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Local actor plays integral role in '12 Years a Slave'

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"APPARENTLY, there are two good white guys in the movie: me and Brad Pitt," actor Rob Steinberg said about his part in "12 Years a Slave."

That's pretty good company to keep.

Steinberg, who was raised in Bala Cynwyd and attended Lower Merion High School, plays Parker, a shop owner with admittedly little screen time. But Steinberg's part is one of the better examples of the "no small parts" adage: His character plays an integral role in the life of Solomon Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a free black man living in antebellum Saratoga Springs, N.Y., who is kidnapped and forced into slavery. Pitt plays a benevolent Canadian who works to free Northrup.

"I got to be in awe of my character's character," Steinberg said.

Steinberg has been working steadily since 1982, appearing in movies like "Die Hard 2" and "Single White Female," but he thought about quitting the acting biz after 21 years of Los Angeles life. He moved to New Orleans, thinking he would try something new. But Louisiana tax breaks kept bringing productions through town, and he's been working steadily there, too, appearing in HBO's "Treme," among other projects.

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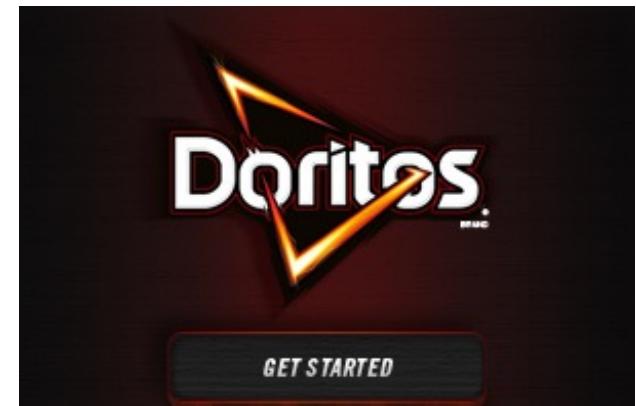
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Steinberg sees “12 Years a Slave” as his most important project yet.

“There hasn’t been a preeminent movie to show the dark and painful history of slavery, other than ‘Roots’ and ‘Amistad,’ ” Steinberg said. “It’s awful, and we’ve so recently in our history behaved this way. It’s important that we see that. It’s an important movie and it will be a historical document for some time. That will be my legacy, if I do nothing else from this point forward.”

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