

Film Feature: 13 Films That Define 2013

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 31, 2013 - 4:27pm

- [12 Years a Slave](#) [2]
- [A Haunted House](#) [3]
- [Blackfish](#) [4]
- [Drinking Buddies](#) [5]
- [Film Feature](#) [6]
- [Gravity](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Instructions Not Included](#) [9]
- [List](#) [10]
- [Man of Steel](#) [11]
- [Nick Allen](#) [12]
- [Sharknado](#) [13]
- [Spring Breakers](#) [14]
- [The Heat](#) [15]
- [The Wolf of Wall Street](#) [16]
- [This is the End](#) [17]
- [Wadjda](#) [18]

Including films that achieve the correct button-mashing combo to earn fancy kudos and are positively lauded, there are only a select few from the whole bunch that have the significance of “definitive.” These are films that transcend ownership of marquee space, or their critical importance with film niches, and take on a wide cultural significance. Such happens to a point in which these movies now help outline our exact understanding of an entire year of film itself. These are the films that are created from specific thematic trends from all of our culture, or in some historical cases, became trends themselves.

From the paranormal parody of “A Haunted House” to the controversial “Wolf of Wall Street,” here are 13 films that best define the movie year that was 2013.



1. “A Haunted House”

Hide as one may try from junky horror spoofs that aim to abuse the clever imbalance of low budget filmmaking with multi-million audience appeal, the “Paranormal Activity” spoof concept appeared in at least four different films in 2013. Complete with CCTV insert perspectives, visits from non-helpful psychics, and usually racist depictions of ethnic maids, these films included “30 Nights of Paranormal Activity with the

Devil Inside the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” “Scary Movie 5,” and “Paranormal Whacktivity.”

The most popular of the batch was “A Haunted House,” co-written by and starring Marlon Wayans, as directed by Michael Tiddies. Admittedly, “A Haunted House” is vacant comedically, but that did not stop domestic viewers (who put this film at second place opening weekend, trailing behind “Zero Dark Thirty”) from giving the film a \$40 million domestic haul. This one at least opts to use accomplished comedians for its jokey sequences (Nick Swardson, David Koechner, Cedric the Entertainer, and Affion Crockett) as opposed to the celebrity “Mad Libs” route of “Scary Movie 5,” the only other “Paranormal Activity” parody to hit wide theatrical release. In true fashion to the scary easiness that is making a low budget film, but sending it out to a multiplex audience paying \$12 to see the movie “A Haunted House 2” is scheduled to open March 28, 2014.



2. “Spring Breakers”

The Super Bowl of pop culture’s hedonism is given quite a look with Harmony Korine’s Spring Breakers, a pop art acid trip aimed and ready to fire against the expectations within its MTV-viewing audience’s gaze. As 2013 marked the latest public maturation ceremony of former teenyboppers to women of Hollywood’s industry of sexuality, (with Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana’s ascension into her latest identity), such also means confused applause for “Spring Breakers,” which pours booze, drugs, and bikini bods on the squeaky clean images of involved actresses and former residents of the Mouse House, Selena Gomez and Vanessa Hudgens.

Its overall intent may be shrouded in its own unique haze of weirdness, but “Spring Breakers” is nonetheless an unparalleled piece of neon-lit pop cynicism, especially in a year where the acts of Miley Cyrus still shock viewers into the state of providing her invaluable free publicity. On an even smaller scale, it is also the first and only time a person with gold teeth might be given a serious-face “For Your Consideration” push, as James Franco earns with his non-human thug Alien, a strange unofficial impersonation of internet rap deity RIFF RAFF.



3. “This Is the End”

Film celebrated its survival of Mayan mistake 2012 by turning 2013 into the year of the apocalypse, with casts of either ensembles or lone wolves placed intimately in circumstances involving the destruction of Earth as it is or was known. Amongst star-studded movies like “Oblivion,” “After Earth,” and “The World’s End” to name a few, the most wholly entertaining of the bunch is Seth Rogen & Evan Goldberg’s “This Is the End,” a directorial debut from the “Pineapple Express” writers. Treating the apocalypse as the main event of a star-studded party, “This Is the End” graduates Goldberg & Rogen from King Apatow’s school of bromantic manchild comedy, while also providing viewers an experience that is playfully meta about what they may imagine these performers’ off-screen personas to truly be. In the end, Rogen & Goldberg round up their bash (with appearances from James Franco, Jonah Hill, Michael Cera, Rihanna, Kevin Hart, Jason Segel, Mindy Kaling, Aziz Ansari, Paul Rudd and more) with a dedication to friendship, not their own celebrity. A special sequence involving the creation of a “Pineapple Express 2” trailer shows all the more that while they may be amused by pot humor, cussing, and general outrageousness, Rogen and company are dedicated first and foremost to the crafting of a good story.



