

SLAVE AND MASTER  
Jamie Foxx and Leonardo DiCaprio face off.

# Rewriting the Past in Pulp

Quentin Tarantino takes on slavery and, no shock, leaves blood on the tracks By Peter Travers

## Django Unchained

Jamie Foxx, Leonardo DiCaprio, Christoph Waltz  
Directed by Quentin Tarantino

★★★★½

WELCOME TO ALTERNATIVE History 101 with Professor Quentin Tarantino. In his last class, cataloged as *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino burned down the damn Third Reich, Hitler included. This time, with *Django Unchained*, he lines up slave traders so a black man can blow their fool heads off. Fuck the facts. Like Sergio Corbucci, who directed the first *Django* (starring Franco Nero), in 1966, Tarantino obeys the only commandment that counts in exploitation movies: Anything goes.

Who else but Tarantino would choose to target human trafficking in the form of a spaghetti Western set in the Deep South two years before the Civil War? And who else would do it to a wowsler of a soundtrack that includes a taste of Ennio Morricone, a mash-up of James Brown and Tupac Shakur, and original

songs from Rick Ross, Anthony Hamilton and John Legend?

*Django Unchained* is literally all over the place. It twists and turns over an unbridled two hours and 45 minutes, giving history (and your stamina) a serious pounding. It limps, sputters and repeats itself. It explodes with violence and talk, talk, talk. Tarantino's characters would be lost in the Twitterverse — there's no end to his tasty dialogue. Not that you'll care. You'll be having too much fun. *Django Unchained* is outrageously entertaining, an exhilarating rush. You'll laugh like hell at a KKK scene in which the Klansmen, wearing bags on their heads, stumble around blindly on their horses because the eyes on their bags have been cut out wrong. Look out for Jonah Hill as Bag Head No. 2. Unchain Tarantino and you get a jolt of pure cinema, dazzling, disreputable and thrillingly alive.

The plot kicks in when Django (Jamie Foxx on low simmer) is bought by Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), a German-born dentist-turned-bounty-

hunter whose wagon still sports a giant tooth. King is a great Tarantino character. Waltz, who won an Oscar for playing Nazi colonel Hans Landa in *Inglourious Basterds*, is again spectacular in his blend of mirth and menace. King needs Django to ID the Brittle brothers, varmints worth a huge bounty, dead or alive. His reward is freedom. But Django needs King to locate his enslaved wife, Broomhilda (Kerry Washington).

The slaughter starts when Django and King arrive at Bennett Manor, where even Big Daddy Bennett (Don Johnson, pimped out and loving it) can't stop the Brittle takedown. Job done, King advises Django to head off for a more enlightened part of the country. But Django won't rest till he finds his love. And so begins the journey, beautifully shot in sun and snow by Robert Richardson.

The final destination is Candyland, the slave plantation run by Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio, having a ball as a charming, posturing sociopath who trains Mandingo warriors for sale and sport).

Under the supervision of house slave Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson), Candie dishes out whippings, brandings, beatings, dog attacks and castration. "Is that a nigger on a horse?" asks Stephen, rubbing his eyes in disbelief as Django rides in. Jackson, the tormented soul of *Pulp Fiction*, is outstanding at locating the complexities in this Uncle Tom with an agenda.

At Candyland, Django finds Broomhilda nearly dead as punishment for an attempted escape. Django is coiled to spring, but holds back during a nerve-shattering dinner scene in which he listens as Candie and Stephen talk of Broomhilda as flesh for use and abuse.

When Django's revenge does come, it's a gore-splattering doozy. Foxx, giving Django his cool-dude props at last, morphs into a cowboy John Shaft and opens fire. There's something here to offend everyone. Revenge fantasies don't leave much room for moral lessons. Django is out for blood. So is Tarantino, but he doesn't sacrifice his humanity or conscience to do it. In this corrective to

*Gone With the Wind*, he sticks it to Hollywood for a Mandingo-Mammy fixation that leaves the issues of slavery out of mainstream movies. He sticks it to Spike Lee, who once objected to Tarantino's use of the n-word in 1997's *Jackie Brown*, by spraying the word like machine-gun fire. And he sticks it to pundits who think he crosses the line by reveling in Django's vengeance. Wake up, people. Tarantino lives to cross the line. Is *Django Unchained* too much? Damn straight. It wouldn't be Tarantino otherwise.

