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Slavery in current films *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave*

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Bachelor thesis

2017

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V Pardubicích dne 31.3.2017

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mrg. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D., for her helpful and valuable advice. A special thank belongs to my family.

Annotation

This bachelor thesis is focused on two current movies *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave*, which are both dedicated to American slavery in the nineteenth century, specifically two years before the Civil War. The aim of this thesis is to find and analyse four main elements – racial stereotypes, slavery, freedom, and revenge. This paper also tries to prove that all these elements were not only closely related but also significantly influenced the lives of the slaves as well as their white slavers who had been involved in this inhumane institution.

Keywords

Afro-Americans, *Django Unchained*, *12 Years a Slave*, stereotype, freedom, slavery, revenge

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na dva novodobé filmy *Nespoutaný Django* a *12 let v řetězech*, které se věnují americkému otroctví v 19. století, v období občanské války. Cílem této práce je najít a analyzovat čtyři prvky, které jsou pro tyto filmy klíčové – rasové stereotypy, otroctví, svoboda, a odplata. Tato analýza se dále snaží prokázat, že se všechny tyto prvky úzce dotýkaly a podstatně ovlivňovaly nejen životy otroků, ale také bílých otrokářů, kteří založili svou živnost na této nehumánní činnosti.

Klíčová slova

Afroameričané, *Nespoutaný Django*, *12 let v řetězech*, stereotyp, svoboda, otroctví, pomsta

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INTRODUCTION

Both *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave* deal with American slavery. Without doubt, slavery is a serious and sensitive issue in the modern day United States of America. It represents a long and wrongful treatment inflicted on the forefathers of Afro-American people. Therefore, this topic constitutes a significant, yet difficult part of the history of the United States.

The movies have been released quite recently (2012), at a similar time as some other slavery-related movies such as *Lincoln* or *Red Tails*. It raises a question – why is Hollywood now so obsessed with films about this issue? The director of *12 Years a slave*, Steve McQueen, is of the opinion that films about slavery would not have been made, if it was not for the election Barack Obama as the first Afro-American president, suggesting that the film makers might now feel the authority to do it.¹ Another view he holds is that American slavery has never been given a full attention it deserves.

It's the embarrassment of slavery and what went down. There's never been anything like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And the effects of slavery are all around us. You can be blind, but you can't be stupid. One can say, "It was 100-odd years ago, get over it!" OK, let's get over it. But things have to be put in place for us to get over it. We're talking about 400 years of slavery and mental torture.²

In this respect, the content of these movies is a tribute to all ancestors of Afro-Americans kept in bondage in the period when slavery blossomed. Many people seem to share this belief, because both of the films are considered to be current best movies about slavery, and thus worth of analysis.

This thesis examines four main themes – racial stereotypes, slavery, freedom, and revenge. The aim of this paper is to show the way these themes are portrayed in *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave*. At the same time, it tries to prove that all four topics constituted core elements of the lives of the people bonded by slavery, which, however, a regular viewer

¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Steve McQueen, "12 Years a Slave," *Transition 114, Gay Nigeria* (2014): 187.

²Gates and McQueen, "12 Years a Slave," 188.

might not be able to recognize. Therefore, this paper also presents illustrations from the films in order to make it clearer to the viewer.

Since the thesis deals with four main topics, it has been divided into four chapters accordingly. All of them first provide the theory including either historical background or basic definitions related to the topic and then presents and analyses each topic in *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave* respectively.

The analysis of the films is based on the information presented in journal reviews and newspapers. It uses these references to build the factual backstory to the films as well as to get other critical opinions about them. However, both movies have been released approximately five years ago, and thus there are not many reliable sources to support it. For this reason, the analysis is predominantly dependent on personal judgment and opinion. Naturally, this might be sometimes subjective.

Despite the common setting, there are many similarities as well as distinctions between the two movies. To illustrate, Steven McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* is an adaptation of the memoirs of Solomon Northup, and thus authentically recreates the lives of slaves on southern plantations, whereas *Django Unchained* might be seen as another Tarantino movie - full of violence, blood and gore - in this movie inflicted on black people. In fact, there is no one better who could depict all of these characteristics of slavery than Tarantino, as he has demonstrated a genuine talent for violent scenes in his previous works.

This time, however, it has a serious undertone. An article named *History Unchained* provides a clear summary about Tarantino's intentions with the movie:

Tarantino himself is quick to point out, his movie is not "History" with a capital "H". In fact, in many ways Tarantino is engaged in a conversation about cinematic history as much, if not more so than, American history. He is more concerned with questioning the genres, traditions, and thematic canons of cinematic practice than in debating the historical record of slavery. However, although Tarantino did not seek to accurately represent the history of slavery, through his representations of racism, degradation, and revenge, he managed to index contemporary fears and fantasies about that period.³

³Yarimar Bonilla, "History Unchained," *Transition, Django Unpacked* 112 (2013): 74.

The important aspect when discussing *Django Unchained* is its genre. Quentin Tarantino is a huge fan of cinematic history and, from this background, he decided to make the story a pastiche of spaghetti westerns. Such movies were characterised by a high level of action and violence, sparse dialogues and emotive background music. Besides, spaghetti westerns are often also set in the period of the Civil War and its aftermath, showcasing of the deserts and mountains of the ‘wild west’ in America. Naturally, the main characters represent horse-riding cowboys with large hats.⁴ Keeping true to this spirit, Tarantino based *Django Unchained* partly on a film of the same genre called *Django* (made in 1960), and partly on another film called *Mandingo*, released in 1975.⁵

In comparison to *Django Unchained*, *12 Years a Slave* directed by Steve McQueen and produced by Brad Pitt is a much more direct and serious. Based on an autobiography written by Solomon Northup in 1853, it tells the story of himself as a non-fugitive, who had been living in upstate New York with his family (wife and three children), when he was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana cotton fields. 12 years had passed until he was rescued and gained his freedom again. The movie therefore presents the authentic yet horrific memories.

⁴“What is a Spaghetti Western,” last modified November 10, 2015, <https://www.spaghetti-western.net/index.php/Introduction>.

⁵“Django Unchained-review,” last modified July 30, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jan/17/django-unchained-review>.

1 RACIAL STEREOTYPES

As stated by Saul McLeod, a stereotype is “a fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people.” When people make stereotypes, they often build their opinion on another person by ascribing them the same characteristics and abilities of a group of the same kind.⁶ According to Walter Lippmann who was the first one to classify this term into the social science a stereotype is the false impression formed in the mind of an individual on the basis of cultural, social and political background. This image is usually passed to other generations, and over that time becomes immutable. He also states that stereotyping is mostly negative – full of prejudice, bias and even racism.⁷

The term “race”, as defined by Encyclopaedia Britannica, represents “the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioural differences.” For example, in Northern America, this term invariably refers to a group of people sharing visible physical traits, for instance, the colour of skin, hair texture, eye formation and facial features. Similarly, it is possible to define race on the basis of the geographical regions of the origin of a person’s ancestry. Even though evidence suggests that all of mankind has originated from Africa, many centuries of separate evolution has created significant variations in physical and cultural traits. Thus, it is also common to distinguish between the African race, the European race and the Asian race.⁸

To continue, Stereotypes created on the basis of race are called racial stereotypes. The article named “Overcoming Racial Stereotypes” defines this term as “automatic and exaggerated mental pictures that people hold about all members of a particular racial group.”⁹ An article called “Racial Stereotypes From the Days of American Slavery” describes which stereotypes people held about Afro Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and The United States. Firstly, it claims that many Americans associated Africans with apes – gorillas, to be specific. They pointed to certain physical likeness shared between many Africans and the large apes, for instance, long arms, heavily set face and head shape. Such close resemblance of just a few features led many people in the white population of America and Europe to believe that blacks must be mentally inferior, or less civilized – just like an ape. Secondly,

⁶“Stereotypes,” last modified (unknown), <http://www.simplypsychology.org/katz-braly.html>.

⁷Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publisher, 1991), 23-24.

⁸“Race,” last modified June 27, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>.

⁹“Overcoming Racial Stereotypes,” last modified (unknown), <http://ucc.nd.edu/self-help/multicultural-awareness/overcoming-stereotypes/>.

they were considered to be less sensitive to physical pain (presumably for their thicker skin) and less able to think abstractly, which are the reasons why they were better suited for the hard work in hot temperatures and less subvert against their owners.¹⁰

On top of such widespread ignorance, the former president, Thomas Jefferson, also gave weight to this public opinion on the mental aptitude of blacks when he spoke for many:

“Blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind” ...Never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture.”¹¹

Obviously, the stereotypes were negative and widely rooted across the United States. However, in the South, they had a much bigger significance as there was a wide-spread belief that black Africans are inferior. This was amplified by the unfair distribution of power between the two races. As a result, the approach of white people towards Afro-Americans was full of humiliation and disdain.