4. “Man of Steel”

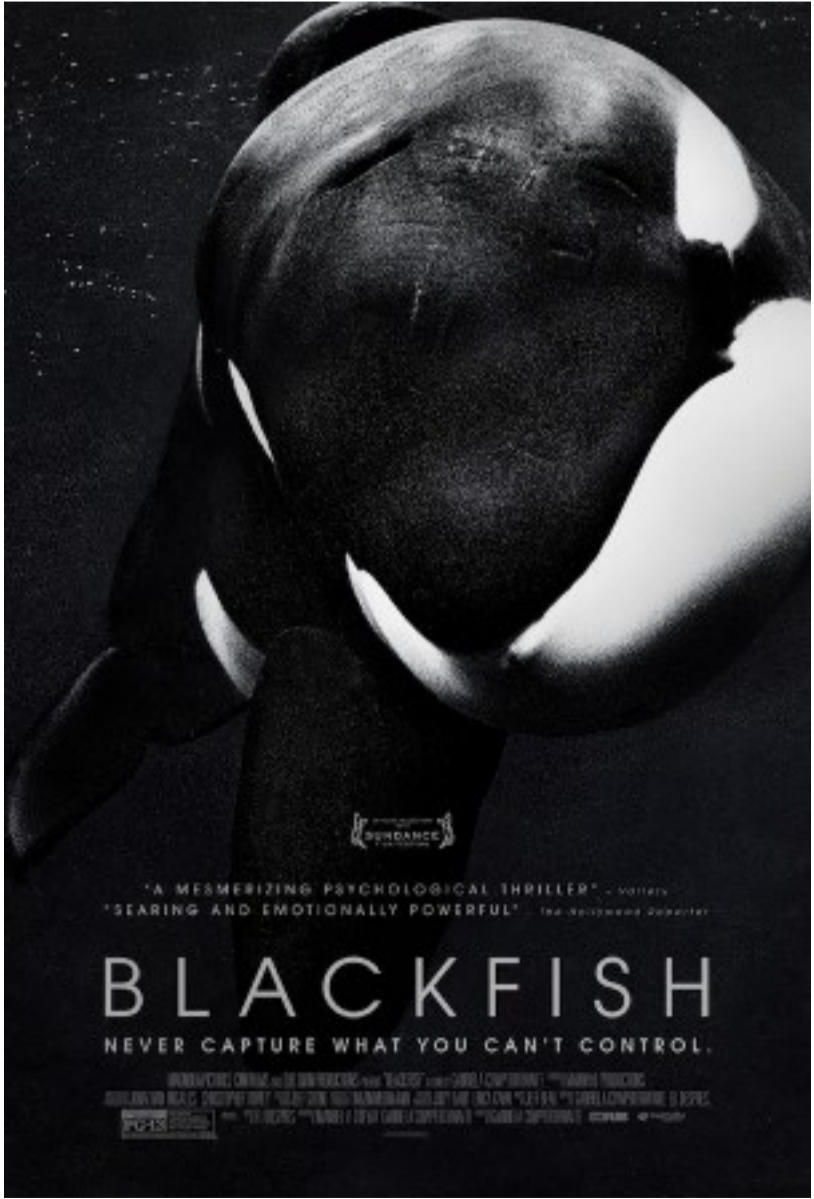
In 2007’s “Superman Returns,” Daily Planet reporter Lois Lane received a Pulitzer Prize for her piece “Why the World Doesn’t Need Superman,” which in all actuality must have been the screenplay we now know as Zack Snyder’s “Man of Steel” (no, I could not resist making this reference). Arriving in the fallout of 2012’s “The Avengers” massive box office domination, “Man of Steel” showed how a flying handsome man with a cape and a few smirks was no longer a pioneer in superheroism.

Snyder’s film indicated the current shape of the lucrative superhero genre especially post-“Avengers,” and its failure as bad expensive movie allowed viewers to witness what is becoming so damning about these inflating superhero films. In particular, audience members who expressed concern in social media about a third act assault on dear old Metropolis at least reckoned awareness to the numbing blandness of immortality that feeds numerous superhero franchises. The same can also be said somewhat for “Man of Steel’s” grotesque product placement, in which Superman fights some villains in an IHOP, and later inside a Sears. Consequently, while audiences may have felt more active awareness about the elements of this subgenre with “Man of Steel,” they were still buying tickets. Domestically, the film took in \$291.1 million dollars, which was 43.9% of its worldwide total of \$662.8 million.



