

Racism in America through adaptation



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Abstract

This study examines the adaptation of the movie *12 Years a Slave* from the memoir of Solomon Northup. In order to analyse the adaptation, several theories will be used as guidelines for our research such as adaptation theories and film techniques. The analysis will lead through the different chapters of the book focusing on atmosphere, characters and religion. The main themes dealt with in the book as well as the movie will be linked with the events which unfolded in Ferguson and Baltimore. In order to understand how racial suppression has changed from the time depicted in the movie to contemporary America the theory of Mills is compared to the findings of our analysis of *12 Years a Slave*.

Additionally, an investigation of the presence of possible racism in the Hollywood film industry focusing on the Academy Awards will be conducted as director of the movie Steve McQueen is the first black director to ever win an award for Best Motion Picture.

This study concludes that McQueen aims to raise awareness of the racial inequalities that still exists in the American film industry today. Furthermore McQueen uses different film techniques to express the different aspects of slavery during that time.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Case presentation

This project will be dealing with first the movie adaptation of Solomon Northup's memoir of the same title *12 Years a Slave*. The movie, directed by Steve McQueen, focuses on issues such as slavery, injustice, racism and hope. These themes along with other characteristics will be analysed on the basis of selective theories on narration and movie adaptations. Furthermore these themes will be discussed in relation to their presence in today's America. The cases we have chosen to study are the controversial occurrences in Ferguson and Baltimore and also the Hollywood film industry more specifically looking at the Academy.

Movies construct meaning and carry messages, which are supposed to reach a broad audience. The movie is based upon Solomon Northup's slave narrative *Twelve Years a Slave*, who noted his experiences in a memoir which was published in 1853. With the movie adaptation follow different precautions to consider. The movie production will portray the narratives differently than how it appears in the literary form with the use of different film techniques which is not possible to be visualised to the reader in narrative presentations. In looking on how the movie is adapted from the book, and constructed by the director, it can be assumed, which position it claims in today's society and what message the director wants to transport. With these notions in mind, how true is the movie to the original book then? These cinematic considerations will be analysed with the help of theories by Jakob Lothe in *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, Kyle Nicholas and Jørgen Riber Christensen in *Open Windows* and Ed Sikov's *Film Studies*. These theories will mainly focus on the adaptational segment, character development, religion, environment, context and film techniques.

Furthermore, an analysis and discussion will be formed on the basis of Charles W. Mills' theory on the role of race in today's America to see if there is a connecting thread between the America depicted in *12 Years a Slave* and the America we see today.

The project is working with the analysis of three different cases with the movie as the main object consisting of an analytical part of the book and movie and the other part dealing with the relation to today's society in America. A focus point in the latter part of the project will be the Academy Award institution itself, as the discussion about conservatism and white privilege seems to be a

recurring topic. The movie won several prestigious awards including an Academy Award for Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay by respectively film director, Steve McQueen and screenwriter John Ridley. A note worth mentioning is that McQueen is the first black director to win the award for Best Motion Picture. What is that saying about the contemporary American film industry and why is the movie of such importance in Hollywood?

1.2 Assumptions

Since the theme of the movie is slavery, it's rather crucial that it occupies the project to some extent. In analysing the movie adaptation and the differences detected between the book and movie a presuming factor is that they could provide a better understanding of the content.

The focus of the project is to investigate if racism is a present aspect in a modern context. Our assumption is that it is very possible that racism is present in the industry of Hollywood. That can be seen in various cases, such as the fact that Steve McQueen is the first black director to ever win an Academy Award for best picture. We could investigate in which form racism is being expressed in Hollywood, if it is prominent or obscure, and how it influences those who are exposed to it.

Another interesting fact is that The Academy's Board of Governors, consisting of members who are accountable for corporate management, control and general policies, only has one member who is of black skin color (Board of Governors, 2015). This fact can raise many questions that can also play a big role in this project.

1.3 Problem formulation

In what way does the movie, *12 Years a Slave*, differ from the book and to which degree are the themes raised in the movie still present in today's America?

1.4 Research Questions

Adaptation

- Is the movie stamped by a rather positive or negative atmosphere?
- Which techniques are used to influence the message of the movie?
- Which parts are left out from the movie, and why is that?
- How are the characters developing throughout the story?
- What influence does religion have in the lives of the slaves?