One form of slave humiliation was expressed by the word “Nigger”. The online source called “African American registry” provides some historical background. It states, that the origins of this epithet might be traced to the word “niger”, which is of Latin origin, meaning black. At first, it was used as a common variation of the word negro which is Spanish and Portuguese for black, and since the Portuguese and the Spanish were both slave-trading nations, it had quickly integrated into common dialect. However, using the word “Nigger” quickly adopted a much heavier tone, which carried hatred and disgust aimed at black Africans. Clearly, this was used to distance the slaves as something other than their white masters. It strengthened the stereotype of the lazy, stupid, dirt, worthless nobody.¹² Naturally, since both films try to depict the true face of slavery, this word is present in both of them, uttered primarily by the white characters while addressing the blacks.

¹⁰ S. Plous and Tyron Williams, “Racial Stereotypes From the Days of American Slavery,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25,9 (1995): 796-797.

¹¹Plous and Williams, “Racial Stereotypes From the Days of American Slavery,” 796.

¹² “Nigger (The Word), A Brief History,” last modified (unknown), 2017.
http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/nigger-word-brief-history.

1.1 DEPICTION OF RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN *DJANGO UNCHAINED*

As mentioned above, Quentin Tarantino tried to depict every aspect of slavery in the antebellum period and the word “nigger” definitely represents the core element of slavery. As presented in *The Guardian*, the actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays the role of an abusive slaver named Calvin Candie, “has spoken of his discomfort at having to use the word, giving himself over to his character’s hideousness when colleagues Jackson and Foxx counselled that only thus could he descend to Calvin Candie’s depths, where the word was common currency.”¹³ On the other hand, Candie has no distaste for this word. In fact, it is a part of his every-day diction. However, all the whites involved in the slave business in this movie use the word so often that in the final effect it loses its seriousness and comes close to being ridiculous and even comical. Tarantino exaggerates this word to not only make the audience feel more comfortable but also ridicule it.

Another portrayal of slave degradation in this movie is depicted in the scene where Calvin Candie examines a skull of his former slave. This loyal servant shaved the head of Calvin’s father every week. Even though he had a chance to cut his throat, he never did. To explain, Calvin removes a bone from his bag and makes a deep cut through it with a saw to show three distinct dimples on the inner side. He claims that the science of phrenology, which studied the association between anatomy and physiology, is crucial to recognize the distinction between the two human species, black and white. The position of the three holes is, according to him, the reason why the idea has never occurred to the slave. They are an attest to the “submissiveness” of blacks. In other words, Candie demonstrates that blacks are born to serve.

Another stereotype in the movie was based on the assumption that Africans could endure extreme pain. This is shown in the scene where Mr Candie is entertaining his guests, including Django and Dr Schultz, at the big house. He becomes thrilled to reveal the scars of lashes on Hildi’s back (the wife of Django) in the same way, as a dog owner exhibits the skills of his pet.

¹³“Django Unchained: Is Its Portrayal of Slavery Too Flippant?,” last modified July 30, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jan/10/django-unchained-portrayal-slavery-flippant>.

CALVIN CANDIE: I mean Hildi got something like fifteen lashes on her back. Lara Lee get one, she'd lose her mind. These niggers are tough, no doubt about it. Hildi's got something about four lashes on her back.¹⁴

By saying this, he positively confirms the beliefs held in the past. Besides, to support his argument, this white slaver then compares Hildi to his white-skinned sister. According to him, she would probably go insane as a result of the intensive lashing. Hildi, on the other hand, is black and thus naturally stronger. However, there would be no way to prove his theory, as nobody would dare to lash a white woman.

To continue, it is widely-known fact that black women became the victims of the sexual desires of their masters. This is a horrific, yet notable aspect of slavery, which at the same time poses a question - How is it possible that white slavers satisfied their sexual needs by raping a black person they so much despised? To explain, white slavers raped the black women in the same way they would abuse an animal, which still happens nowadays. Therefore, such abusive practices did not represent anything unusual even in the past. In fact, there were hundreds of "mulatto" children (which is a Portuguese word for a mixed-race person) born in consequence.

However, *Django Unchained* spares the viewer such scenes, as Tarantino centres the attention on other forms of violence. Still, the movie can be perceived to have a heavily sexual undertone. For example, Calvin Candie enjoys the company of his female house slaves with attractive appearance. One of his beautiful servants wears a tight short knee-length dress, while another one is dressed in a long robe and her face is beautified with makeup. What is more, he is shown to like touching them, to feel them, which he shows in the scene at a dinner table in the big house. Calvin invites Hildi to fill his glass, while he grabs her around her waist. This fondness of Mr Candie for his slaves definitely contradicts the stereotypes.

¹⁴*Django Unchained*, dir. by Quentin Tarantino, (Weinstein Company and The Columbia Pictures, 2012), 1:49:08-1:49:20.

1.2 DEPICTION OF RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE*

Most of the stereotypes portrayed in *Django Unchained* have also been well depicted in *12 Years a Slave*. Especially in the scene where Mr Freeman explains to Mr Ford his decision not to sell a young mulatto girl. Mr Freeman is a business man who trades with “black flesh”. Mr Ford represents a potential buyer.

FREEMAN: I will not sell the girl. There's heaps 'n piles of money to be made off her. She is a beauty. One of the regular bloods. None of your thick-lipped, bullet headed, cotton picking niggers. ¹⁵

Mr. Freeman refuses to sell her to Mr. Ford as a field hand, as it would be a huge loss. Given the fact that their black genes were mixed with the white ones, they had a lighter complexion, which made them more attractive to the whites. Therefore, mulatto people represented valued commodities. This is also the reason why Mr Freeman is shown to be milder to this young mulatto child. On the other hand, he has nothing but distaste for the other blacks, which stems from their apparent difference in physical features.

Further, there is a scene when Mr Epps leads a conversation with Bass, a light haired middle aged Canadian, who, unlike Epps, opposes slavery. Bass has been hired by Mr Epps to work on the extension of the Great House. He is shocked that the slaver invites him to respite from the heat, whereas the blacks cannot. As a result, he makes an attempt to explain to Epps that there is no difference between white and black man, as they are both human beings. This remark, however, greatly offends the slaver.

EPPS: Yah compare me to a nigger, Bass?

BASS: I only asking in the eyes of God what is the difference?

EPPS: Yah might as well ask what the difference is between a white man and a baboon. Now, I seen one of them critters in Orleans that knowed just as much as any nigger I got.

BASS: Mr Epps, these niggers are human beings. If they are allowed to scale no higher than brute animals, you and men like you will have to answer for it. There's an ill, Mr Epps, a fearful ill, resting on this nation-- ¹⁶

¹⁵*12 Years a Slave*, dir. by Steven McQueen, (Regency Enterprises, et al., 2013) 31:01 – 31:12.

¹⁶*12 Years a Slave*, 1:44:00-1:44:30.

The arguments of Mr Epps in fact support the viewpoints of the white southerners. As illustrated, most of them regarded Africans as brainless apes. Obviously, this belief is so rooted in him that any association with Africans is not only absurd but ridiculous as well.

Similarly to *Django Unchained*, *12 Years a Slave* shows the sexual desires of slave masters towards their female servants as well. In McQueen's movie, it is Mr Epps who has fondness for the "black flesh", particularly towards his most productive slave Patsy. There is a scene where his slaves finished their work on plantation and are gathered in the gin house, obediently waiting as their baskets of cotton are being weighted. Patsy has again managed to pick over 500 pounds of cotton (230 kg), which is double the average. While he approaches Patsy, he stops and gazes at her, touching her skin. He certainly has some affections to her. He later seeks her at night to brutally rape her, which satisfies his lust. There is a clear controversy in the fondness he has for Patsy – a slave master finding beauty in a negro who is normally viewed with distaste. Mr McQueen provides an explanation of this complicated relationship.

“Yeah, the situation is that there were two victims: the perpetrator and the victim. ...Epps-yes, he's horrible, disgusting, but – why is he in love with a slave? Of course, Patsey does not return that love at all. But it's one of those things where he takes out his love for her trying to destroy her.¹⁷

As a result, he is frustrated, which could have been caused by the fact that they cannot be together because of their different races. Even though she is in a way special to him, however, he still treats her like an animal; like an object that he may treat according to his will.

Lastly, Mrs Epps (his wife) observes those feelings of her husband towards Patsey. This woman certainly feels humiliated and offended by the fact that her husband favours a Negro over her. As a result, Mrs Epps does everything possible to dispose of this slave. However, her husband admits he would rather get rid of her than Patsey. As a result, she does not hesitate to purposefully hurt Patsey. By this, Mr McQueen illustrates how hard it was for white women, whose husbands committed adultery with a slave.

¹⁷“12 Years a Slave,” 193.

To conclude, both movies show that the white southerners did not regard Negroes as human beings. Instead, they viewed them as dull animals. However, this did not apply to all slaves. Some of them were more valued because of their lighter complexion or better look. Those, however, were treated differently only for the fact that they were worth more money.