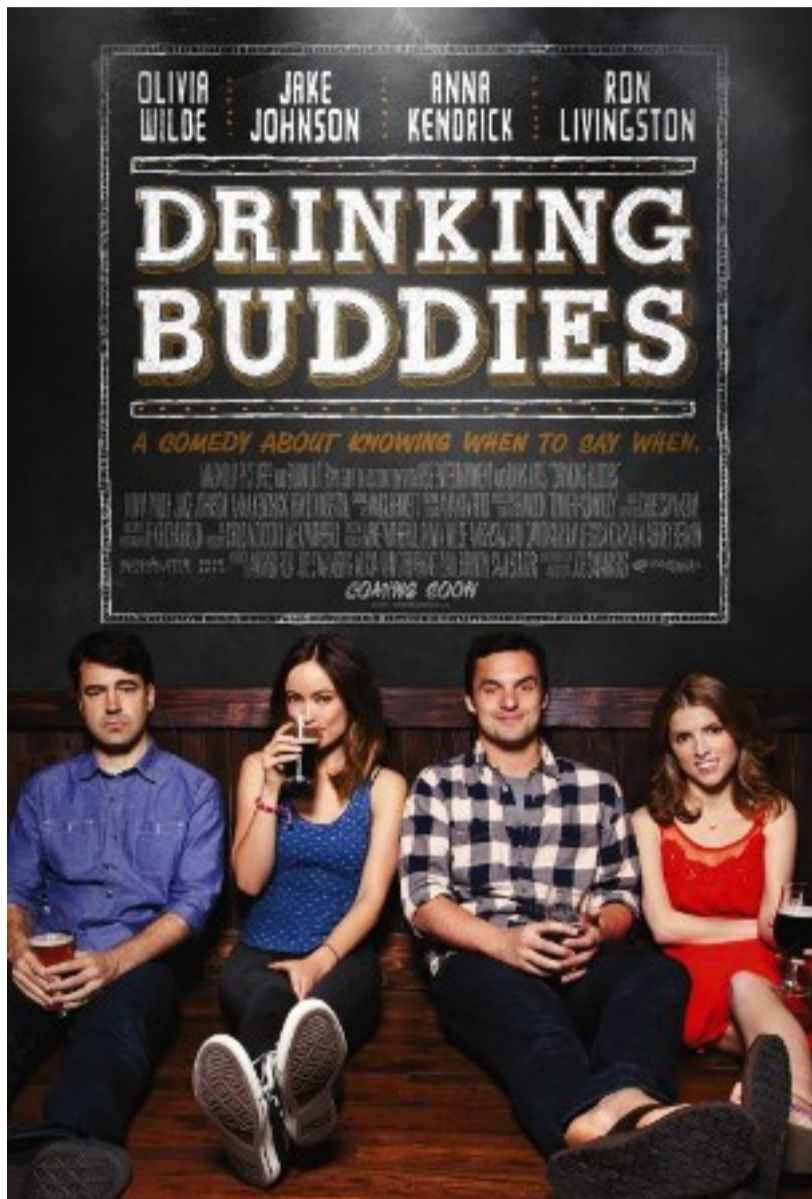
5. “The Heat”

A very funny film in a movie year that’s strength does not come much from comedy, “The Heat” showed that the success of previous female-centric comedy “Bridesmaids” was no fluke, and also that the touch of producer Judd Apatow was not necessary to create box office magic. Though it remains to be seen in the upcoming few years how studios will embrace the success of this buddy-cop story with working women as the two opposing leads, 2013 provides an exciting hope they will soon listen.



6. “Blackfish”

Though many try, rare is the documentary that reaches out to a wide audience, and then convinces them to rally them behind a specific perspective-changing cause. As 2008’s “Food Inc.” caused a ruckus and inspired by new eating habits, so did 2013’s “Blackfish” change a lot of its viewer’s perceptions about water zoo destination SeaWorld, causing a massive inflation to the amusement park’s number of critics. Especially when the film earned wider exposure by arriving on Instant Netflix and receiving two-hour broadcasts on CNN, Gabriela Cowperthwaite’s emotional documentary created a rippling cultural effect, which included musical acts canceling their previously-scheduled gigs at the water park, the mysterious alteration to the upcoming plot of the new Pixar movie “Finding Dory,” and certainly numerous social media posts by “Blackfish” viewers expressing disturbance with SeaWorld, and places like it. To Cowperthwaite’s credit, all was achieved without brandishing a phone number or web address in the credits.