Today's America

- How can the racial debate be seen in relation to the themes presented in the movie?
- How does the movie use particular techniques to show racial inequality and does this still exist in today's society?
- What does the messages of this film say about the American film industry?
- Did the movie raise awareness of the social taboo of racial issues if so, how?

Study Cases

- Hollywood film industry
- Ferguson
- Baltimore

1.5 Methodology

It is unquestionable that, by looking back in history, many inhuman deeds have been conducted towards fellow human beings, which cause us to feel ashamed of our kind. Among other things the brutal and heartbreaking abduction and further enslavement of the black people was for certain one of these cases. This fact has not been news since it is something we have been taught since a fairly young age.

There have been many studies that have tried to examine and also explain this devastating phenomenon, partially for understanding humanity to a more extended degree but also because of the subject's relevance in today's society. Before approaching the gist of the analyses a clarification of some of the main terms used in the project would be a good idea. When referring to the modern or contemporary society, especially in relation to the study cases happening in recent times, the time definition is set to the utmost recent part of the 21st century. Also concerning the mentioning of the term Hollywood the restriction is not set to the residential neighbourhood in Los Angeles but the film industry with connection to the Academy Awards which are located and held in Hollywood.

Though this subject is immensely interesting, it is a subject that has been done more times than it can be accounted for. In spite of that, the trigger for this project was undeniably the successful movie *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and the momentous recognition it gained after being released. It is a movie dealing with slavery and fairly recently released which makes it a relevant and current case to study. Additionally the fact that Steve McQueen was the first black director to win an Academy Award for Best Motion Picture was a striking point of interest and curiosity as to the speculations of why now and what makes this movie special from other slave narratives? The movie was predominantly what triggered the idea of merging slavery as depicted in the movie with racism in the modern society and additionally what this can result to.

There are a few questions to be posed in relation to this subject. For instance it is in our interest to seek if there is any connection between the issues in the movie and various occurrences and episodes in today's society in America.

Additionally the fact that the movie was adapted from a book that's over a 100 years old is worth mentioning. This fact raises some questions such as, why it was chosen to adapt the book into a movie version 100 years after the book's publishing. Since it was decided to work both with the

book and the movie, it is rather interesting to examine the differences between the two works considering such a big time gap. It is also intriguing to see which scenes added in the movie are absent from the book, and which scenes from the book are omitted and not included in the movie. We would additionally get provided with a solid project if we could detect any racial issues within the American film industry, seeing that it could show how racism is experienced in modern society and how this is a result of slavery.

There is an abundance of approaches in handling the different aspects of slavery. After consideration it was decided that the best way of doing so would be to analyse the book and movie and then linking it with two actual cases where racism is explicitly experienced. The two cases refer to the acts of injustice and misuse of power in Ferguson and Baltimore, which show the true face of racism towards the black population in everyday life.

The reason why it is of a great importance to go in depth with the movie is because the director, in this case McQueen, is trying to convey a meaning with his movie and pass a message on to the audience. Therefore it is crucial to detect this message.

This will be achieved by utilising the book *Film Studies* (2009) by Ed Sikov, which introduces an abundance of movie techniques and how to go in depth in a scene and consequently understand what the given scene tries to declare. This will be accomplished by examining the lighting in a scene, the placing of the different objects included in the scene, the characters' movements, the music that is being played in the background, the angle of the shot and the distance between the camera and its object.

Next to the main theories that will be used for our investigations, the analysis part shortly refers to the work "I was born": *Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature* written in 1984 by James Olney. He deals with slave narratives as a genre and depicts the particular characteristics that should be regarded when working with that literature.

Olney states that there are thousands of slave narratives emphasizes that they all follow the same pattern. It was considered to be interesting to see why McQueen chose this one and what particular aspects from this book he chose to highlight in his adaptation.

By inspecting those aspects in a scene, it would be feasible to understand the meaning that lies between the lines, and by doing so it would be understandable what the addresser tries to achieve overall with his movie.

The concept of religion plays a fair role of importance in the movie and therefore will be included in the analysis. This will be attainable by analysing the scenes where religion is either mentioned or discussed. Additionally it will be looked upon how religion is interpreted and conveyed by the different characters in the movie and later on seeing what this achieves. Equally there will be conducted an analysis of some of the characters that are deemed relevant, their role in the movie, and their development through it. However religion will not occupy a tremendous section of the project as it is not the direction we wish to take our project through.

