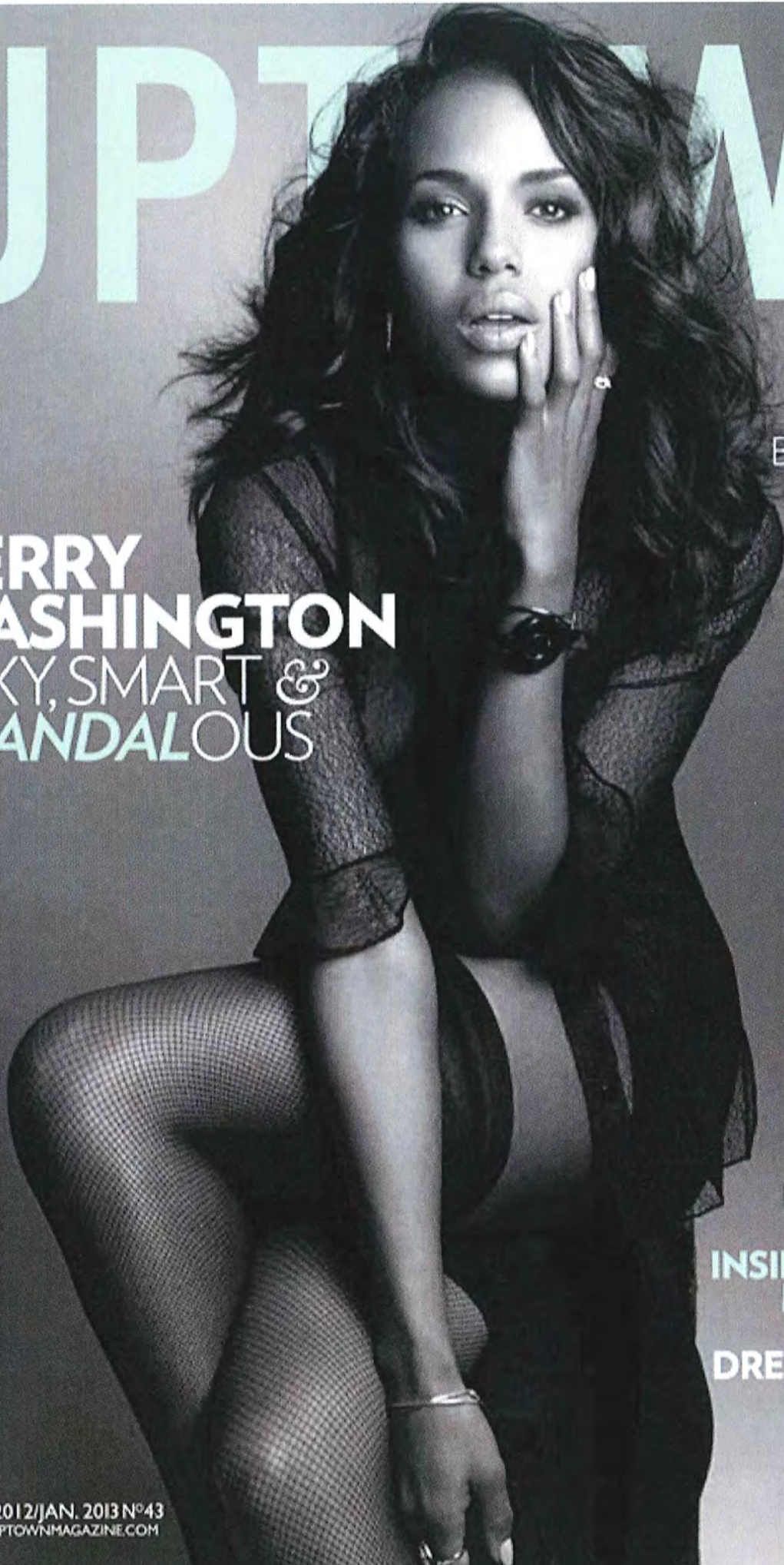


UPTOWN



**KERRY
WASHINGTON**
SEXY, SMART &
SCANDALOUS

TOKYO
BRIGHT LIGHTS,
BIG CITY

**BLACK
WOMEN
& AIDS**
THE UNTOLD
STORY




**MEET LIANNE
LA HAVAS**
INSIDE ART BASEL
MIAMI BEACH
THE BEST
DRESSED OF 2012

Film Noir

THIS MONTH THE SEXY AND TALENTED **KERRY WASHINGTON** HITS THE BIG SCREEN IN AN EPIC FILM THAT HAS OSCAR WRITTEN ALL OVER IT. HERE, SHE MODELS THE SEASON'S FIERCEST ONYX-HUED STYLES AND OPENS UP ON HER OVERACHIEVING CHILDHOOD, RECENT PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL TURMOIL ON SET, AND WHY SHE'S NO ONE'S ROLE MODEL.

**BY CRAIGH BARBOZA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NINO MUÑOZ
STYLING BY ERIN WALSH**



Kerry Washington likes to say careers aren't made overnight in Hollywood; "they're built over long periods of time, and there are waves of progress." Well, she's certainly riding atop a mammoth one right now, playing not one but two roles of a lifetime that bookend the African-American experience.

On ABC's *Scandal*, Washington is a BlackBerry-wielding, Armani-draped crisis expert who leads a team of dedicated associates that save clients from public embarrassment or possible jail time. At the other end of the spectrum is Quentin Tarantino's new film, *Django Unchained*, for which Washington's brave performance as a slave trapped in an antebellum South hellhole awaiting rescue by Jamie Foxx's title character is already getting Oscar buzz. The two projects, emblematic of Washington's elevated status in Hollywood, will overlap this month. (*Scandal* will be in midseason when *Django* opens on Christmas Day.)

It's hard offhand to think of another actress who's been in this position, and even harder to think of one in a pair of roles that are such whiplash extremes of one another. Washington, who is talented, beautiful, and smart, is still contemplating what it all means for her. "I know a moment like this doesn't last forever," she says during a recent interview in New York. Asked if she's at least enjoying it, there is a long pause. "I think I am," she says, finally.