2 SLAVERY

To have better understanding of the content of this thesis, it is important to characterise the pre-American Civil War setting of both movies that many historians call the Antebellum Era. This period began after the American Revolution and stretched to the beginning of the Civil War. The Antebellum period can be characterised by westward expansion of American colonials as well as great economic prosperity both in the North and South. While the northern territories were radically modernized by the Industrial Revolution, the southern prosperity, however, depended primarily on large-scale production of cotton. Growing cotton was labour intensive and reliant on slave labour.¹⁸ Besides, had it not been for the invention of the cotton gin (devised by Eli Whitney in 1793), the southern plantations would have never been so vast and profitable. This revolutionary machine mechanised the process of separating seeds from cotton wool and made the processing more time efficient. Along with the development of power looms came the development of the sewing machine as well. Consequently, this increased speed of making cotton clothing and similar garments stimulated the demand for slave labourers, as the profit-seeking planters were eager to grow larger volumes of crops in order to keep the cotton industry in supply.¹⁹

There were other factors that contributed to the great wealth of the South as well as the expansion of slavery. After the Indian Removal Act, there was great abundance of land in the western territory, which drove the prices of land down for local farmers and plantation owners. As the U.S. expanded south and west, plantation owners could spread across a large area in order to maximize the production of cotton and increase their income. It is clear that

¹⁸“Antebellum Period,” last modified March 11, 2016. <http://www.historynet.com/antebellum-period>.

¹⁹“Cotton Gin and Eli Whitney,” last modified November 9, 2016, <http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/cotton-gin-and-eli-whitney>.

the slaves themselves, who could neither resign nor demand higher wages, were also contributing to the profitability.²⁰

Slavery has existed as long as history can remember. Over all that time, it has taken various forms. Therefore, one cannot fully say what a slave is or how slavery should be defined. However, the webpage *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes it along the following lines - It is generally agreed, by many historians, anthropologists and sociologists, that a person might be regarded as a slave if they have the following characteristics:

Firstly, in spite of the fact that slaves are human beings, they are also considered to be property. In other words, they are regarded and treated as objects belonging to someone else. In this respect, there is no means by which a slave could take responsibility for their actions, as they are deprived of almost all rights free people (such as their owners) could enjoy. Secondly, a slave owner has the right to claim any of the products produced by his slaves. Thirdly, since a slave is an unfree person, they are deprived of personal liberty and the right to move about freely. An online source called *New World Encyclopaedia* provides a clear summary of the facts already mentioned above:

“Slavery is the social and/or legal designation of specific persons as property, without the right to refuse work or receive payment. Where slavery is a legal practice, slaves may be held under the control of another person, group, organization, or state.”²¹

Moreover, the slaves are not part of this relationship voluntarily. Bondaged people were very frequently captured in wars, kidnapped on slave-raiding or piracy expeditions, or enslaved as a punishment for crime or debt. Shockingly, some slaves are sold into slavery by their parents or even spouses.²²

To continue, in the past, the lives of bondaged people used to be regulated by Slaves Codes. Enacted by the authorities, these codes established the following facts: “Slaves are not people but property; laws should protect the ownership of such property and should also protect

²⁰Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation. 7th ed. Boston* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 327.

²¹“Slavery,” last modified September 24, 2015, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Slavery>.

²²“Slavery,” last modified March 24, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slavery-sociology>.

whites against any dangers that might arise from the presence of large numbers of slaves.”²³ Lastly, Kenneth M. Stampp adds that all codes required the absolute devotion to the master as well as respect and subordination to all white men.²⁴

Even though many people now condemn slavery and feel ashamed of the way their ancestors treated these (primarily African) people, it was a common and legal practice throughout the United States. Most significant number of slaves worked on cotton plantations, but they were also engaged in the cultivation of tobacco, rice, and sugarcane. All plantations were under constant supervision of an owner or several overseers. The work was hard, long and intensive. A slave was expected to pick on average 323 pounds (150 kg) of cotton in one day, although 150 pounds (70kg) of cotton was considered a satisfactory performance. In order to increase the pace of work, the plantation overseers often used the whip. Even at that time, whipping was one of the most criticized abuses of the institution. However, it was the most frequent tool, as it not only served to conduct the work on plantations, but also as a punishment for disobedience, laziness or any attempt to run away.²⁵ Mary Beth Norton support this fact: “Whites throughout the South believed that slaves cannot be governed except with the whip” adding that “the fear of the lash kept them in good order”.²⁶

2.1 DEPICTION OF SLAVERY IN DJANGO UNCHAINED

As mentioned above, the aim of *Django Unchained* is to show the inhuman treatment of Africans rather than educate people about the historical facts. The magazine *Esquire* claims that, because Quentin Tarantino made the film with the view to show the brutal and shocking reality of slavery, it portrays slaves being whipped, dogs chewing slaves to death while bystanders watch, slaves forced to gouge out each other's eyes, slave women given to houseguests the way one might give a basket of decorative soaps, slaves kept in burning holes to die by thirst, slaves having their balls cut off with red-hot blades, and so on.”²⁷ It is not only the cruelty itself which is horrifying. It is the fact that most slavers actually took great delight in inflicting the pain on the bondaged people, both physical and emotional.

²³John Hope Franklin Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994), 124.

²⁴Kenneth M. Stampp, *The peculiar Institution Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House, Inc., 1956), 207.

²⁵Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 123-129.

²⁶Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation*. 7th ed. Boston, 340.

²⁷“*Django Unchained* Is a Better Movie About Slavery Than *Lincoln*,” last modified November 20, 2015, <http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/a17647/django-unchained-lincoln-slavery-14895534/>.

This might be another aim of Quentin Tarantino, as he states “We all intellectually 'know' the brutality and inhumanity of slavery, but after you do the research it's no longer intellectual any more, no longer just historical record – you feel it in your bones. It makes you angry, and want to do something ... I'm here to tell you, that however bad things get in the movie, a lot worse shit actually happened.”²⁸ In other words, he is asserting that even though people might be familiar with the idea of slavery, they may not fully understand what it meant to enslaved. With those scenes, he wants the audience to relate to the suffering of the slaves so that they can comprehend its seriousness.

Django Unchained opens with a scene where five black people are dragged across several landscapes from The Greenville Slave Auction in Greenville Mississippi. This was one of the usual ways of transporting slaves. As described by John A. Moss, Jr., most bonded people were either shipped to the cotton kingdom via the Atlantic Ocean or sent overland, passing from southwestern Virginia, through Mississippi, to Louisiana. Slaves that went by land had to walk most of the way, being either handcuffed or chained together or both. Since they represented valuable commodities, there was always a trader or agent who kept a constant eye on the them to prevent unwanted escapes.²⁹ These traders are in the film represented by two hillbilly brothers who are riding horses, with their cargo in between them.

Obviously, they do not pay any particular regards to the conditions under which the slaves are transported. All the five “poor devils” have been forced to travel long distance, given the fact that they are first seen walking under the unmercifully strong sun somewhere in the desert. Then, in the following shot, they stumble onwards in a cold and frozen land, their bodies thinly covered in a blanket. The camera zooms in for a close-up of their bare and sore feet, which are connected together with leg irons. The chains slowly scrape at the skin and through the flesh. During the journey, the merchants make no attempt to stop even when one of the slaves falters out of exhaustion, struggling not to fall.

Another disturbing aspect of slavery which should be considered is flogging. As stated above, bonded people used to be lashed with a whip for many different reasons - to intensify their

²⁸“Quentin Tarantino defends depiction of slavery in *Django Unchained*,” last modified July 30, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/dec/07/quentin-tarantino-slavery-django-unchained>.

²⁹Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 115.

work, to punish them for attempting to run away or not picking a sufficient amount of cotton. As a result, the backs of a slave very often bore the marks of large scars and the main hero is no exception. In fact, the opening scene portray large deep scars across the whole backs and arms of Django as well as his black companions, as if Tarantino could not resist to shock the audience straight from the beginning. To intensify this, the opening theme song is accompanied by a random sound of the whip, the mostly dreaded piece of rope for all Afro-Americans kept in bondage.

A later scene provides the reason why slaves felt so anxious about this form of punishment. In the scene, Django has a flashback on the day he and his wife Hildy made an attempt to escape. However, they were pursued and caught. In consequence, Hildy is about to be given a peeling (a punishment by a bullwhip across the back). Her hands are attached to two poles by two ropes to prevent her escape, and to ensure the power and intensiveness of the flick. There are three overseers. While one of them is attaching Hildy to the tree, another one is preparing to lash her, turning the whip from one side to the other, in anticipation. The third overseer listens to Django's begging for mercy, to which the overseer responses: "I like the way you beg boy". The scene is very powerful - she is covered in sweat and desperate. With the first whip, Hildy gives a terrible scream full of agony, her face is shown with her eyes closed and her mouth wide open. As the whipping continues, she hardly has the energy to scream again, as the pain is clearly unbearable.