As for the section of modern society, the work that will be applied is the book *The Racial Contract* (1987) by Charles W. Mills . By utilising *The Racial Contract* it would be feasible to analyse the episodes in Ferguson and Baltimore and what this brutal behaviour is due to. Moreover, Mills' theory will be used to understand if racism is behind these actions performed by the police enforcement towards the black citizens and if so, then in which way? We did discuss whether the political aspect would be included in the section concerning modern society, but agreed that this as well would not be in our interest. Though it is infeasible to analyse racism without mentioning to some extent politics, we believe that it should only be partially.

1.6 Case introduction: Ferguson & Baltimore

The following chapter will introduce the two most modern cases of possible racism within America, as well as introduce the Caribbean philosopher Charles W. Mills' theory about "White Supremacy". This theory will be further elaborated in the chapter *Theory*. The following chapter should be seen as a presentation of the theme racism in modern America, grounded in the two most recent cases. Furthermore these are cases that we have picked to draw a coherent line between the America depicted in *12 Years a Slave* in comparison to modern America. The goal of this chapter is to give the reader knowledge about the cases, preparing them for the analytical part. In correspondence with our project formulation these cases have been selected to somewhat represent a brief part of today's American society, as well as make it possible for us to form a coherent knowledge to why *12 Years a Slave* is of such importance in Hollywood. The two cases introduced within this chapter, will be forming the background for a discussion of why the movie is yet so relevant, more than 100 years after the book was released.

Upon studying the term racism within America in correspondence with our project formulation studying contemporary society, there are two major cases that seem to be especially relevant; The Ferguson and Baltimore cases. Both of these cases depict an America where racism is still ongoing just below the surface, as well as cases where the tension between black and white is still present, leading to major debates of whether racism and the history between races has really been forgotten. What both cases have in common, is the fact that young black men were unnecessarily killed by white policemen, resulting in riots leading to states of emergency. What has changed from back then to contemporary America? After the brief introduction chapter, we will apply Mills' theory of racism and thereby be able to draw a conclusion in coherence with our question from our problem formulation.

1.6.1 Ferguson: White Supremacy?

The first case that we have chosen to investigate takes place in Ferguson which is a suburb to St. Louis in the state of Missouri. Center of the story is the 18-year old African-American Michael Brown, who at the time he was shot by a police officer, was unarmed and therefore would some argue; unable to pose as a real threat. At the time Michael had visited his grandma, who resides in a low-income working part of Ferguson, and was headed home accompanied by his good friend Dorian Johnson. Here they were walking in the middle of the street, when they were stopped by the white police officer Darren Wilson, who ordered them to get on the sidewalk. Henceforth Darren got out of the car a got a grip of Michael's collar, who slipped the grip, and started to run away. Darren pulled his gun a shot Michael, when realized he had been shot, Michael raised his hands thinking it would stop the officer shooting, but it didn't. Michael was shot six times, causing an immediate death.

1.6.2 Consequences

The shooting of an apparently innocent black man, by a white police officer, led to so many unanswered questions following the incident. Why shoot an unarmed man? Was this a race crime, based on Darren's unconscious beliefs? Or simply put by the majority of people in Ferguson; Why?

Very quickly the black community gathered to mourn and protest the killing of an innocent man. These protesting grew and quickly turned into rioting which left the police with no other option than

to try and control the mobs, somewhat forcing a police vs. black people affiliation, which the media then prompted as a subject of race. This fight between cops and the black people protesting went on, while the trial of Darryl was ongoing, leading to a state in emergency as a consequence of the shooting. For a lot of people in the black community, this was an example of violence based on the sheer factor that Michael was black, and that Darren held a grudge against this part of society.

What more importantly was brought up was the fact that several people saw it as a reminder of a dark place in American history, a flashback to when slavery and suppression of the black society was at its utmost peak.

In this case it is undoubtedly relevant to bring up the term “White Supremacy” coined by the Caribbean philosopher Charles W. Mills. The term “White Supremacy” was first brought up in his book “The Racial Contract” and focused mainly on western social contract theory, and how whites and non-whites were influenced by moral theory and moral psychology. The base outline of white supremacy was that an unwritten racial contract in America was;

“Promising equality to all persons while withholding it from all sub-persons — black slaves, their descendants, and other vulnerable minorities”(W. Mills Charles 1997: 21)

The point of this quote is hereby saying that society may well promise black people the same constitutional rights as everyone else, but under the surface they the black community needed to be kept “on a tight rein”. This was the message being sent around the world by the media. Police officers enforcing the law behind large shields, trying to control the masses and returning the message of “The Racial contract” that;

“Black Americans should know their place and submit to the orders of those who work on behalf of white wealth — the police force, the bankers, the realtors, the tax collectors, our local and state representatives”.

