EDITOR'S NOTE: The following two film reviews offer competing perspectives on Quentin Tarantino's "Django Unchained," a movie about a former slave who sets out to free his wife from bondage and exact revenge on a sadistic Mississippi slave owner. The reviewers, Jazmyne Young and Asani Shakur, are both African American youth from Richmond, California, and writers for The Richmond Pulse newspaper.

'Django' criticisms are predictable, misguided

In a way, I'd been looking forward to seeing Quentin Tarantino's new movie, "Django Unchained," before I'd ever even heard of it, since the moment I drove away from the theater so thoroughly entertained by his previous film, the revenge-full "Inglourious Basterds." (If you aren't familiar with that film, but did see "Django Unchained," you've done yourself a great injustice.)

"Inglourious Basterds" -- now there's a movie where the director took liberties with historical accuracy and was still able to tell a damn good story, all while keeping the spirit of the era (World War II) intact. At the time I'd thought to myself, "Wow, I'm not even Jewish and I still felt a sense of satisfaction when the Nazi's head got bashed in with a baseball bat... I wish there was a movie like that for Black people!"

I don't imagine the public reactions to the violence in "Django" will be much different from that of "Kill Bill" – certain women's groups attacked the film for its scenes of brutality against the lead character, a woman -- or any other number of Tarantino movies. And certainly there were Jewish people who felt that the director's disregard for historical accuracy in "Basterds" amounted to nothing less than blasphemy.

Speaking of historical accuracy, I can't help but compare "Django Unchained" to another movie circulating theaters right now, Seteven Spielberg's "Lincoln." If the historical inaccuracy of Djangoupsets you, the perceived truths in Spielberg's latest film concern me just the same. At least Quentin Tarantino didn't run from the uncomfortable, brutal, savage nature of American slavery, whereas Steven Spielberg turned it into a matter of rhetoric and policy. All things considered, with awards season approaching in Hollywood, I'd rather spend my money to boost the ticket sales of a film like "Django" than "Lincoln."

Still, it's only natural that all Black people will not receive "Django Unchained" with open arms. It doesn't help that our most highly respected filmmaker has publicly boycotted the movie, saying it is disrespectful to his ancestors.

Ironic, because Spike Lee is actually the reason why I became a fan of Quentin Tarantino's work in the first place. (Remember Tarantino's cameo appearance in the Lee film, "Girl 6?") My read of Lee's disdain for "Django" is that it has less to do with the film itself – after all, he refuses to see it -- and more about his own current position in Hollywood, considering that (1) people aren't seeing his movies like they used to (Who do you know that saw "Red Hook Summer" or "Miracle at St. Ana?") and (2) if Spike Lee were to try to make a film like "Django," it would never get the same financial backing and support from Hollywood that Tarantino enjoyed, let alone a nationwide release on Christmas Day. Not even with Barack Obama in office do I think that would ever happen.

As for the film's generous use of the n-word, it was a Spike Lee character (played by comedian Paul Mooney) in the film "Bamboozled" that admitted, "I say nigga 50 times a day; it keeps my teeth white." We are so subjected to gratuitous use of the n-word that it's laughable this film would be regarded as anything more than a spec in an n-word-filled sea. If I'm not mistaken, Kanye West & Jay-Z's summer anthem was called what? Who was in Paris? That's the same musician (Jay-Z) seen rubbing shoulders with our beloved Black president on the campaign trail. So please, spare me the need to reiterate a count of how many n-bomb's get dropped in "Django Unchained."

In critiquing "Django," it's important to also keep in mind that no man is an island, including Tarantino. His new film was produced by Reginald Hudlin, also the producer of the Black animation series, "The Boondocks." Remember the George Lucas film, "Red Tails?" (I know, I tried to forget it, too.) It was produced by Aaron McGruder, creator of "The Boondocks" franchise. Yet we saw how "Red Tails" turned out -- it had none of the edge of "Boondocks." Now look at "Django Unchained." Samuel L. Jackson's character might as well have been named Uncle Ruckus (a "Boondocks" character). It is clear to me that Hudlin (also the producer of "Boomerang" and "House Party") brought the same sensibilities that helped make "The Boondocks" so edgy and satisfying, to the decisions that ultimately made "Django Unchained" such a cinematic success.

So at this point it's safe to say that if you don't appreciate the sarcastic humor of "The Boondocks"; or if you thought "Kill Bill" was too bloody and sexist; or if you just couldn't accept the fact that Tarantino's imagined group of "Inglourious Basterds" snuffed out Adolf Hitler in a movie theatre, then you will probably never appreciate "Django Unchained" for what it is, and may quite possibly even write it off as something that it is not.

But for my part, I'll just say thank you, Mr. Tarantino. Thank you, Mr. Foxx. Thank you, Ms. Washington -- you're so beautiful, I cried every time I saw you on that screen, from your sheer beauty to the intense plight that was all too familiar to our ancestors. Thank you Mr. Jackson, for reminding us what a real Uncle Tom is. "Django Unchained." See this movie.

Entertaining, but film misses opportunity to inspire

The movie "Django Unchained" was an exceptionally entertaining and courageous love story – that totally lacked inspiration. Judging by the previews, I'd developed a notion that it was a story inspired by the life of Nat Turner, or some other rebellious slave. I was wrong. In the end, "Django" just didn't turn out to be the hero I had in mind.

Yes, he showed bravery and determination to get his wife back, but not without the help of Dr. Schultz, the German dentist character who, in my opinion, stood out much more than Django did as the film's hero -- which I found ironic, being the movie was promoted as a slave hero film. After all, he freed Django, paid him favorable wages, and crafted the plan that helped lead Django to his wife. Not to mention, he taught Django how to fight, paid $12,000 to get Django's wife out of slavery, and expressed compassion for the victim of what was the most heart wrenching scene in the movie, where a slave is depicted being torn apart at the limbs by dogs. In those times, for a white man to do such things for a black man showed a rebel spirit and tenacity that makes him my favorite character in the movie.

The use of the "n-word" did not bother me. Yes, it was used excessively. However, knowing a thing or two about history, it was no surprise. Not to mention the fact that the word "nigga" is commonly used in our communities and music, sometimes as a term of endearment (although I personally don't agree with this). More curious to me is why the word "nigger" -- more commonly used back then by whites as a slur – seemed to have been replaced with "nigga" in the film, which may or may not have been intentional.

I didn't leave the theater feeling any sense of anger toward whites, as I'd heard some mention. Maybe because the entertainment outweighed the outrage, and also because I went into the movie theater already with a solid knowledge of our history, so I was prepared for the degrading scenes, the use of the n-word, and other diabolical practices that were a common way of life back then. Plus, we can't get more offended by a fictional movie than by what's actually going on in our communities, with the way we view and treat each other.

Yet despite it all, I left disappointed. Again, not because the movie wasn't good -- all of the actors did an amazing job -- but rather because there was no message of substance to be found in the entertainment; nothing motivating to leave you inspired, nothing that would help uplift our communities or humanity in general.