To continue, *Django Unchained* shocks the viewer with the fact that the whites could take pleasure in watching their slaves dying. Calvin Candie delights in Mandingo fights, where usually a pair of black slaves are engaged in a mortal combat. In the fight, there is always a winner and a loser. However, in this case, the loser is not only defeated, but terribly murdered. There is a scene of two fighting Negroes. To encourage his fighter, Calvin Candie instructs his slave on how to attack the opponent. Driven by these commands, the black man first breaks the arm and then blinds the other fighter by sticking his fingers into his eyes. Eventually, Calvin orders to finish him, providing a small hammer and the slave obliges. In spite of the fact that in reality a slave owner would not engage his slave in such fight, for they were intended for the work on the plantations, Calvin, as a fictional character, is supposed to demonstrate the cruelty of the white slavers. He takes advantage of having the right to the life of the slave, and does not hesitate to sacrifice it for his own entertainment.

Another horrifying scene, which depicts the brutality of white slavers, shows a black man being torn by a pack of dogs on command of his master. Unfortunately, in the past there were many cases of slaves being burned alive, hanged or drowned, which their masters always escaped blame for, as it was not considered a murder. In fact, as stated by M. Norton: “The masters wielded virtually absolute authority on his plantation, and courts did not recognize the word of chattel. Slaveholders rarely had to answer to the law or to the state. Pregnant women were whipped, and there were burnings, mutilations, tortures, and murders.”³⁰ In *Django Unchained*, this poor slave has attempted to escape because he does not want to take part in Mandingo fights any more. He finds himself in the situation with no way out – he will either fight in another combat or get severely mauled by the dogs. Calvin Candie, however, finds no use for him. In consequence, he unmercifully throws the slave to the beasts.

2.2 THE DEPICTION OF SLAVERY IN 12 YEARS A SLAVE

12 Years a Slave depicts other aspects of slavery, particularly the disregard of whites to Africans’ feelings. This is well-played by Paul Giamatti, who portrays the character of Mr Freeman. Mr Freeman has purchased Solomon and other slaves for their further sale. This businessmen first prompts the blacks to get prepared. They are seen washing their bodies, while he observes the quality of his “commodity”. After that, all of the slaves are distributed all around a room. In order to encourage the sale, most of them are naked so that the buyers may observe their physical condition. Mr Freeman is seen providing random commentaries or making the slaves to show how fit they are. For instance, he commands a little boy jump to exhibit his strength and endurance: “You see how fit the boy is. Like ripe fruit. He will grow into a fine beast.”³¹ The viewer will certainly come to realise that those who were involved in slave business had not been affected by the humiliation they inflicted on African people.

Later in the scene, the viewer may observe another inhuman aspect of slavery business - separation of black families. Mrs M. Norton claims that losing a family member by sale to another country represented one of the most frequent fears for all slaves kept in bondage. In fact, there were thousands of families forcibly disrupted by sale every year.³² This is in the

³⁰Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation.7th ed. Boston*, 341.

³¹McQueen, Steven, 30:26 – 30:42.

³²Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation.7th ed. Boston*, 345.

movie shown in the scene where a black mother called Eliza is about to be sold without her children. Being distressed, the woman starts begging.

ELIZA: Please, sir..Please don't divide my family. Don't take me unless you take my children as well.

FREEMAN: Eliza, quiet!

ELIZA: You will have the most faithful slave in me, sir. The most faithful slave that has ever lived, but I beg that you do not separate us.³³

Even though Mr. Ford sees the panic and distress in Eliza, which clearly touches him, he is probably the only one who is moved. Mr. Freeman pays no regard for her desperation. He even shouts at her to be quiet. When a pair of black men grab Eliza and start pulling her away, she has an instant hysterical outburst, for which Mr. Freeman does not hesitate to strike her with his foot. Then, the scene ends with a mother and her children screaming and crying while being dragged away from each other.

To continue, as mentioned above, the whip represented an indispensable part of slavery. It was the most frequently used tool to subjugate the slaves. This is presented in the scene in which Solomon is sent to his new master Mr Epps. Epps welcomes his new servants with a few words from the Bible with the view to let them know that they have to obey his master unless they want to be beaten.

EPPS: "And that servant which knew his Lord's will..and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes..." D'ye hear that? Stripes."³⁴

The treat of being lashed places a considerable pressure on the slaves, which the viewer might observe in the following sequence. It shows several lines of slaves picking cotton. The camera is first pointed at the skilled hands of Patsy and then zooms at Solomon, whose clumsy hands do not allow him to be as quick as she is. As a result, he is anxious. The tensed atmosphere in this scene is being intensified by a random crack of the whip made by one of the overseers.

The most disturbing and brutal scene, however, takes place towards the end of the film. There, Patsy becomes a victim of her master's insanity. His outrage is driven by anger and

³³ *12 Years a Slave*, 30:10 – 30:20.

³⁴ *12 Years a Slave*, 54:35-55:12.

jealousy at the fact that Patsey visited his neighbour Shaw's plantation, which he believes, is because Patsey is having an affair with Mr Shaw. Despite his rage, he cannot deliver the beating. Then comes the most emotional moment - Epps orders Solomon (her dear friend) to take his place and strike her. Mr McQueen believes this represented another means of mental torture. He says: "Most of the beating were done by black people. It was all part of it, part of the psychological torture."³⁵

With no other choice, Solomon begins to whip. His lashes are light, though. Mr Epps's grief is now replaced by fury. He threatens Solomon:

EPPS: Yah will strike her. Yah will strike her until her flesh is rent and meat and blood flow equal, or I will kill every nigger in my sight!³⁶

The camera is pointed at Patsey's face - with every whip there is a spray of blood. Patsey now screams in agony, as her back is ripped open. He continues to strike, again and again, until it becomes unbearable to see the blood and meat. It makes him stop. However, Epps is still not satisfied. He takes up the whip and hits Patsy with greater force than Solomon. The camera slowly turns to reveal how every strike makes a deep groove in her flesh. After this brutal act, Patsey is left terribly lacerated, the lash wet with her blood. Her head sinks to the ground. She no longer screams but moans, as she is on the verge of death. Many critics argue that this is too extreme to appear on the screen. However, the director felt obliged to shoot this scene.

"That picture of Solomon hanging there was, for me- it had to represent all the hundreds of thousands of people who were lynched. I had to do that because, in some way, it was representing those people who never had a name and who never had a grave. People talk about what happened, but when you visualize it, when you see it...I was very careful about how I brought that to the narrative. There's a subtlety that leads up to the crescendo of Patsey being whipped by Solomon."... "I'm making a picture of what took place in those times, and if I didn't do it justice, I wouldn't be able to look at myself".³⁷

³⁵"12 Years a Slave," 188.

³⁶ *Steve McQueen*, 1:50:33-1:50:40.

³⁷"12 Years a Slave," 192.

To conclude, the status of being a slave brought a lot of physical and emotional distress for African people. Mainly for the reason that the owners of the slaves did not feel slaves had any emotions. As a result slaves were very often the victims of the interests of their owners, especially when they wanted to have entertainment or get finance.

3 FREEDOM

Freedom was a real aspiration of all the black people kept in bondage in the Antebellum era. As previously mentioned, true accounts of slave mistreatment - including beating, sexual abuse and mutilation - were numerous and shared widely in the slave communities. Therefore, slaves needed some form of escapism. As stated by John A. Moss, Jr., one common means of seeking freedom was escapism through Christianity, particularly through religious music. Religious rituals and songs enabled slaves to abandon their miserable everyday lives in order to find spiritual ones. Mr Moss also presents the examples of most popular songs with the following titles - "Look Away in de Heaven, Lord", "Dere's a Great Camp Meeting' in de Promised Land". These tunes suggest that slaves anticipated their burdens would be relieved in the afterlife.³⁸

To continue, Mr Moss provides another example of slaves' reaction to bondage. He claims, that there were many individuals who could not find any value in their lives and thus resorted to committing suicide. Some of them drowned themselves while being transported from Africa to American, while others refused to intake any food and died of starvation. Moreover, some slave mothers even killed their children in order to spare them the life of hard and constant servitude.³⁹

Further, those who were unable to find comfort in Christianity nor had the courage to take their lives, attempted to gain freedom by running away. Because the work was severe and the punishment frequent, the number of runaways was considerable. In fact, it could easily be argued that there was a real innate and spiritual desire to be free in this life and there was probably no more common form of salvation than escaping. Slave women, men and children most frequently went through forests, mountains and swamps, often giving it a careful thought and preparation, procuring copies of free papers. Many others simply left the

³⁸Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 142.