Considering that only 29% of the population in Ferguson is white, while the black community consists of 69% (Shet, 2014), it is interesting to observe how the more influential jobs have been spread out amongst the groups. The head of the police sector is white, five of the six City County members are white, which is also the case in the school board. This somewhat emphasizes the difference amongst the population, and surely also enforced the hatred coming from the black community. Equally it also enforces the argument being proposed in “The Racial Contract” “...that

racism (or, as I will argue, global white supremacy) is itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule..."(Charles W. Mills – 1997:43)

Having less political power and influence, on top of what many saw as a racial crime, ignited a spark within the black community and led to a city in flames. Similarly it led to a war on words, with the statement from Dorian Johnson supported up by the black community, counter to the statement the police gave, focusing on Darren's right to defend him. Ultimately it led to Darren being freed, and no charges of civil rights violation were brought up, as the jury estimated that he had no other choice than to shoot. Still ongoing in Ferguson, is the debate whether or not both black and white, share the same equality, and that is a debate that will not likely end soon.

1.6.3 The case of Baltimore: Police Brutality?

The case of Baltimore is the most recent event of police violence on a black American by white police officers. The case is focused on the 25 year old black Freddie Grey, who was violently arrested by 6 officers, using excessive force, leading to his death due to injury. Apparently Grey had made eye contact with the police officers, and started to run off. This meant that the police officers started chasing him, and upon arrest began brutally hitting him, leading to a severed spine. This put Grey in a coma, that he would not wake up from again, and ignited the hatred towards the police brutality, as well as questioning whether this was a pure act of racism hatred.

Unlike the prior case in Ferguson, the Baltimore case actually had several witnesses, as well as film evidence of the brutality that Grey had been a victim of. This correspondingly meant that the police officers involved were charged with violation of the civil rights. Nonetheless that justice had been done and the officers had been sentenced, people still took to the streets and started rioting. Especially the black community part of Baltimore felt that racism was involved, especially in lights of the events in Ferguson 2014. Therefore a decision was made to use black front figures to try and restore law and order in the state. Stephanie Rawlings-Blake the Mayor of the city was a very exposed figure in the media, likewise Linda Singh who was an officer in the Maryland National Guard. The last figure was Attorney General Loretta Lynch. These three black women were and are still trying to restore complete order, in a state of emergency.

Both cases share similar focus towards injustice and outrages done by white officers directed towards apparently innocent black individuals. But what does this say about the state of racism in America? Is it still just below the surface, waiting to ignite at a given possibility? What does it say

about a state as Ferguson, that the minority of white people still governs the high profitable jobs, as well as has the most political influence? How far have we really come suppressing racism in modern America, when keeping in mind the themes of 12 Years a Slave? These are some of the questions we will try to answer in the following chapter.

1. Theory

This chapter will consist of a collection of the different theories and cases we would like to use in the analysis. First of all we will have a brief explanation of adaptation by using the book *Open Windows* which was written in 2005 by Kyle Nicholas and Jørgen Riber Christensen. After that we will be looking more closely at the how to analyze the narrative of a book and a movie and how these differ from each other. This will be done by using the book *Narrative in Fiction and Film* written by Jakob Lothe in 2000. Furthermore we will use the book *Reel Racism - Confronting Hollywood's Construction of Afro-American Culture* written by Vincent F. Rocchio in 2000. This book discusses how Afro-American culture is depicted throughout different movies. Then we will go through some film techniques by using the book *Film studies* which was published in 2009 and written by Sikov. Additionally we are going to use a book written by Charles W. Mills called *The Racial Contract* which discusses the theory that white people are still more influential in different parts of society. And lastly we will have a presentation of the events that transpired in Ferguson and Baltimore, which later in the analysis and discussion chapters will be used as a comparison to the story of Solomon Northup and how Afro-American life was in the 19th century.

2.1 Open Windows

To best do an analysis of the adaption of the book to a movie we have chosen to use a book called *Open Windows*. The book discusses different methods of analyzing an adaptation while giving a variation of examples. The book focuses on a lot of different forms of adaptation and since we are mostly interested in the adaptation of books into movies this will not be a full resume of the book but more of a collection of the most interesting and important methods and terms discussed in the book. Furthermore, it should be made clear that this will not be some kind of checklist of how to make a correct adaptation but more guidelines of what to look at when discussing adaptation strategies.

