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TEACHABLE MOMENTS IN FILM

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

We often learn from movies. They can give you information about a story you never knew before, or a tiny morsel of truth that piques your interest in a subject encouraging you to learn more. Whatever it is that makes you learn something, films and art in general can offer teachable moments to those who view it in the simplest ways possible. But even better than that is when a character realizes something new and grows from it and we the audience are taken along for a ride. This is the third week of Black History Month, so it's only fitting that the list of teachable moments in film highlights Black stories and moments in history.



Amazon Studios

Teyonah Parris in a scene from "Chi-Raq" (2015).

"Best of Enemies" (2019) — While it's overly simplistic, the surprisingly true story about the desegregation of Durham North Carolina schools in 1971 is thought-provoking. It follows the lives of C.P. Ellis (Sam Rockwell), the leader of the local Ku Klux Klan chapter, and Ann Atwater (Taraji P. Henson), a Black civil rights activist, as they are forced to come together to decide if the town's schools should be integrated by heading a community meeting called a charrette. Eventually, Ellis begins to see that he and Atwater aren't as different as he first believed. The film is problematic in its chosen perspective of highlighting Ellis's come to Jesus moment and paints him too much as a kind

of white savior, writing off his history of bigotry almost immediately, but there is still a lot that can be taken away from the story. Stream it on Showtime or rent it on Amazon Prime, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"Chi-Raq" (2015) — This Spike Lee joint is ambitious and a little muddled, but the musical-dramedy based on Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" certainly packs a punch. Set in Chicago it focuses on Englewood and South Side gangs as they are at constant violent odds with each other. When their wives, girlfriends and other sexual partners become fed up with the bloodshed, they decide to teach them a lesson and withhold sex until the men come to a truce. Filled

with all the hard truths usually seen in a Lee film, "Chi-Raq" may not be his best, but is still worth the watch. Stream it on Amazon Prime or rent it on Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

"Just Mercy" (2019) — Based on the true

story of attorney Bryan Stevenson (played by Michael B. Jordan), it follows his early years as he worked to represent prisoners — usually wrongly convicted — on Alabama's death row and give them the justice

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