³⁹Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 142.

plantation without any plan at all. Some considerable numbers of reckless slaves returned to their masters voluntarily or were caught and punished.⁴⁰ As stated by K. M. Stampp, the future of a runaway slave was very uncertain for several reasons. First, the journey to the North was long and hard. Without food and drink, the fugitives therefore often raided the enroute villages and thus risked being caught. Second, the deprived masters advertised the loss of their slaves, providing the description of their appearance and a reward.⁴¹

The third reason is provided by John A. Moss. According to him, the number of fugitives was so overwhelming that the southern states had to strengthen their patrol as well as other safeguards. Besides, southern communities were aided by the federal and state legislation in the pursue of their absconded “properties”.⁴² On top of that, the Congresses passed fugitive Slave Acts which, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “provided the seizure and return of runaway slaves who escaped from one state into another one.”⁴³ These acts enabled the seizure and return of runaway slaves. Nevertheless, in spite of all these obstacles, many runaways achieved their freedom and returned repeatedly to assist other fugitive slaves in their escape. Soon, there emerged an antislavery movement, which guided and assisted thousands of fugitives to safe places, predominantly to free slave states in the North. All in all, without question, slaves could not become reconciled to their inferior status and harsh treatment. All of them fought for their freedom in various ways. Successful or not, had it not been for those who tried to escape the slavers, the institution could not have come to an end.

3.1 DEPICTON OF FREEDOM IN *DJANGO UNCHAINED*

Django really aspires to have a better life for him and his beloved wife Hildy. As the viewer learns from one of the many Django’s reflections, the two of them have already attempted to save themselves from slavery. Holding hands, they are seen running in the woods chased by a group of overseers on horses and a pack of their dogs. This is presumably their first and not thoroughly considered attempt to escape, as they are soon discovered, caught and punished. To illustrate the story, the viewer listens to a song called “Freedom”. The lyrics reads “I’m

⁴⁰Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation*. 7th ed. Boston, 346.

⁴¹Kenneth M. Stampp, *The peculiar Institution*, 116-120.

⁴²Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 143.

⁴³“Fugitive Slave Acts,” last modified March 27, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Fugitive-Slave-Acts>.

looking for freedom, I'm looking for freedom...And to find it may take everything I have"⁴⁴. Quentin Tarantino is well known for selecting eclectic and powerful music, and by choosing this song, he might be indicating the risk Django takes by trying to flee. He might not only fail, but also lose his wife, the only value in his life.

Luckily, Dr Schultz offers Django freedom and makes him his companion. Django becomes free, however, in a state where white people believe all blacks should be enslaved. Therefore, when the two main protagonists enter a town in Texas, Django is seen riding on a horse. All of the citizens stare at him in amazement, as they never saw a "nigger" ride a horse. Moreover, when Django and his companion enter one of the local pubs, the inn keeper is so startled that he runs to get the sheriff to solve this "problem".

In order to finish the transformation from a slave to a free person, Django is invited by his companion to choose his own clothes. When he first appears in his new outfit, the viewer will definitely notice the remarkable transformation. Django as a slave is seen wearing only a piece of blanket and a pair of baggy trousers. His messy hair needs cutting and his overgrown beard shaving. On the other hand, Django a freeman wears a blue satin dress comprising a doublet and knee breeches (this outfit used to be commonly worn by noble men). His hair and beard is neatly cut, and he is now riding his own horse. However, he cannot, of course, disguise his complexion. With this scene, Tarantino has invented a fictional situation in order to show the reactions of racist nineteenth-century whites when they encountered a black man acting as if he was a white man.

While the two main heroes ride through a cotton plantation, Django has the full attention of all of the cotton-picking slaves, who stop their work out of amazement. They not only see a slave riding a horse, as though he was equal to white man but also in a set of clothes that so remotely resembles theirs. The patriarch of the plantation, Big Daddy, is stunned by this extraordinary spectacle as well. Yet he decides to refuse the possibility that Django is free, which he demonstrates by declaring that he does not want a "nigger" to ride a horse at his manor. Dr Schultz tries to correct this misconception by urging Big Daddy to treat Django as a free man. However, Big Daddy still struggles to comprehend the status of Django. Mrs Glenda R. Carpio from *Transition* journal provides a supportive example: "The scene that

⁴⁴ *Django Unchained*, 33:41 – 33:56.

follows is one in which Big Daddy has to explain to one of his female slaves how to treat Django who, as Schultz informs him, is free. What is a free black man and how to treat him? Tarantino treats us to a slowed down, mellow comedy in which Big Daddy struggles to explain these concepts and indeed, to understand them.”⁴⁵

BIG DADDY: Django isn't a slave. Django is a free man. Do you understand? You're not to treat him like any of these other niggers around here, cause he ain't like any of these other niggers around here. Ya got it?

BETINA: Ya want I should treat 'em like white folks?

BIG DADDY: No that's not what I said.

BETINA: Then I don't know what'cha want Big Daddy.⁴⁶

Big Daddy clearly does not allow Betina to treat Django as a white man, as he still regards him as a slave. At the same time, he cannot overcome his innate belief that all blacks are to be kept in bondage. All in all, he refuses any association with this black man.

3.2 DEPICTION OF FREEDOM IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE*

Brilliantly directed by black filmmaker Steve McQueen, *12 Years a Slave* is a devastating indictment of the inhumanity of slavery. As Northup, Chiwetel Ejiofor's bewildered astonishment and horror at the theft of his freedom, and the degradation of his new condition, not only add to the impact of his experiences but give his story an immediacy that draws the viewer in.⁴⁷

At the beginning of *12 years a Slave*, the main character, Salomon Northup, has the status of a free man. This entitles him to the same privileges that white people enjoy, for instance, getting married, having a decent job and holding property. At the start of the story, he is a talented musician who is married with three children living in New York in the North East. He can afford to own and live in a large house, wear expensive clothes and dine in luxurious restaurants. In other words, he is a successful member of society even though the society is of white majority. The white population in New York even admire him for his musical

⁴⁵Glenda R. Carpio, "I like the way you die, boy," *Transition 112, Django Unpacked* (2013): 2.

⁴⁶*Django Unchained*, 30:54 – 31:17.

⁴⁷"Twelve Years a Slave," last modified March 23, 2015,

http://www.catholicdigest.com/articles/food_fun/film_television/2013/10-16/twelve-years-a-slave.

talents. However, given his complexion and the Slave Acts, he becomes a victim of a bounty hunting slave traders.

These “merchants” are represented by two white gentlemen who pretend to be artists that have allegedly heard about Solomon’s considerable talents and thus invites him to perform with them in Washington. Given the fact that *12 Years a Slave* is a real story, it is a revelation of an inhumane business, which required underhanded cunning by those who earned their living from it. Attracted by huge profit, Solomon accepts and in the following scene he is sitting at a table with the merchants in a luxurious restaurant, celebrating his successful week.

The next day, Solomon wakes up to find himself in a dimly lit room. At first, he comes to realise that his hands are handcuffed and legs in irons. Besides, the irons are attached to a chain running to a bolt in the ground. He begins to pull on the chains, and fight against them. His emotion is expressed first by fury and then panic. James Burch, who runs the slave pen, enters the jail. Solomon rises and attempts to prove his identity saying that he is a free man, a resident of Saratoga. Burch invites Solomon to produce his papers. As Solomon fails to do that Burch says:

BURCH:Yah no free man. And yah aint’t from Saratoga. Yah from Georgia. Yah ain’t a free man. Yah nuthin’ but a Georgia runaway. Yah just a runaway nigger from Georgia.⁴⁸

He speaks very slowly and distinctly so as to make Solomon understand that he can no longer regard himself as a free man. At this point, however, it is clear that Solomon will never accept it. Therefore, he is pulled to the ground and, subsequently, terribly beaten with a paddle with such force that it falls into pieces. Solomon is panting and apparently in an agonizing pain. However, he still refuses to accept his new status. As a result, his backs are lashed like any other slave at a plantation kept in bondage. At once, Solomon has not only been deprived of his identity but also his freedom to leave.

As already mentioned at the start of this chapter, many plantation slaves found their way to escape through rituals and songs. After Solomon is sent to a new master, he meets Patsey who is particularly is constantly traumatised by her master and mistress. She can hardly escape.

⁴⁸*12 Years a Slave*, 13:45-14:11.

However, there is one place where Patsy seeks refuge and that is on the neighbour Shaw's plantation. The New Yorker shows how McQueen managed to show an abolitionist spirit through one of the characters.

In "12 Years a Slave," McQueen offers a wise and empathetic view of the house slave, Mistress Shaw (played by Alfre Woodard), who has escaped from the slave owner's most brutal treatment by becoming his mistress—and who, in the process, makes whatever use she can of her improved situation to help other slaves.⁴⁹

It is The Sabbath (Sunday) and Patsy is having some leisure time with Mrs. Shaw, who is also black. Patsy enjoys the company of Mrs Shaw because they have a lot in common. The talk and understanding of her Mrs Shaw helps Patsy forget and it eases her strain. Besides, both women are dressed like ladies, wearing nice gowns and bonnets with ornate patterns. She is comforted by pretending to be someone else, as if she is an equal.

