



"I Am Not Your Negro" uses archival footage of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to explore the racial violence that continues to permeate American culture.

My Top 10 Films of 2016

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"13th" is, in a way, the perfect companion to "I Am Not Your Negro," though I definitely don't recommend seeing them together. Director and co-writer Ava DuVernay (whose "Selma" topped my 10-best list in 2014) has assembled a comprehensive cinematic case for how mass incarceration came to be the most recent iteration of racism and oppression of black and brown people in the United States. The sheer volume of data and voices and analysis that DuVernay has marshaled to make this case clear is staggering; she has enlisted the insights of a host of experts, including Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, Bryan Stephenson, Henry Louis Gates, and many others, as well as abundant news footage and other evidence to connect the dots between the economic dilemma presented by post-Civil War Reconstruction, the lasting impact of "The Birth of A Nation" in sewing images of the menacing black man into our collective consciousness, the early use of incarceration as a tool for keeping black people in subjugation, the crime-scare tactics of the 1970s that manipulated the electorate into supporting the drug wars that multiplied the size of the U.S. prison population far beyond that of any other country. The impacts on communities of color who have lost generations of their leaders, whose families are decimated, and who have permanently lost the right to vote is illustrated with astounding clarity. In the end, this is more than the story of mass incarceration and race in America; it is a huge chunk of the truth of American history to which we have collectively blinded ourselves. With Peck's film, this is essential viewing for every American. [Nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; on at least 22 other critics' top 10 lists.]

"Two Trains Runnin'" is, sadly, the most obscure title on my list, though it was the best documentary that I saw at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festi-

val last April and played for two nights in Portland last fall. The very summer -- indeed, the very weekend -- that Andrew Goodwin, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner were murdered by the police and the Ku Klux Klan, two other groups of white men, oblivious to the extent of the dangers afoot in the South, traveled there in search of two obscure black country blues singers who had disappeared into obscurity. Using interviews, archive footage, and beautiful animated sequences, this wonderful film captures their improbable journeys, illuminates some important pieces of what happened during Freedom Summer, and illustrates the role of music in spiritual awakening. Keep an eye on the film's website and Facebook page for further screenings and, hopefully, a digital release; this one is too good to miss. [Not rated; should have been nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.]

"Fences": Many of us who love theater have reveled for years in August Wilson's rich explorations of the African American experience. Now audiences have their first shot at seeing his work on screen, under the very able direction of Denzel Washington and with a screenplay written by Wilson before he died. Wow. The cast is uniformly phenomenal, and Wilson has no equal when it comes to perceptively capturing the impacts of generational trauma on the lives of ordinary black folks. As with "Moonlight," this is deeply empathetic storytelling and rings with emotional truth. Absolutely as good as it gets. [Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, language, and some suggestive references; nominated for, and should win Academy Awards for Best Actor (Denzel Washington) and Best Supporting Actress (Viola Davis); also received nominations for Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay (August Wilson); on at least 22 other critics' top 10 lists.]

"Presenting Princess Shaw" was another of my favorites at Full

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