by Dr. King, John Lewis, Bayard Rustin, and so many who came before. If we honor the struggle and commitment of our elders—we can find strength and pride in our history, and even hope.

Selma is a film for our times, a lens to see our past in our present, and our path to the future. You can change the world, it tells us. It is not just one person's story, it's the story of our community, ready for us to write the next page.

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Defeat Won't Have Last Word in Game Called Life

Russell Wilson will rise above the noise

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Far be it from me to join the legions of Monday morning quarterbacks for a game that has been, and will be, dissected for weeks and years to come. But whatever one may think of the outcome of the Seattle Seahawks' decision to have quarterback Russell Wilson throw from the 1-yard line in Super Bowl XLIX's nail-biting, final seconds, it accomplished something more than sealing the fates of two championship teams. It shifted our attention from "DeflateGate" and pre-game sniffles to Wilson—where arguably much of the focus before the big game should have been considering that this 26-year-old from Richmond, Virginia stood on the precipice of both NFL and American history.

Initially tapped by the Seahawks as a 2012 third round draft pick, Wilson, with the presumed limitation of his 5-foot-11 inch frame, was an underrated prospect and an undervalued entity. However, he emerged from his first season as the 2012 NFL Rookie of the Year—with his 26 touchdown passes tying the NFL's single season record by a rookie set in 1998 by Peyton Manning and the Seahawks 8-0 record at home making Wilson the first rookie quarterback in the Super Bowl era to lead his team to an undefeated home record.

By the 2013-14 season—only his second in the NFL, Wilson had led the Seahawks to the team's first-ever Super Bowl victory, making him only the second African American quarterback to win a Super Bowl (Doug Williams was the first in 1988) and cementing his standing as a new force in the NFL.

So, with a media landscape as vast and varied as ours, why



was this story drowned out by so much less-worthy noise in the days leading to the Super Bowl?

Whether you prefer to call it "DeflateGate" or "Ballghazi," the allegation of underinflated balls is a serious one for the NFL to investigate. The act itself strikes at the very heart of the game and its obligation to fairness. But for a nation known for its love of feel-good, inspirational stories, putting a spotlight on Wilson's history-making rise could have been a reminder that cheating allegations do not define the pastime—and that "nice guys" are champions too. However, as many

national conversation the morning after the NFL's biggest game would have been about Wilson being the youngest starting quarterback ever to win two Super Bowls, the only one to win two Super Bowls in his first three seasons and the only Black quarterback to have more than one Super Bowl ring. Instead, many people are discussing an ill-fated pass that Wilson refuses to become his lasting legacy. Making his feelings clear on his Twitter account, he responded that "At 26 years old I won't allow 1 play or 1 moment define my career. I will keep evolving. #Motivation."

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media chose to not focus on this angle, in the few words that I have here, I will.

Of course, there is more to Wilson than his prowess on the field. Last year, he launched "Pass the Peace," an initiative to raise awareness and money for victims of domestic violence through his "Why Not You Foundation." In an environment where the NFL remains under a cloud of scandal after a number of high-profile abuse cases, the story of Wilson's effort to help combat this insidious problem should be able to generate as much press interest as Marshawn Lynch's media stand-off or Patriots' QB Tom Brady's pre-Super Bowl cold.

If history had been on the side of the Seahawks, the

When Wilson was a teenager, his father, who died in 2010 from diabetes complications, would conduct mock interviews with him, asking him how he prepared for an imaginary Super Bowl in the future. This wasn't his first Super Bowl run—and I have a strong feeling it will not be his last. I believe Wilson will rise above the noise of the NFL and the media's silence both on-and-off-the-field and continue to make history.

The final-minute interception snatched a hard-fought victory from the Seahawks, but if Wilson's story speaks to us in volumes about anything, it tells us that defeat will never have the last word in his game called life.

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