This is really a rarity to be enjoyed, thought. In reality, there is sparse comfort in the life of Patsy. Her days are spent by hard labour, as she is the only slave on plantation who picks over five hundred pounds of cotton. At nights, she has to satisfy the sexual needs of her master and at other times she suffers the humiliations dished out by Mistress Epps. As her life on plantation is unbearable, Patsy seeks Solomon with a request for an "act of kindness" by ending her life.

PATSY: All I ask: end my life. Take my body to the margin of the swamp. Take me by the throat. Hold me low in the water until I's still'n without life. Burry me in a lonely place of dying.⁵⁰

She has certainly given this intention a lot of thought, for her request contains details about the means and place. As her life resembles hell on earth, she believes this is the best way to escape. The thought makes her happy. She smiles, presumably because she cannot wait to find a place of peace, as she might be expecting, in Heaven. However, Solomon is disgusted by this request, because its fulfilling would be to the detriment of his afterlife. He argues in return that God would not forgive him.

⁴⁹"Should a Film Try to Depict Slavery?," last modified October 21, 2013.

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/should-a-film-try-to-depict-slavery>.

⁵⁰*12 Years a Slave*, 1:19:16-1:19:33.

To conclude, both movies use a different approach to how they portray freedom. *Django Unchained* presents the viewer with the fact that the white community would probably never accept a free black to have the same status. *12 Years a Slave*, on the other hand, shows the injustice and suffering of Solomon when the same community takes his freedom away from him. Then, it centres its attention on Patsy, who represents a typical example of the fact that slaves found no solace in their lives.

4 REVENGE

According to John A. Moss, Jr. “Resistance could be found wherever slavery existed, and slavery in the United States was no exception.”⁵¹ Slaves rarely submitted themselves to enslavement willingly much less completely. Apart from the attempts to abscond, discussed as a desire to freedom, there were other forms of defiance developed by slave. As stated by Kenneth M. Stampp, blacks frequently idled their work or did not work at all due to their professed sickness. Most slave owners were familiar with this frequent trick. However, not many took the risk to do any permanent harm to their labourers, because they represented expensive commodity. Other slaves, particularly adult women, shammed pregnancy for which they enjoyed extra food rations as well as a diminished workload. Besides, female slaves learned that some masters also eased the strain of their work if they feigned so-called “female complaints”.⁵²

Another form of resistance had a much extreme character which can be closely linked to the level of the slaves’ despair. Many bonded people resorted to such extremes as self-mutilation and attempted suicide, either to render themselves as unproductive labourers or prevent their further sale. Slaves used knives or guns to maim or amputate their fingers, hands and other limbs. As a result, their lives had to be ended by their masters, because an ineffective worker had no value for them.⁵³

Further, as a result of their knowledge of widespread resistance, plantation overseers and masters often feared being murdered by their slaves, as there were many recorded instances when slaves poisoned their master’s meal. On occasions, slaves were known to use an axe or

⁵¹Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 141.

⁵²Kenneth M. Stampp, *The peculiar Institution*, 104.

⁵³Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 142.

a knife to cut the throats of their masters. Local newspapers helped spread the unease of the slave masters by frequently including articles saying a master was killed by his slave in the woods.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, there was no more feared resistance but slave revolts. They existed since the early days of slavery, and represented the most radical way blacks fought against slavery. There was a very good reason for the anxiety of slave masters, as at almost all plantations, slaves significantly outnumbered both the overseers and their masters. Hundreds or thousands of slaves, with usually one or two leaders in the lead, armed themselves to attack the white community. Mr. Norton describes a rebellion led by one of the most widely renowned African slaves, Nat Turner: “After nurturing his plan for several years, Turner led a band of rebels from farm to farm in the predawn darkness of August 22, 1831. The group severed limbs and crushed skulls with axes or killed their victims with guns. Before alarmed planters stopped them, Nate Turner and his follower had slaughtered sixty whites of both sexes and all ages in forty-eight hours.”⁵⁵

4.1 DEPICTION OF REVENGE IN *DJANGO UNCHAINED*

Django Unchained portrays the aspiration of the main protagonist to liberate himself and his wife from slavery. As a bounty hunter, he kills white men for reward. Later, when his situation gets worse, he turns into a machine, mercilessly killing all whites within his reach. Many critics argue that this is only a fiction and that no slave would ever stand up to the white oppressors. However, this has its roots in history. As stated by Jelani Cobb from *New Yorker*, “the film’s content accurately portrays what the slaveholding classes feared most – slave rebellions, in this case, in the hands of Django who attempts to do it alone despite the risk of losing his own life.”⁵⁶

In other words, Django is taking vengeance for all the black slaves whose rights were denied by all the white slavers. Therefore, this theme occurs repeatedly throughout the film in various forms. The journalist also adds that “the primary sin of “Django Unchained” is not

⁵⁴Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation*. 7th ed. Boston, 346.

⁵⁵Mary Berth Norton et al., *A People & Nation*. 7th ed. Boston, 347.

⁵⁶“Tarantino Unchained,” last modified October 21, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/tarantino-unchained>.

the desire to create an alternative history. It's in the idea that an enslaved black man willing to kill in order to protect those he loves could constitute one." 57

Django is definitely in the right to take revenge for his people. In one of those flashbacks already mentioned in this thesis, Django is seen begging one of the Brittle brothers, John Brittle, to spare his wife. However, he shows no mercy. In fact, he seems to be amused by Django's desperation, as he responds "I like the way you beg boy". Now, in these later scenes, Django is not the old slave with messy hair and torn clothes. He is a new man. The moment is really powerful when the main hero takes his revenge on John. As the camera zooms in on Django, the audience listens to a sound of victory, as though he represented a hero to take this revenge for all the mistreated slaves. John stares at him in amazement, baffled by this new unfamiliar look. Then, his heart is pierced by a bullet shot by the hero who says: I like the way you die, boy.⁵⁸

It does not stop there. As in the next moment, he takes hold of a whip and terribly lashes the other brother, Roger. However, he is not tied to a trunk of a tree so that the whip would be directed only on his back. Instead, he is thrown to the ground, the whip hitting both his face and chest. There is a great strength and power in this whip. The last moments of this act of revenge are shown in slow motion to exaggerate it. Then, Django picks a pistol, and all blacks from the plantation watch how he empties it into Roger. The moment is surprisingly satisfying.

This has certainly been Tarantino's intention, which is also portrayed in the scene when the five slaves (the human cargo for sale and travelled with Django at the beginning of the story) took revenge on the two hillbillies. Dr Schultz offers them two options. First, to carry the wounded hillbilly to the nearest town. Second, to unshackle themselves and dispose of him, then disappear. Unsurprisingly, the next instance all four of them are seen making their way towards the hillbilly. While approaching nearer, the coats are powerfully thrown to the ground, revealing the scarred backs by a whip. In this moment the viewer comes to understand that they want a revenge for their suffering, while in the next moment, when the

⁵⁷"Tarantino Unchained,"

⁵⁸ *Django Unchained*, 36:22-36:25.

slaves shoots the traders with rifles and large pieces of flesh (representing the their revenge) rocket in the air.

4.2 DEPICTION OF REVENGE IN *12 YEARS A SLAVE*

The desire for revenge is again manifested in *12 Years a Slave*. Primarily by the main hero, Solomon, who suffers the injustice of being deprived of his rights to life with his family. As we know he was born free, and even though the odds that he will see his family again are very low, he refuses to fully submit himself to his white oppressors. Besides, he is an educated man, whose intelligence very often surpasses the intellectual ability of other black fellows and his white overseers as well. We are shown that, in some cases, this might be regarded as a disadvantage. Such is the case when Solomon meets Tibeats, a much younger white overseer at Ford's plantation.

Tibeats is offended by Solomon's special and unusual traits. In fact, he is seen to feel humiliated, as Solomon demonstrates to be more inventive and intelligent than him. Besides, Solomon uses technical words such as "materially diminished" to which the overseer responds: "Are you an engineer or a nigger?" with the intention to remind Solomon of his inferior status. Tibeats clearly hates Solomon. Later, when the main protagonist works as a carpenter on a house, Tibeats purposefully gives him instructions which he later criticizes, simply out of his delight. Then, he accuses Solomon of doing careless job, purposefully looking for fault. Solomon defends himself.

SOLOMON: I did as instructed. If there's something wrong, then its wrong with your instructions.

TIBEATS: Yah black bastard! Yah goddamn black bastard! Strip your clothes.

SOLOMON: I will not.⁵⁹

Tibeats might have expected Solomon defiance. In fact, he contradicted himself in order to provoke Solomon and have an excuse to administer out the corporal punishment. However, Solomon's resistance does not stop there. When Tibeats is about to seize him around the neck, Solomon is in control and starts a fight. Taking hold of the whip, he firstly pushes Tibeats to

⁵⁹*12 Years a Slave*, 45:56 – 46:00.

the ground and then strikes his back. The crack of the whip is powerful and repeated, yet it does not penetrate his cloak.

