

## '12 Years a Slave' star Chiwetel Ejiofor, director Steve McQueen return film to city in which it shot



1 / 10

Caption



By [Mike Scott, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

[Follow on Twitter](#)

on October 11, 2013 at 5:47 AM, updated October 31, 2013 at 12:11 PM

"**12 Years a Slave**" came home to Louisiana on Thursday night (Oct. 10) -- the place in which the buzz-generating drama was both shot and set -- screening as the high-profile opening-night selection of the **24<sup>th</sup> annual New Orleans Film Festival**. Following triumphant screenings at the Telluride, Toronto and New York film festivals, director Steve McQueen took a special pleasure in showing his film to the sellout crowd at the 700-seat Civic Theatre.

In fact, McQueen -- talking backstage in the Civic Theatre green room after introducing his film to the festival crowd -- said "12 Years a Slave" wouldn't have been the same film had it been shot anywhere else but Louisiana.

"This is it, this is the reason why we were here," he said. "It wasn't for tax breaks, it wasn't for this, it wasn't for that. It was for basic location. But also the people and the talent were so rich and deep, so we loved it (for) all those things."

As the film embarks on what many expect to be a successful award-season ride -- especially for its main stars, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Lupita Nyong'o -- McQueen singled out the local cast and crew, saying they deserve a share of the credit for helping make those performances happen.

"All the crew in New Orleans and the cast in New Orleans -- it was such fun," McQueen said. "It was so much like a family, our crew. And, actually, that's what helped the actors to create those performances, because we re-created an environment with the people in New Orleans that allowed the actors that kind of freedom, that safety, that support. That's what happened. We were family. We were *family*."

McQueen was just one of several of the film's principals to walk the red carpet at Thursday night's event. He was joined by Ejiofor, among others, whose performance as Solomon Northup -- a free black man who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1841, and on whose memoirs the film is based -- is earning early Oscar buzz.

Although he is from England, Thursday's screening had a hint of a homecoming about it for Ejiofor, who spent time exploring the state before shooting started. "I was able to get down here a little bit beforehand," the actor said from the red carpet. "I just spent time traveling through Louisiana, through some of the different plantations, trying to get an overall sense, not just of the story, but what really was."

McQueen and Ejiofor were joined at the film's local premiere by a number of Ejiofor's "12 Years a Slave" co-stars, including Nyong'o, Alfre Woodard and Sarah Paulson -- who is back in town to shoot the FX television series "**American Horror Story: Coven**" -- along with a raft of local actors appearing in the film, including Bryan Batt, Dwight Henry, Rob Steinberg and Cameron Zeigler.

Also in attendance: actor Rodrigo Santoro, who isn't in "12 Years a Slave" but who arrived in town Wednesday to start work on the Warner Bros.-backed con-man film "**Focus**" with Will Smith, one of several film and TV projects currently underway in-state. Santoro, who worked previously in

New Orleans on the 2009 romantic comedy "[I Love You Phillip Morris](#)," said that he's taking the time to enjoy the city -- and the "12 Years a Slave" red carpet -- before his "Focus" scenes start shooting.

Local dignitaries walking the red carpet Thursday night included New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu as well as New Orleans Saints executive and film enthusiast Rita Benson LeBlanc.

The lucky handful to score tickets to Thursday's event got to see the movie weeks before others will get a chance to. "12 Years a Slave" isn't scheduled to open theatrically in New Orleans until Nov. 1.

Thursday's red carpet kicked off what will be eight days of screenings, workshops, panel discussions and parties playing out at venues all over town as part of the 24<sup>th</sup> annual New Orleans Film Festival. It concludes Oct. 17 with a screening of director Lily Keber's local music documentary "[Bayou Maharajah: The Tragic Genius of James Booker](#)," also at the Civic.

That screening will be followed by an in-theater music performance honoring Booker's work and featuring local musicians who appear in Keber's film.

Click here for more information on the [2013 New Orleans Film Festival](#), including the full schedule and ticket details.

## NEW ORLEANS FILM FESTIVAL

---

**James Booker doc 'Bayou Maharajah' among Audience Award winners at 2013 N.O. Film Festival**

**New Orleans Film Fest 2013: Your favorite films, moments and photos**

**New Orleans Film Festival marks an evolution as 2013 event sees growth in size, prestige**

**New Orleans Film Festival 2013, Day 8: 'Bayou Maharajah' closes fest in NOLA style**

**'Bayou Maharajah' filmmaker excited to bring James Booker doc home to New Orleans**

---

[All Stories](#) | [All Photos](#) | [All Videos](#)



[View/Post Comments](#)

---

## Related Stories

**On '12 Years a Slave,' 'Ender's Game' and more: Mike Scott talks movies with WRNO's Denny Shaffer (audio)**

---

'12 Years a Slave' director Steve McQueen says his film isn't 'difficult' -- it's just the truth

## new orleans movies in-depth

**Holiday Movie Preview 2013**

most comments

most read

1415 80,000 Louisianians' health insurance policies will be canceled under Affordable Care Act

123 New Orleans Saints chat with Katherine Terrell at noon

95 Lawyer says he warned city of harassment, abuse by Taxicab Bureau employees

82 New Orleans Saints work out several kickers Tuesday, report says

52 Kenner Police probing fatal officer-involved shooting; suspect's relatives cry foul

[See more comments »](#)

## entertainment news updates

Get the latest entertainment news from around New Orleans.

OPTIONAL

Enter your e-mail address  ENTER ZIP

Sign up today!



Check here if you do not want to receive additional email offers and information. [See our privacy policy](#)



**Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement and Privacy Policy**

**© 2013 NOLA Media Group. All rights reserved (About Us).**

**The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of NOLA Media Group.**

**Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site. Contact interactivity management.**

**[▶ Ad Choices](#)**