It's certainly not easy finding time in her packed schedule. These days, Washington needs to be three people: filming 17-hour days, doing press, popping up on talk shows, accepting awards, etc., etc. Earlier this year, the actress had just two days between scenes for *Scandal* and *Django*. "I went from shooting in a slave shack with my character curled up in bed, terrified about the state of her future," she says, "to walking in heels outside of the White House on my way to meet the president's chief of staff."

All her life, Washington, 35, has had to straddle two worlds that seem poles apart. Growing up in the Bronx, a few blocks from Jennifer Lopez, she was bused to a school in a predominantly Italian-American neighborhood where she was enrolled in a gifted and talented program. Washington still managed to take home the sixth grade language prize... in Italian. That adaptability has helped her become one of the most versatile and consistently interesting actresses around. Washington has lit up movies from *The Last King of Scotland* to *I Think I Love My Wife*; originated a role on Broadway in the David Mamet play *Race*; and spent one of her few off days of 2012 in Charlotte, N.C., addressing the Democratic National Convention.

Foxx, her two-time costar, says she's the real deal. "I can't say enough about the brilliance and toughness of her, especially in *Django*, where she's amazingly vulnerable playing this damsel in distress throwback character. And then you look at the strength of what she's doing on *Scandal*, where she's in control and doing her thing." He adds: "A lot of actresses only get to play one note. Kerry's able to play a symphony."

Accolades tend to fly when people talk about Washington. *Scandal* producer Betsy Beers calls her a dream collaborator. "She's kind, forthright, super-supportive of the crew and cast," says Beers. "She has the ability to make you feel special, like you're the only one in the room."

Washington, of course, doesn't disappoint when we meet up. On a fall day in Midtown Manhattan, she walks into the restaurant of a swanky hotel, looking hood chic: tar-black bubble vest, a designer-knit sweater, slim-cut jeans, and some custom-built Nikes. Lunch is on the itinerary, but with the sun shining Washington asks to take a walk instead. She'd just awoken from a nap after flying in on the red-eye and running into a fitting. Yet, even with no makeup and her hair pulled back in a bun, she is radiant. She could have just walked off the pages of *Vogue*.