To continue, as already mentioned, slave owners fell under suspicion their slaves could rise against them. In a later scene of this film, the slaves are gathered to dance for their masters in the main in the big house. Mistress Epps provides a tray of freshly baked pastries for all of them except Patsey. She merely lowers her eyes. However, Mistress Epps, understands the non-responsiveness as proof of abhorrence. She is convinced that all of their slaves are full of hatred and resistance. She corners Epps to speak to him:

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D): They foul with it; foul with their hate. You let it be, it'll come back to us in the dark a night. Yah want that? Yah want them black animals to leave us gut like pigs in our own sleep?⁶⁰

After that, this distressed but spiteful woman remarks that the blacks are taking advantage of his foolishness and that he should take a whip and beat all of the ill thoughts from them, especially from Patsey. This again provides further testimony of the wide-spread belief among white slavers that whipping was the most effective way to subdue black slaves.

To continue, slaves were generally forbidden to educate themselves. For example, they could not read and write, apart from perhaps some instances where slave masters allowed them to study the Bible. Slave masters had usually paid a considerable sum of money for their slaves, some of them going into enormous debt. Provided that a slave could read and write, they could also contact somebody and escape. Such a worry is expressed by Mrs Epps, who sends Solomon to get some goods from town, handing him a list. Solomon takes a brief look at the content, not realizing Mrs Epps will notice. As a response, she inquires about his abilities to read.

SOLOMON: A word here or there, but I have no understanding of the written text.

MISTRESS EPPS: Don't trouble yer self with it. Same as the rest, Master bought yah to work. Tha's all. And any more'll earn yah a hun'red lashes.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *12 Years a Slave*, 1:17:18 – 1:17:33.

⁶¹ *12 Years a Slave*, 1:03:07 – 1:03:20.

Solomon is aware that he was careless about his actions. This little mistake has nearly earned him punishment. He is certainly familiar with the fact that slaves are not supposed to be literate. The stereotype says that field slaves, or slaves in general, had not the capacity to understand the written word.

5 CONCLUSION

Both of the films compared in this thesis have portrayed the lives of African people brought to America for the purpose of serving as slaves. They try to represent the daily reality of life on a Southern plantation and show the brutality of white men in a trade that used to be considered normal, if not necessary. The movies also prove that stereotypes and other beliefs about another race, when shared across many communities, can severely damage lives.

The treatment of slaves stemmed from their significant difference in appearance as Africans. Because of these dissimilarities, white people felt superior to black people. But this injustice was taken further in that, not only did they feel superior but, they cruelly took advantage and pleasure out of proving their power over these people who they had enslaved: whipping them; raping them, forcing them to travel a long way without rest; watching them fight for their lives, etc. These two movies intentionally leave their audience with the strong impression that white people did, in fact, treat these Africans wrongfully.

All four elements of slavery which I have discussed – racial stereotypes, slavery, freedom and revenge are well depicted in both *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave*. Sometimes these are explicitly depicted in those films (such as whipping being a tool or repression) which does not require further explanation. However, often the viewer may not realize certain associations which are being made in these films and so these aspects do require further analysis.

However shocking *Django Unchained* might be, the movie accurately portrays the brutality of whites. Despite the film being a tribute to Spaghetti western movies, this brutality really did represent a good part of everyday life of slaves in the Antebellum era in The South. Using this film as a medium to bring us some clear imagery from this era, Quentin Tarantino did a great job and the scenes will be clearly remembered by everyone who watches the film. In fact, the audience are made to feel real sympathy for the slaves and when Django avenges himself they support him whole heartedly.

12 Years a Slave is a harder film to watch, as it is a true story which certainly makes Americans feel decidedly uneasy or guilty about their past. It portrays a more emotional side to the suffering of the slaves. It shows that they had no comfort in their lives and they felt

anxious because of the constant threat of being whipped. However, it is also an importantly educational film and an invaluable witness to the experience of untold children, women, and men kidnapped and sold into slavery as well as the millions of other victims of slavery who never knew freedom at all.

Both of the main characters of the film, Solomon and Django, share the desire to break free. Solomon has experienced great injustice, deprived of his family as well as his rights. His story portrays his struggle to be free and also some rare chances of escapism, shown through the character of Patsy visiting Mrs Shaw so that she can pretend to be someone else and believing that she will find freedom in the afterlife. Django, however, is free from the start of the film and the viewer is presented with the fact that whites in The South would have been unable to come to terms with a slave having the status of a free man, let alone to consider a black man as an equal.

6 RESUMÉ

Nespoutaný Django a *12 let v řetězech* jsou hollywoodské filmy, které se zaměřují na americké otroctví v období před občanskou válkou. Toto téma má v Americe dlouhodobou historii, jelikož silně ovlivňovalo americký národ, především předky dnešních Afro-Američanů. Američané zotročovali Afričany po více jak tři století, a to především tím, že je připravili o jejich svobodu a nutili je tvrdě pracovat na velkých plantážích za účelem zisku z prodeje bavlny, tamější nejcennější nerostné suroviny. Kvůli hrubému a nelidskému zacházení museli po dobu třech století bojovat za svá práva. Toto téma tedy představuje velmi citlivou záležitost, ovšem velmi důležitou část americké historie.

Vzhledem k této skutečnosti se oba dva režiséři – Quentin Tarantino (*Nespoutaný Django*) a Steve McQueen (*12 let v řetězech*) snažili ve svých filmech zobrazit pravou podstatu otroctví. Oba totiž zastávají názor, že jen tak mohli projevit úctu všem Afroameričanům, kteří v tomto období vytrpěli velké bezpráví. To se jim také podařilo, jelikož jsou tyto filmy považovány za jedny z nejlepších novodobých filmů o otroctví. I přesto, že se *Nespoutaný Django* se svým žánrem zařazuje do kategorie fikce, a tudíž není historicky přesný, záběry v něm zachycující kruté zacházení s otroky velmi dobře vystihují události této doby.

Hlavní náplní filmu je odplata, která je v rukou bývalého otroka. Ten na cestě za osvobozením své choti neváhá zabít každého zotročovatele, který mu stojí v cestě, a tím se současně mstí za všechny otroky, kteří to sami nedokázali. Na rozdíl od *Nespoutaného Djanga*, *12 let v řetězech* vypráví skutečný, příběh Solomona Northupa, který byl unesen a prodán do otroctví. Zde strávil dvanáct let, než se ho podařilo najít a navrátit mu jeho právoplatnou svobodu. Tento film je tedy považován za historicky přesný, jelikož záběry filmu popisují reálné skutečnosti ze života v otroctví. Nejdůležitějším motivem je zde touha po svobodě, která byla neprávem odepřena všem otrokům.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá čtyřmi hlavními tématy, které tvoří – rasové stereotypy, otroctví, touha po svobodě, a pomsta. Každému tématu je v této práci věnovaná samostatná kapitola. Zde je vždy nejdříve nastíněn historický kontext, či definice, které objasňují či doplňují informace k jednotlivým tématům. Poté se již práce konkrétně zabývá způsobem, jak jsou jednotlivé motivy zobrazeny ve filmech, a to tak, že se zaměří na určitou scénu obsahující daný element, a tu nejdříve popíše a poté analyzuje. Zejména se práce soustřeďuje

na to, jak jsou tato témata ve filmech zobrazena, co mají vyjadřovat, popř. jaké je hlavní sdělení režiséra divákům. Práce se zároveň snaží dokázat, že tyto témata úzce souvisely, ne-li utvářely životy většiny otroků v Jižní Americe v 19. století.

K tomuto účelu je zde využíváno názoru kritiků obsažených např. v novinových článcích či odborných časopisech. Vzhledem k tomu, že tyto filmy byly natočeny poměrně nedávno, je počet těchto materiálů poměrně malý. Z tohoto důvodu je analýza v této práci založena převážně založena na vlastním úsudku autora, což samozřejmě nezajišťuje úplnou objektivitu.

První kapitola se zabývá rasovými stereotypy. Nejprve uvádí, že pojem „stereotyp“ je vlastně utváření negativních názorů velké skupiny osob. Dále zmiňuje definice pojmu „rasa“, což jsou společné rysy určité skupiny lidí, utvářené na základě zeměpisné polohy. Hlavním bodem je ovšem spojení těchto slov - „rasový stereotyp“, přičemž kromě definice jsou zde vypsány příklady těchto stereotypů v 19. století. Ty byly v této době samozřejmě namířeny vůči Afričanům. Zde se čtenář dozví, že díky jejich zjevné odlišnosti, především pro jejich černou barvu pleti a výraznějším rysům, byla většina černochoů spojována s opi, a proto byli současně považováni za podřazenou lidskou rasu. Tyto negativní názory byly silně zakořeněny v tamější společnosti lidí bílé pleti, a to se také významně odráželo v jejich přístupu a zacházení s Afričany.

