

Film Notes

By Harriet Norman

Selma

2014 | 128mins

Director: Ava DuVernay

Starring: Carmen Ejogo, David Oyelowo, Oprah Winfrey

Ava DuVernay's *Selma* follows Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s (David Oyelowo) role in the organisation of the marches from Selma to Montgomery that pushed through the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The film explores King's relations with his family, close associates as well as President Lyndon B. Johnson (Tom Wilkinson) in the lead up to the bill's passing.

The first studio feature film to ever portray King as the main protagonist, *Selma* had long been in development. The British actor Oyelowo was first given a script to read back in 2007, and after being directed by DuVernay in her film *Middle of Nowhere* (2012), suggested she should direct *Selma*.

The numerous speeches for which King is famous had to be rewritten by DuVernay due to copyright issues, one reason which had long delayed the making of a King biopic. The combination of DuVernay's careful reworking of King's speeches and Oyelowo's acting skills succeed in recreating the rousing scenes that King's oratory powers inspired. Oyelowo sadly missed out on an Oscar nomination for his performance, as did DuVernay for Best Director, though the film did land a nomination for Best Picture.

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On the film's release, there was some criticism over the depiction of Lyndon B. Johnson's reluctance to pass the Voting Rights Bill. DuVernay countered this, stating that her job 'is not to deify what the president did' (Rolling Stone, 2015), but to craft a narrative that is more nuanced and grounded in truthfulness, making use of King's autobiographical accounts, rather than only those close to the former president.

The inclusion of a wider variety of characters and their differing objectives, as well as direct sources, helps enrich the historical accuracy of this film. DuVernay offers up a meticulous recreation of this time period, seeking not to idolize individuals but to show normal people doing the hard work and standing up for what is right.

'I had to become Dr King's speechwriter for a little while there which was very odd'

- Ava DuVernay

Excellent

Fair

Poor



What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

Please add any further comments here

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Did You Know?

- The rights to King’s speeches were licensed in 2009 to Dreamworks and Warner Bros entertainment for an untitled project to be directed by Steven Spielberg.
- *Selma* won Best Original Song for ‘Glory’ by John Legend at the 87th Academy awards as well as receiving a nomination for Best Picture.
- Much of the film was shot on location in the states of Georgia and Alabama, including the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.
- Congressman John Lewis, who was present for the marches, acted as a mentor and historical consultant to DuVernay on the film.



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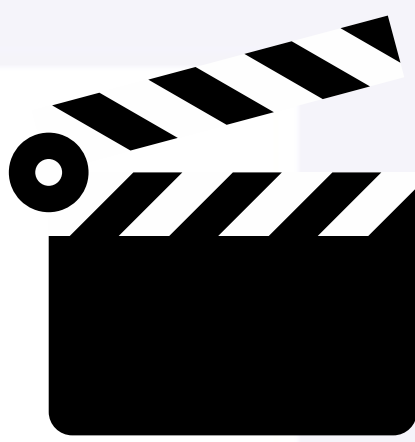
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