



# Counterpoint to the Oscars



PHOTO COURTESY PARAMOUNT PICTURES.

David Oyelowo brings Martin Luther King Jr. to life in 'Selma.' The Oscar nominated movie for Best Picture came in at No. 1 on the list of Best Films of 2014 by Portland Observer film critic 'Opinionated Judge' Darleen Ortega.

## My top 10 films of 2014

I have even less interest than usual in making Oscar predictions this year; it's the whitest and most unimpressive slate of nominees in years, overlooking a particular wealth of absolutely amazing work, including some featured in the films below. But as is my tradition, I offer this list of the 10 best films of 2014 just in time to provide a counterpoint to the Oscars, with a little bit of Academy Awards commentary thrown in.

My three top films were hard to rank; I could make a case that any one of them was the best film of the year. The two I ranked first are underappreciated, and both happen fundamentally to be stories of heroic faith. They are followed by two films that have received and deserved a lot of awards notice. My list also includes three films that I first saw at last year's Portland International Film Festival (PIFF), two of which garnered Oscar nominations.

1. Of all the films on my list, "Selma" pulls off the most difficult and important storytelling on this or any list. The American film industry loves stories of dark chapters in

### OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE  
DARLEEN ORTEGA



other people's history (most notably Nazi Germany), but doesn't have much of a track record for producing films that wrestle competently with the troubled parts of our own, barely more recent history. Ava DuVernay deserved an Oscar nomination for best director for what she accomplished here: a depiction of an important chapter of American Civil Rights history which neither whitewashes nor oversimplifies, and which imparts a sense of the canny strategy, guts, and heroic faith that it took to win for black Americans rights already guaranteed to them by the Constitution. She has set the bar for future work in telling the scores of neglected stories of this part of our history. And David Oyelowo deserved best actor honors for presenting Martin Luther King, Jr., as a living human, a young man thrust into leadership with the skills to pull it off but also with flawed humanity.

As with any historical drama, valid questions can be raised about some dramatic choices (most notably about Coretta Scott King, whose depiction here likely diminishes her influence, though no more than has chronically been the case). But compared to most other fact-based dramas (including the Oscar-nominated "The Theory of Everything," "The Imitation Game," and, most

egregiously, "American Sniper"), "Selma" gets the balance right between facts and truth.

2. "Calvary" is the film that means the most to me personally. It is also a perfect depiction of heroic faith as it might be lived by the rare person who takes seriously what faith demands in daily life. I actually can't think of a film that deals with questions of faith in a more complex and challenging way-

-which may account for why it hasn't really received the critical reception that it deserves. What passes for faith, in life and on film, is too often way more packaged and safe than what is depicted here; this film is pitched perfectly between faith and doubt, and shows how heroic action often occurs in exactly that intersection. It's a film I will return to for inspiration again and again.

3. "Boyhood" has received universal acclaim--and that acclaim is, for once, well-deserved. By filming over the actual span of the lead character's childhood and making flexible and attentive use of that childhood in

*continued* ▼ *on page 20*

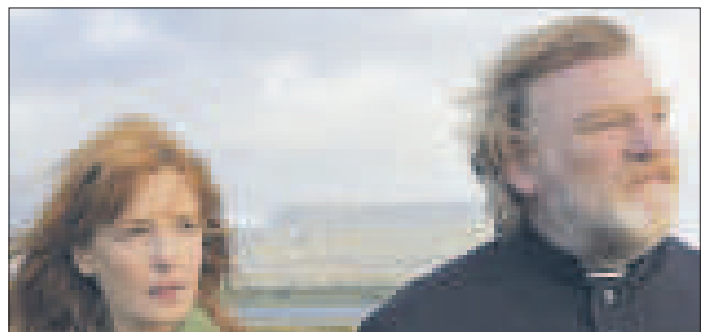


PHOTO COURTESY IRISH FILM BOARD

Kelly Reilly and Brendan Gleeson star in 'Calvary.' Portland Observer movie reviewer 'Opinionated Judge' Darleen Ortega puts the film at No. 2 on her list of Top 10 films of 2014 for its perfect depiction of the challenges and complexities of faith and doubt.