

Letters from our readers

8 January 2013

On “Quentin Tarantino’s *Django Unchained*”

Thank you for undertaking what I know was a painful task for you of viewing *Django Unchained* in order to subject it to your cogent analysis. Your review is a much-needed antidote to the reactionary barrage of confusion and hopelessness being imposed upon the population, expressed particularly by the films of Quentin Tarantino. As you have explained quite eloquently, there is an objective significance to the timing of the release of *Django Unchained* immediately after Spielberg’s *Lincoln*. Both films are responses, in different ways, to the social conditions and current political landscape.

I have a young niece who told me years ago that she thought *Pulp Fiction* was the best film she had ever seen. This was disturbing to me, since she is one of the sweetest and kindest people I know. Conventional thinking accepts all the social ills and attributes them simply to individual shortcomings. There are only the good guys and the bad guys, only black and white.

Tarantino’s misanthropic trajectory is described well in your review. *Inglourious Basterds* justifies fascist methods to fight Nazism. *Django Unchained* promotes brutal vigilantism, based on the premise that the source of racism and slavery was, and is, the bigoted mentality inherent in the majority of the population.

At a time when critical thinking requires, more than ever, a grasp of history to understand and prepare the working class for the emerging struggles, Tarantino’s work and his promotion as a great artist plays a deeply pernicious role. The brutally violent short-cut solution to social problems, as you correctly point out, is the stuff of fascism. The object of this ideological trend is to cut the masses off from their own history, the deep democratic and egalitarian spirit which is our legacy, and I am not just referring to Americans, from the revolutions both of 1776 and 1861.

You beg the question, “who is it that can be entertained by viewing such filth?” To some elements,

viewing *Django Unchained* may be an enjoyable experience because it confirms their own pessimism and hatred of the masses, but for the rest of the population, the warning implicit in your review should be well taken.

James B

5 January 2013

“If you watch *Lincoln* you might imagine that America slavery was a matter of debate and policy, that it was a matter of law, and that all white people needed to do was correct their intellectual error of categorizing personas as property.”

Stephen Marche doesn’t realize how ironic he is being with this statement. During the Lincoln-Douglas debates Douglas had said that slavery could not exist a day unless it was supported by protective local legislation. In other words, slavery *was* a matter of law. It was a subject of much debate—in fact the debate about the expansion of slavery into the American West was nearly continuous in the days leading up to the Civil War. And while the Civil War demonstrated that it would take more than an adjustment in the attitude of white people to correct the error of treating people as property (something which has not happened to this day) a change in attitude certainly would not have hurt the situation.

I believe Lincoln hoped the issue of slavery could be solved without violence but history took a different turn. Author Bruce Catton helpfully points out that slavery died out in the North not because white people in the North had a better attitude but because it simply did not pay. It did not pay because slavery was incompatible with the industrial revolution happening there and further, that it would eventually die in the South as industrialism spread to that region.

Catton also said that as the economy of the South depended on the institution of slavery its abolition would lead to the collapse of the economy there.

Southerners closed ranks not because they “had a physical reaction to black flesh” but because they had bills to pay. Catton says as a result, “It became first unhealthy and then impossible for anyone in the South to argue for the end of slavery”.

Catton puts it this way: “infinite change was beginning and problems left unsolved too long would presently make the change explosive, so that the old landscape would be blown to bits forever, with a bewildered people left to salvage what they could.. . .”

“At bottom, this change simply meant that the infinite ferment of the industrial revolution was about to work its way.. . .”

Karl Marx couldn’t have put it any better.

Phillip S

7 January 2013

On “Best films of 2012”

Thanks for this comment on *Lincoln*, which I would otherwise have ignored until it arrived on DVD.

Yes, Daniel Day-Lewis is a tremendous actor, always worth watching, but more central is that, however talky this film is, it very useful on how the 14th Amendment ending US slavery came to be passed.

Again, thanks for your film reviews, which have caused me to attend to several I’d otherwise have missed.

Siusaidh

3 January 2013

Editors;

I think you rate *Lincoln* too highly. Yes, Day-Lewis’s performance is sublime, brings *Lincoln* to life is exactly right. And it’s a very worthy film—so worthy!—but it is a dull film. The original review says, “It does not detract from the film in the least to point out that Kushner and Spielberg might have focused on several other moments in the long and bloody war.” Actually, it does. Spielberg needed something other than the three buffoons (James Spader, John Hawkes, and another guy), as comic relief, as the action. The script too was worthy. (It’s a worthy film!) But it is not a well-crafted film, and thus, for me, ultimately, fails.

(And the best scene in the film is its first. That’s always a problem.)

CW

4 January 2013



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