Navazující podkapitola ukazuje, jak jsou tyto rasové stereotypy zobrazeny ve filmu Nespoutaný Django. Prostředníkem k tomu slouží jedna z hlavních postav, a to otrokář Calvin Candie. Ten nejprve pomocí malého experimentu dokazuje, že černoši jsou podřazená rasa, která je od přírody předurčena sloužit. Dále poukazuje na stereotyp, že Afričani byli schopni vydržet extrémní bolest (čímž se také zřejmě snažil ospravedlnit jejich bičování). Zbytek této kapitoly je především věnován otázce, proč mnozí otrokáři byli sexuálně přitahováni k jejich otrokyním, a to i přesto, že Afričany pro jejich odlišnosti opovrhovali.

Druhá podkapitola se zabývá stereotypy ve filmu 12 let v řetězech. Ty jsou odvozovány od názorů většiny bílých otrokářů, že Afričani nejsou nic jiného než hloupá zvířata, které podle nich nejsou schopna lidského citu. Ovšem paradoxně jsou to právě černoši, kteří jsou plní citu a běloši, díky tomu, jak nehumánně zacházejí s otroky, jsou vyobrazeni jako bezcitní. Ukázky z filmu toto přesvědčení jasně dokazují. Otrokáři zde černochoy urážejí, ponižují a vyjadřují svou nechuť k jejich druhu. Dále je zde v jedné scéně zobrazeno, že pro tyto otrokáře byla

velká urážka na cti a zároveň značné ponížení, když je někdo s těmito „zvířaty“ srovnával. Stejně jako v přechozí podkapitole, i tato dále zobrazuje sexuální touhy otrokářů. Ovšem tentokrát se zaměřuje na to, jak se člověk vyrovnává s tím, že je fyzicky přitahován k této podřadné rase. Toto je ukázáno prostřednictvím otrokáře pana Eppse a jeho otrokyně Patsey. Čtenář se dozví, že jeho city způsobují velké ponížení nejen jemu, ale i jeho manželce, která se nedokáže smířit s faktem, že je otrok mnohem důležitější než ona.

Druhá kapitola, která nese název Otroctví, je především zaměřena na seznámení čtenáře s popisem otroka. Uvádí, že otrok je považován za majetek svého kupce, a tudíž nemá právo na svobodu. Dále se zde i popisuje právní úprava mezi otrokem a jeho majitelem, jenž byla obsažena v takzvaných „Slave Codes“. Tyto zákony především vyžadovaly, aby otrok byl nejen oddaný svému majiteli, ale také prokazoval respekt vůči všem bělochům. V neposlední řadě zmiňuje, že Afričané byli nejčastěji uneseni z jejich domovů a následně prodáni do otroctví, a to i prostřednictvím jejich členů rodiny. Konec kapitoly je věnován popisu života otroka na bavlníkových plantážích.

V související podkapitole je popsáno otroctví, zobrazené ve filmu Nespoutaný Django. Film se především zaměřuje na fyzické utrpení Afričanů. Tato podkapitola nejdříve uvádí záměry režiséra Quentina Tarantina. Tarantino tvrdí, že jeho film zobrazuje spoustu drastických scén, kde otrokáři mrzačí své otroky, hlavně proto, že bez těchto živých a výstižných záběrů by diváci nikdy nepochopili pravou podstatu a závažnost hrůz, které se v minulosti staly. Z ukázek filmu pak čtenář pochopí, že většina otrokářů nevěnovala fyzickému utrpení svých otroků žádnou pozornost. Mnohem šokující ovšem je, že většina z nich našla určité uspokojení a zábavu, když mohla otrokům způsobovat bolest, a to především bičováním.

Otroctví ve filmu 12 let v řetězech se hlavně zaměřuje na jiný aspekt otrokářství, a to, jak otrokáři nechali černochoy trpět emočně. Jejich trýzeň pramenila především z ponížení, které při jejich prodeji utrpěli. Při tomto procesu Afričané byli nuceni předvádět svou fyzickou kondici - ukazovat zuby, svaly, hbitost, atd. Dále tito obchodníci neváhali rozdělit černošské rodiny, které tím utrpěly značný emoční šok, jelikož matky byly většinou prodány bez svých potomků. Dále se snaží popsat jaký měli otroci strach a z toho, že budou zbičováni. Toto je umocněno v jedné scéně ke konci kapitoly, kde tento nástroj v ruce šíleného Eppse skoro způsobí smrt Patsey.

Kapitola s názvem „Svoboda“ se zabývá způsoby, kterými otroci kvůli svému zoufalství unikali všedním hrůzám života v zajetí. Udává, že nejčastějším způsobem, jak mohli otroci na chvíli uniknout všedním hrůzám otroctví, bylo náboženství, a to zejména při zpěvu svatých písní a různých rituálů. Snažili se dosáhnout spirituální svobody, odpoutat svou mysl od těla a tím dosáhnout klidu. Dalším mnohem drastičtějším způsobem řešení problémů spáchání sebevraždy. Často proto, aby dosáhli klidu, který v reálném životě bohužel rozhodně neměli. Černoši se často pokoušeli z otroctví uprchnout, což také vyžadovalo mnoho odvahy. Navíc museli podstoupit riziko, že budou chyceni. Dobové zákony totiž umožňovaly odchyt zběhlých otroků a jejich navrácení majitelům.

Svoboda ve filmu Nespoutaný Django, nejdříve nastíní fakt, že Django chce svobodu nejen pro sebe, ale také pro jeho ženu. Dále se tato kapitola zabývá reakcí místních lidí (plní předpojatosti a rasistický stereotypů) na představu svobodného černochoha v jejich společnosti. Zvláště, když je navíc oblečen do saténových šatů, kterými se dříve honosili urození šlechtici, a které mají umocnit jeho status svobodného člověka. Je zřejmé, že tento vzhled černochoha je pro bílou i černou společnost dost matoucí a zarážející. V konečném výsledku se divák dozví, že by okolí nikdy nepřijalo svobodného černochoha mezi sebe, jelikož by se nechtěli rovnat někomu, koho považují za podřadnou rasu.

Svoboda v 12 let v řetězech hlavně spočívá v úkolu přesvědčit čtenáře o závažnosti toho, že byl vážený a vzdělaný člověk unesen ze svého domova, a tudíž mu byla odeprána i jeho svoboda, která mu právem náleží. Touha dosáhnout vysvobození z otroctví je tu ale především zobrazena prostřednictvím otrokyně Patsey. Čtenář se dozví, že Patsey nalézala určitou útěchu při občasných návštěvách sousední plantáže, kde spolu s paní domu vedou příjemné konverzace a relaxují od tvrdé práce. Největší útěcha a zároveň vysvobozením je pro tuto otrokyni představa, že někdo ukončí její pozemský život, aby dosáhla svého klidu.

Ve čtvrté a zároveň poslední hlavní kapitole na téma „odplata“, je poukázáno na to, že ne všichni otroci byli plně oddaní svým pánům. Naopak, mnozí z nich se snažili proti otroctví bojovat. Jejich kroky byly často zoufalé, například, když si neváhali amputovat části těla, aby se učinili neschopnými vykonávat práci. Často také předstírali nemoc či jiné zdravotní problémy. Větší strach ale otrokáři měli z toho, že se jejich otroci zavraždí, což nebylo ničím neobvyklým. Největší hrůzou pro místní otrokáře ale představoval fakt, že se černoši spolčí a napadnou je.

Pomsta je vlastně hlavním námětem v Nespoutaném Djangu. Quentin Tarantino chtěl prostřednictvím Jamieho Foxxe v roli otroka, který se chce pomstít za všechny černochoy, kteří byli zbičováni či jinak brutálně napadeni jejich bílými otrokáři. Tato kapitola se tak převážně věnuje jedné scéně, kde Django konečně dostává možnost tuto pomstu vykonat, a to na dvou bratrech, kteří se provinili tím, že zbičovali jeho ženu. Jednomu z bratrů střílí kulku do srdce, druhého nemilosrdně zmrská bičem.

Poslední podkapitola je především věnovaná tomu, jak tento nelidský business včetně lidí, kteří v něm byli zapojeni, připraví Solomona, běžného obyvatele státu New Yorku, o jeho svobodu. Je zde popsána také naděje tohoto otroka, že své svobody znovu dosáhne. Solomonův boj proti celé instituci započne, když zmrská jednoho z dohlížitelů na plantáži. Ten si ho vybral jako svou oběť, jelikož nemohl přijmout, že je Solomon inteligentnější než on. V neposlední řadě je zde popsána obava bělochů z povstání jejich otroků a možnosti, že je zamordují. Díky tomu byly některé schopnosti (např. čtení) tělesně trestány, jelikož byly považovány za důkaz vzpoury.

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