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CSA: The Confederate States of America and the Image of Slavery in Hollywood Films

Kevin Willmott, University of Kansas

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The idea for the film, "CSA- The Confederate States of America" came from watching Ken Burns' "The Civil War" on PBS. In one of the segments, Burns details the South's plan, had they won. They were to build a "tropical empire" and expand further south into Mexico and South America. Evidence of this actual plan is the city of "Americana" in Brazil that was founded by former Confederates.

Often, when I would submit scripts to Hollywood that in some way dealt with slavery or the issue of race in a historical context, they would tell me that slavery is not "commercial" and that no one is interested in this side of American life. My former agent would mention "Amistad" and "Beloved," both financial failures (in Hollywood terms) as examples that prove slavery is a subject that is a downer for blacks and a guilt trip for whites. Yet, "Gone with the Wind" is always placed at the top of the "greatest films of all time" lists. I would agree with syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts, who wrote, "Gone with the Wind" is a romance set in Auschwitz." Is the film popular because the

slaves in the film are happy and impervious from complicating the romance and struggle of the white characters?

If audiences do feel this way how can we correct it? The film, *12 Years a Slave*, is an attempt to make slavery real for us today. The challenge was to develop a way to define what the system of slavery and the iconography associated with it means from a slave's point of view. There is no film footage of the institution of slavery, only still photos. By extending slavery into the modern world, we finally see the normality of how it functioned. In doing so, we also reveal how slavery defines many other aspects of our lives as Americans. Finally, the film suggests that the South did win the Civil War and that we still avoid the emotional impact of slavery today because of the anger and guilt it exposes. The film uses satire and dark comedy to reveal hidden historical truths rarely discussed in the national arena.