7. “Drinking Buddies”

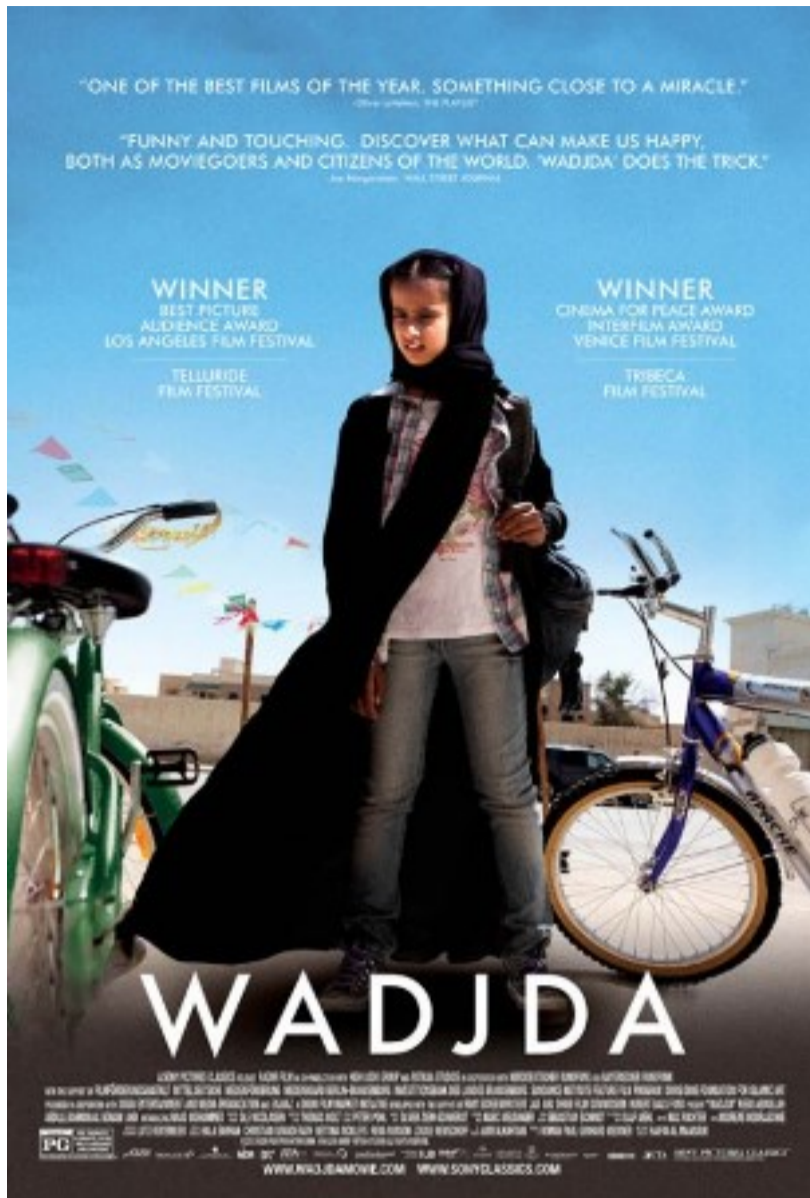
Is this the future of an ancient genre, the romantic comedy? And to be fair, there may not be a lot of romance in this story about two friends (played by Jake Johnson and Olivia Wilde) toeing the line of being platonic pals, but the makings of this low budget, star-led project released to VOD seem to be a fruitful kinship for a genre that always has audience potential. So long, of course, as the films themselves can actually be made, and find their way onto audience’s radars. If a film looks tempting as “Drinking Buddies” does, especially with stars recognizable from other mainstream projects, then it may not matter at all to the future viewer whether a film is on VOD or in theaters. While Joe Swanberg may have made “Drinking Buddies” to expand his appeal, his project has helped make 2013 a historical year for a md of film-viewing that is becoming increasingly popular.