Outside, we enter Central Park through the Artist's Gate on Sixth Avenue, moving past a crowd of tourists on camera phones, and turn up a walkway lined with benches. When Washington is out in public, rolling with friends and associates, she sometimes avoids eye contact with strangers as a courtesy to them. Having to stop every few minutes to talk to admirers, she knows, could get a little tiresome. Of course, she's spotted anyway: One couple asks for a photo; and a woman has to tell her how much she loves *Scandal*. The show has been getting solid ratings, and in a week or two ABC will announce that it's extending *Scandal*'s sophomore season from 13 to 22 episodes.

After years spent seesawing between commercial and independent films, Washington made the leap to television in 2011, becoming the first black actress in nearly 40 years to have her own major network drama. (The first was Teresa Graves in 1974's *Get Christie Love!*, which ran for a season.) *Scandal*, produced by Shonda Rhimes, is immersed in Washington, D.C., politics. Not surprisingly, the actress loves playing the biggest "fixer" in town. She comes alive just talking about the character. "Olivia Pope is so much more powerful and sophisticated than I am, and she has more access!" says Washington. The character, loosely based on consultant Judy Smith, whose clients included Monica Lewinsky, is in a lot of ways the most complicated she has ever played. "Usually I go into my actor's toolbox and say, 'Okay, I need this tool and this tool and this tool,'" states Washington, pretending to grab some hardware. "Everything else I'll put away and go to work. With Olivia, every day I have both toolboxes! Every tool. She requires all of me: my brain, my body, my heart, all of it."

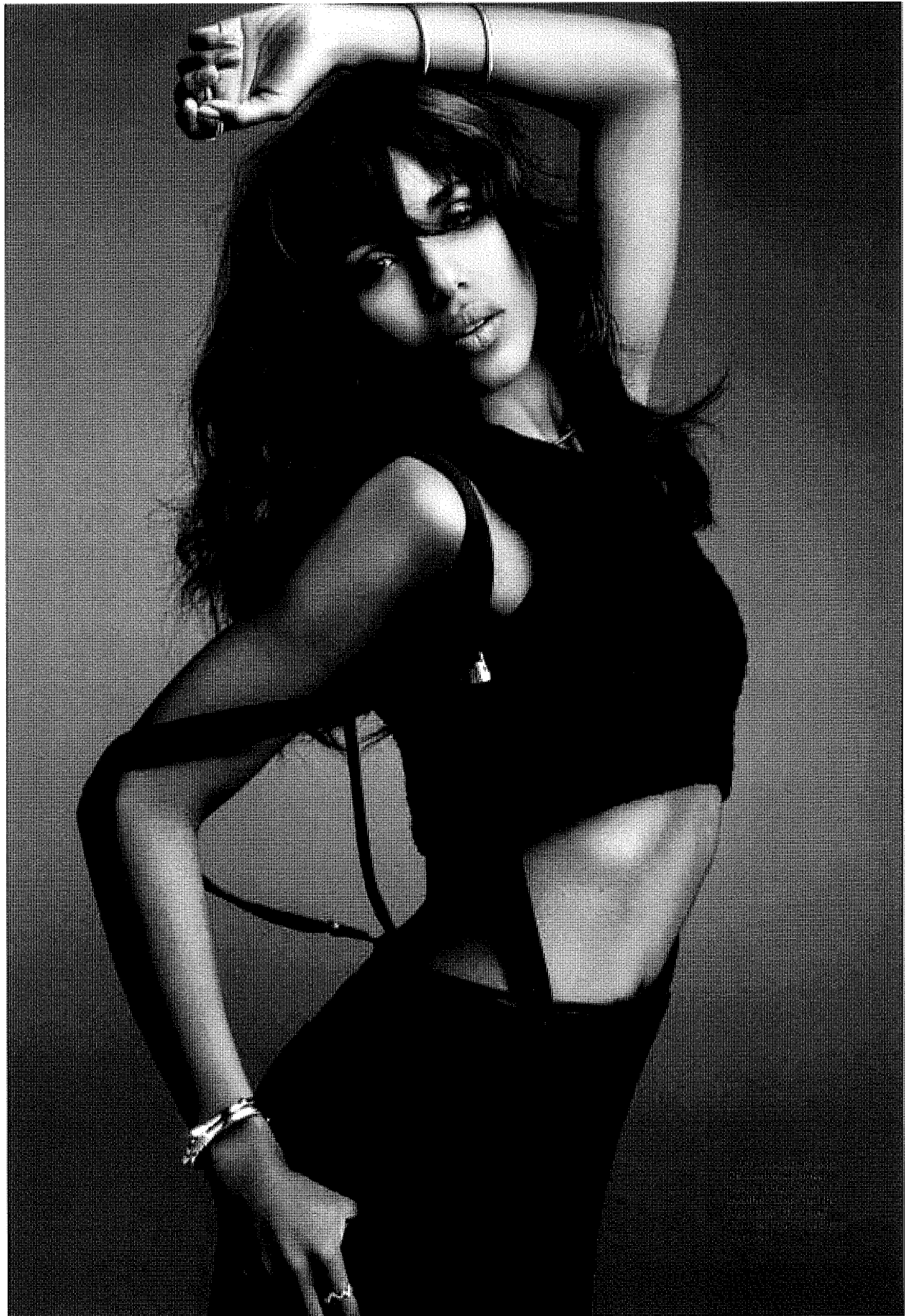
Washington doesn't exactly sit when she approaches a giant rock at the top of a small hill; she sort of perches atop it and takes in the sights. Over her shoulders is a row of gleaming skyscrapers. She breathes in the view and smiles. "Isn't this great? We're getting our vitamin D and fresh air."

