

12 Years A Slave (15)

Sixteen members watched and tried to listen to the multi-award nominated and winning 12 Years A Slave on Wednesday 8th July. Why “tried to listen”? Because at various points in the film, the dialogue was so badly slurred or mumbled, combined with Deep South American accents and/or overlapping with other dialogue, that it was incomprehensible. Unfortunately, subtitles could not be shown owing to the remote control getting wet (silly error). As a result, one member left during the showing.

Putting aside the poor sound track, this film is a very powerful story (based on real life events) of how a free man in New York, Solomon Northup played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, is tricked into going to Washington where he is kidnapped and enslaved. He is taken to Louisiana where he is sold to a “benevolent” master played by Benedict Cumberbatch (but who, as is pointed out in the film, is still a “slaver”), along with Eliza (who is separated from her children at the slave auction). Following an incident with an overseer, Solomon is sold to a ruthless owner - Edwin Phipps, played by Michael Fassbender. In this new life, Solomon has to endure trials and actual torture to survive, along with his new friend Patsey (an excellent Lupita Nyong’o, who deservedly won the best supporting actress Oscar for her performance). After several years with Phipps, Solomon meets a Canadian carpenter, played by Brad Pitt, who happens to be an abolitionist and who writes to Solomon’s old friends in New York, eventually leading to his release.

The director was Steve McQueen, who is now a Patron of Anti-Slavery International. The film is well paced apart from a couple of extended pauses where we are treated to long shots of actors in deep contemplation - a few seconds would have been enough. Early in the story, some of the flashback sequences were initially confusing (“what’s going on... oh, I get it...”) but were essential to the background narrative for the main protagonists (Solomon and Eliza, primarily). Incidental music was generally supportive and not overbearing, the cinematography excellent, and the acting superb. A very powerful film highlighting mans

inhumanity to man, just marred at times by the awfully constructed dialogue based soundtrack.