8. “Sharknado”

Bad movies are a fact of life, and junky movies from production company The Asylum are a dime-a-billion, especially considering their constant output of campy material where logic and/or science are not real celebrated concepts. Yet despite The Asylum’s plenitude of “mockbusters” about sharks and natural disasters, arguably no coupling has caught affection from the mass public more than 2013’s “Sharknado,” putting them on the pop-culture map in a way that “Mega Python vs. Gatoroid,” “Mega Shark Versus Crocosaurus,” “2-Headed Shark Attack,” “Mega Shark vs. Giant Octopous,” somehow never did.

“Sharknado” (in which tornados pick up sharks from the ocean and then throw them at people) essentially went viral in 2013, standing as this year’s “Friday” (in reference to the pop music deconstruction that was the Youtube song from Rebecca Black). It even transcended usual Asylum treatment, with its premiere on the Syfy channel leading to a showing in 200 movie theaters across the country on August 2nd. The reported ticket price? \$12.50.



9. “Wadjda”

World cinema had many achievements in 2013, but a strong argument could be made that none was more historical than “Wadjda,” the first film to be directed entirely in Saudi Arabia, and consequently also the first to be directed by a woman from that country. A country, as it should be noted, that outlawed movie theaters in the 1980s for fear of gender mixing, one of many archaic rules that keep women like this film’s title character and her mother secondary to the males in their lives.

“Wadjda” expresses punk rock attitude against these ideas with its story of a girl who wants to get a bicycle, even though women are not allowed to ride bicycles especially in conservative capitol of Riyadh (her mother even has to pay a man to drive her 90 minutes to work as women are similarly not allowed drive). The stories of “Wadjda’s” production are heroic but also indicative of Saudi Arabia’s specific conditions, including the now-famous image of Al-Mansour having to direct some of her own film from within the confines of a van, as she could not be seen with her male film crew.

Al-Mansour’s film is not only a strong one for its classic narrative (a la “The Bicycle Thief” or “Children of Heaven”) but for the progress that it represents. With the film first premiering to the world in late 2012, in April of 2013 by perhaps some coincidence, the cycling ban on women biking was lifted. However, women are only allowed now to ride in parks, and “for entertainment.”



10. “Instructions Not Included”

America showed its melting pot colors with the box office numbers of “Instructions Not Included” a Spanish-language film starring famous Mexican comedian Eugenio Derbez, who also directed. The comedy about fatherhood topped “Pan’s Labyrinth” to be the fourth biggest foreign language film ever in the United States, and also boasts being the best-ever domestic debut (on Labor Day weekend) for a Spanish language film.

The success of “Instructions Not Included” is exciting about the audience potential for wide-released films that are not made specifically for or about white American men. Similarly, it shows that movies of seemingly specific backgrounds can appeal to a broader range of demographics. And not for nothing, it further demystifies the belief that American audiences are biased against subtitles.



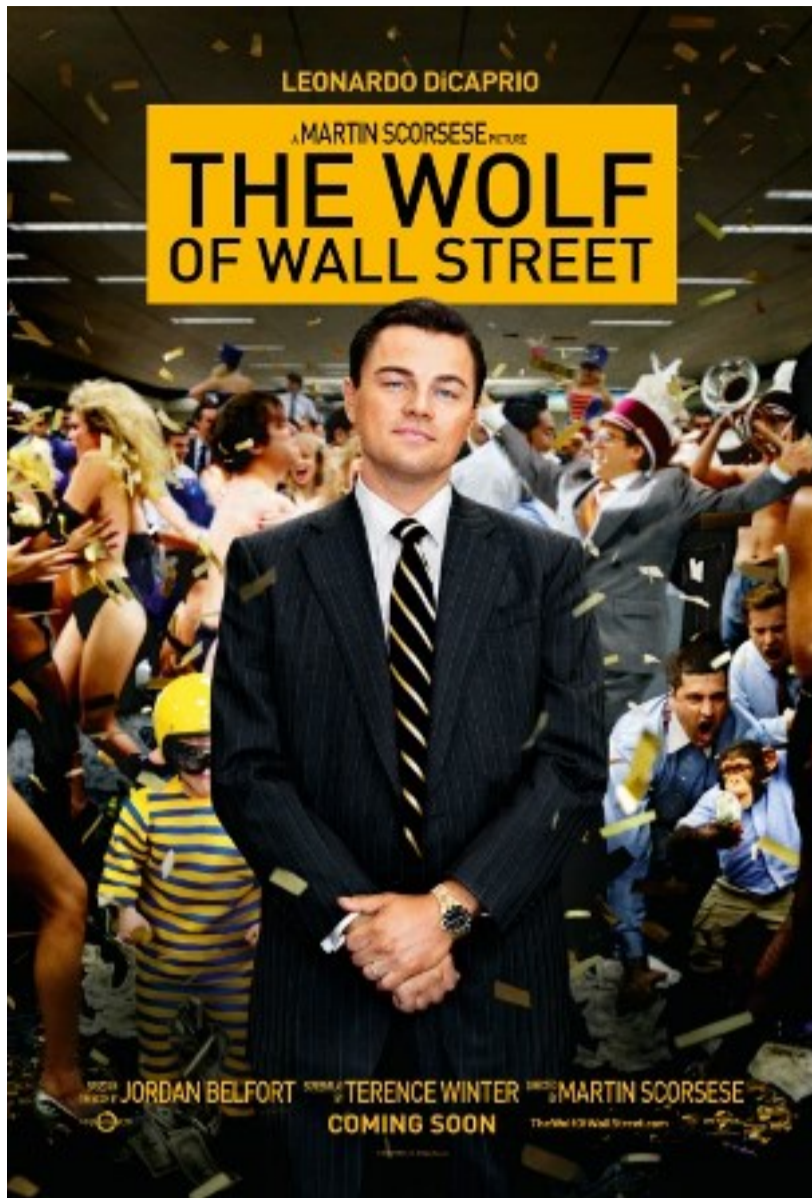
11. “Gravity”