Washington is here to accept an award tonight from the youth empowerment organization Black Girls Rock. In an age of party girls and potty-mouthed stars, and in a town where nice girls finish closer to last than first, Washington is a paragon of civility and integrity. Yet, she's clearly riled by the idea of being some kind of saint. "I try to make the best choices for me," she says, looking pensive. For her, it's never been about, "Oh, this is what people should see or need to see." "If you look at my body of work, I've always taken huge risks. At a moment when people considered me a serious actor, I'll go work with the Wayans brothers on a silly comedy [*Little Man*]. I've played prostitutes, drug addicts, pimping lesbians. I do work I'm drawn to."



This page:
Jaded Marcie jacket;
Therese Theory
bra; Vince pants;
Trunk cuff; Swarovski
Ludysa Designs
bracelet; Phibbs ring;
Finn cuff and six
round and garnet
rings; Louis Vuitton
hoody.

Opposite page:
Vintage lace top;
Elizabeth and James
bralette; Jennifer
Fisher signing ring;
Finn ring; and
modern House of
Watts necklace.



“I WENT FROM SHOOTING IN A SLAVE SHACK WITH MY CHARACTER CURLED UP IN BED, TERRIFIED ABOUT THE STATE OF HER FUTURE, TO WALKING IN HEELS OUTSIDE OF THE WHITE HOUSE ON MY WAY TO MEET THE PRESIDENT’S CHIEF OF STAFF.”

What drew Washington to *Django* was the chance to work on something that would present the period in a new light. “I’ve never seen slavery dealt with this way before in film. So often it’s a white character who’s the savior of black people,” she says.

Slavery, of course, has been well documented in print. A whole slew of books examining its long and bloody history are published yearly. But more recently there seems to be a growing fascination with America’s original sin reflected in everything from art exhibitions to folk star interviews. At a time when our nation’s first black president is struggling to pull the economy out of the worst recession since the 1930s, filmmakers are taking a closer, more critical look at its origins. In addition to *Django*, which has spawned a comic book series with the same title, there’s Steven Spielberg’s *Lincoln* biopic, about the 16th president’s decision to emancipate the slaves, and *Twelve Years a Slave*, based on the memoir of a free black man who was kidnapped and sold into human bondage.