## On the Road

Kristen Stewart, Garrett Hedlund, Sam Riley  
Directed by Walter Salles

★★

A DASH OF TARANTINO might have juiced up Walter Salles' wrongheadedly well-mannered take on Jack Kerouac's 1957 Beat Generation landmark. Kerouac's semiautobiographical novel comes to the screen looking good but feeling shallow. Kerouac, here

called Sal Paradise and played by Sam Riley, hits the road with his pals to find a non-conformist America spiked by drugs, jazz and poetry. Hey, man. Sal's life spins around Dean Moriarty (Garrett Hedlund), a restless thrill-seeker based on Neal Cassady.

Dean, in bed with wife Marylou (Kristen Stewart), invites Sal to hop in. The sights of San Francisco, New Orleans and Mexico can't compete, especially when Dean hooks up with Camille (a stellar Kirsten Dunst) and hardly discourages the attentions of a poet (Tom Sturridge), modeled on Allen Ginsberg.

Got that? Didn't think so. Jose Rivera's script attempts to jam it all in while director Salles (*The Motorcycle Diaries*) keeps a hand-held camera whirling to suggest churning excitement. No deal. Hedlund and Riley do their best. And Stewart, free of *Twilight*, does better. She's a live wire. In the front seat of a car with Sal and Dean — all naked — she jerks off both boys with a joy that defines free spirit. The rest of *On the Road* feels tight and constricted.

## Not Fade Away

John Magaro, James Gandolfini, Jack Huston  
Directed by David Chase

★★★★

YOU EXPECT A HOT DOSE OF bada-bing, what with David Chase, creator of HBO's groundbreaking crime drama *The Sopranos*, making his feature debut as a writer-director. Instead, Chase offers a gritty, graceful salute to rock & roll. Like Douglas (John Magaro), his film's protagonist, Chase grew up in suburban New Jer-

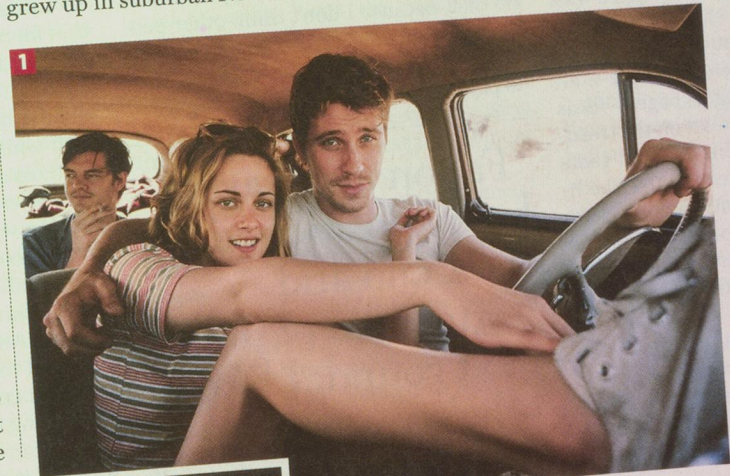
cote), and they comically and touchingly prepare for a fame that never comes. Home from college, Douglas debates his old-school father (a splendid James Gandolfini), who hates his Dylanesque hair and Cuban heels. Later, at a restaurant, when Dad confesses to an affair and a possibly terminal illness, father and son make a connection that is more heart-piercing for being so tentative. Chase shows a natural affinity for actors, who are uniformly excellent. The awkwardness comes in letting some of the stories

## Amour

Emmanuelle Riva, Jean-Louis Trintignant  
Directed by Michel

★★★★½

THE TITLE IS love. The movie, putably the year's language film front-runner, is. And it does. No sex, drugs or two people off total commitment both are Georges (Jean-



(1) Kristen Stewart, Garrett Hedlund on the road. (2) Amour for Emmanuelle Riva and Jean-Louis Trintignant. (3) John Magaro with LPs that will not fade away.

sey in the 1960s playing covers of Buddy Holly and the Stones in his garage. Unlike Douglas, Chase never went farther than his garage. But the impact of the music, the way it opened doors to a larger world that embraced TV, film, politics and renegade social change, never left Chase. His love for the period permeates every frame.

Douglas and his bandmates Eugene (Jack Huston of *Boardwalk Empire*) and Wells (Will Brill) vie for the attentions of Grace (a luminous Bella Heath-

breath at the expense of others, suggesting something lost in the cutting. The music, expertly curated by Steven Van Zandt, is in the film's DNA. Watching Antonioni's *Blow-Up* at a theater with Grace, Douglas complains about the lack of scoring in a silent park scene. "The trees are the music," Grace tells him. She knows the secrets that lie in the spaces between words and music. So does Chase. His ardent, acutely observed debut makes him, at 67, a filmmaker to watch.

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