While 2013 was a strong year for unmistakably cinematic films (from “The Place Beyond the Pines” to “12 Years A Slave”), no film was more necessary for genuine in-theater viewing than Alfonso Cuarón’s “Gravity,” which self-proclaimed “King of the World” James Cameron declared to be the best film made about space. Mixing the luminosity of Hollywood’s shiniest stars (Sandra Bullock and George Clooney) with immaculate CG artistry, “Gravity” gave moviegoers a unique movie experience that provided excitement to the classic phrase “only in theaters,” especially with the boosting of genuine 3D imagery that felt like it further completed the visuals. A step forward for both CG animation and original blockbuster storytelling, “Gravity” gave viewers a strong sense of the current blockbuster’s potential, while also reminding them that there are still new frontiers to be traversed in a century-old art form.



12. "12 Years a Slave"

2013 restored voices to significant civilians in history with at least three different films - that of Oscar Grant (played by Michael B. Jordan) in "Fruitvale Station," White House servant Eugene Allen (an inspiration for Cecil Gaines, as played by Forest Whitaker in "Lee Daniels' The Butler"), and most remarkably, Solomon Northup, brought to life with a magnificent performance by Chiwetel Ejiofor in "12 Years a Slave." Based on Northup's writings from his experience as a freed man kidnapped back into slavery, "12 Years a Slave" provided something that which text cannot, a palpable sense of atmosphere, in which the reality of its events could never be confused for anything else. Director Steve McQueen's film earns historical merit itself for such a successful attitude, which famously places mainstream audiences back into this disturbing chapter of American history without the ability to be distracted by a softer touch, or even worse, gratuitous revenge.



13. “The Wolf of Wall Street”

Opening on the last major day of release in 2013, Martin Scorsese’s “The Wolf of Wall Street” provided a conclusion to year of previously-released films about recent American excess, from the 1990s steroid-blinded American dream in “Pain & Gain” to the late 2000’s celebrity invading shenanigans of “The Bling Ring,” to even the post-bailout psychological trauma of Woody Allen’s “Blue Jasmine.” Along with providing the perspective of someone actually toiling in Wall Street, (instead of only influenced by such ideology), Scorsese’s punk rock-filled story raises a crucial question (still being debated on Twitter at this very moment) about how we should be presenting these characters and their stories, if justice itself rarely accurately responds to these figures in real life. Especially for a filmmaker who can be expected to provide some Catholic comeuppance, “The Wolf of Wall Street” jars viewers by allowing its title character Jordan Belfort (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) to control the attitude of the narrative, which essentially prevents the natural winds of film justice from intervening. As the final shot of the film shows, it is up to our own culture to control the cultivation of wolves like him.

By Nick Allen
Staff Writer
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)

Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 28 2024 - 5:52am*): <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/23176/film-feature-13-films-that-define-2013>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/12-years-a-slave>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/a-haunted-house>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/blackfish>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/drinking-buddies>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/film-feature>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gravity>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/instructions-not-included>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/list>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/man-of-steel>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/nick-allen>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/sharknado>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/spring-breakers>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-heat>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-wolf-of-wall-street>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/this-is-the-end>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/wadjda>