Unlike those, *Django*, which takes the guise of a spaghetti western, has stirred up a bit of controversy online and in academic circles. One Ivy League scholar (who hadn’t seen the movie) said it “sounds like a huge step backwards.” But the film’s producer Reginald Hudlin argues that it was essential that it not play like a dry lecture. “The bottom line is you have to approach the subject from an artistic point of view,” says Hudlin.

The genesis of *Django* dates back to a 1990s Oscar party, where Hudlin and Tarantino had a brief conversation about movies on the topic of slavery. “I just thought they were what I call ‘cod liver oil movies.’ They are not entertaining in any way and you have to force yourself to go see them because ‘they’re good for you,’” explains Hudlin. “But why is it so bad? Why does it have to be a painful experience?” It took more than a decade, but the seed that Hudlin planted with Tarantino eventually grew into the script for *Django*, and the two decided to make themselves the biggest, baddest, bloodiest slave film ever.

Washington is aware of the controversy, which she attributes more to the film having a white director than anything else. She’s also glad more movies are focusing on the slave experience. “We should have a plethora of visions and interpretations of who we are as a nation.” But she admits, “This is not necessarily the film I would make about slavery. I’m not a violent person. I often watch Tarantino movies through what he calls ‘chick-vision.’” She covers her eyes and peeks through her fingers.

From the start, the idea of inhabiting the world of slavery was daunting. Candyland, the plantation to which Washington’s character is sold, doubles as a 19th century gentlemen’s club. Its owner, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, forces male slaves to fight to the death for public amusement and the women into sex. “Leo and I had to be willing to go into the darkest places of this period in order for Jamie’s rise out of the ashes to really mean something,”

she says. “*Django* was the hardest film I’ve ever done. It took me to places I never had to go before—I never even thought about going before.”

Samples of Washington’s *Django* scenes include a savage gang rape; a lashing; and an emotional sequence in which Broomhilda is stripped of her clothing and thrown in the “hot box,” a metal cell buried underground. On the day they shot the scene, Washington told the stunt coordinator standing nearby that she was going in and would be screaming for a while before the scene starts. Don’t do anything, she told him. “The stunt coordinator just couldn’t bear it,” remembers Hudlin. “He had to because she gave him strict instructions. But it was brutal for everyone.”

Washington, like Foxx, was determined to honor her ancestors by “getting in the skin and the mind state of a slave.” On the set, she always had her eyes in a book, usually a slave narrative, and she, Foxx, and the filmmakers would have long talks about the effect of the material. “Psychology, sociology, and history are important parts of my toolbox as an actor,” the Phi Beta Kappa scholar says at one point. “I work that way. I come from a research perspective. I feel like I approach my work as an anthropologist and the goal is to go native, to kind of lose myself in the world I’m researching.”

Hudlin says Washington definitely does that, in a challenging and nuanced role. “She’s an extraordinary actress. She’s also a genuine intellectual,” says Hudlin. “So in terms of really understanding the material and being able to translate it into performance, she was fantastic.”

Even worse than the physical demands of the role were the psychological scars Washington picked at throughout the course of making the film, which dragged on for 136 days, much of them spent on the grounds of Evergreen Plantation on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Prior to production, the filmmakers built a replica slave cabin next to the actual 22 that are standing. From one of the doorways, you can see an old hanging tree nearby. “It was crazy,” says Washington about going to work every day. “You would be shooting in the fields and someone would stumble upon, literally, a piece of an old shackle.”

Some mornings she was completely terrified to even get out of bed to approach the character. It got so bad she invited her manager and parents to visit her on location, something she never does. “I kept saying I was going to send Tarantino the bill for my extra therapy sessions,” Washington says, half-joking. Ultimately, what carried her through the experience was the profound respect and gratitude she has for the women who survived these conditions. “Making this film changed us,” she says.

In the wake of *Scandal* and *Django Unchained*, Washington isn’t sure what to do next. She’s not one to plan too far ahead. But she’d love some time to travel and chill with her family. Maybe, in February, she’ll hear her name called at the Oscars. And who knows, by that time she just might have read another script that made her say, “Oh... Well, this is kind of great.” ■