Throughout the book it is clear how every person who wishes to transfer something from one medium to another faces plenty of problems. Transferring from a text to a movie can be especially hard since the two offer different kind of details. A movie will often have a big amount of visual details while a written text often offers more insight in what the different characters are thinking. The richness of these two forms of details differ from movie to movie and book to book but it is still an interesting aspect of adaptation. *Open Windows* discusses two terms, "Remediation" and

“Reflexivity” which both have something to do with the process of adaptation (Nicholas and Christensen, 2005: 17).

“Remediation” talks about how one medium is represented in another medium, meaning how does a ten page text change when you migrate it into a thirty minute movie sequence or how a certain plotline or story is presented in the new medium. But also how you visualize a written text, a written character description allows the reader to get insight into the characters’ thoughts while most movies, like *12 Years a Slave*, don't offer this insight. It describes an interplay between media forms. “Reflexivity” also refers to a change in how a certain medium is presented but here a representation which is more dependent on the audience’s perception. "If we locate the impulse of remediation in the process of presentation, reflexivity occurs in the process of conceptualization" (Nicholas and Christensen, 2005: 17). This quote refers to how both the audience and the filmmakers conceptualize different textual procedures, intertextual influences etc. whenever they read a text or watch a movie. So how does a filmmaker produce a movie where his interpretation of the medium is roughly the same as the one which is interpreted by the audience?

The process of “Fidelity” (Nicholas and Christensen, 2005: 130-131) is both discussed in *Open Windows* and *Narrative in Fiction and Film*. In *Open Windows* it is explained as the process of having multiple stories, both the main plot but also a myriad of side stories which is often found in books. The filmmaker has to make a choice in how to wove all these together into a connected and meaningful story or if one or several of them can be left out without damaging the story (Ibid.: 130-131).

2.2 Narrative in Fiction and Film

The basis of this theory book is literary studies, focusing on the narrative and how they can be presented in many different ways and forms e.g. novels, biographies, movies etc. In our project we will especially be looking at film adaptations when transferring narratives into movies.

The book brings several important concepts to light in film theory and narrative fiction as: “Narrative terms such as plot, repetition, events, characters, and characterization are also important in film” (Lothe, 2000: 8). We will especially take a closer look at events, adaptation modes, the different tools used in fiction and film, characters and characterization in the analysis of the book and movie.

Movies can be very influential and often influence us in one way or another. In our case, this influence has been acknowledged through various prestigious award wins and nominations and the effect on the reader is considered noticeably empowering. To better our understanding of what ties literature and film together this narrative theory should be a help along the way because according to Lothe: “The combination of the enormous appeal films have in themselves and the development of the modern media society is causing film to become a more and more important art form, which to an increasing extent influences the way in which we read and understand literature.” (Lothe, 2000: 8)

Narrative communication is often indicated by the author as addresser to the reader as addressee. From the verbal narrative it can be transformed to a narrative film communication with visual storytelling and different effects (Lothe, 2000: 8). The process goes from literary to filmically communication.

Verbal communication model (Fig. 2.1 p. 15):

(Narrator) – (story) – (listener)
 Addresser – context, message, contact, code – addressee.

Narrative communication model (Fig 2.2 p. 16):

Historical author → Implied author → Narrator → Narratee → Implied reader → Historical reader

The book also deals with different perceptions of the addressee when reading a story compared to watching a movie: “the presentation of events and characters in film is radically different from that in literary fiction” (Lothe, 2000: 85). The book will take the reader through a literary journey where one would analyze the characters, plot, symbols and metaphors and watch them unfold during the reading process (Lothe, 2000: 85). What can a movie achieve that a book cannot and vice versa?

The way the characters are presented in different media is extremely different. The advantages of film techniques are the “external features” (Ibid.: 86) which the movie can show quite convincingly, such as portraying a fantasy island to the letter so that the addressee is convinced of the setting. On the other hand a book can give a much more versatile description of the characters’ thoughts and

feelings. In movies the audience would have to decode these emotions through the actions and appearance of the characters.

“To ‘transfer’ a work of art from one medium to another is in one sense impossible” (Lothe, 2000: 86). Making a movie demands technical skills and seems as a complicated process. With the “external features” and advanced special effects, the artistic question is if the true aesthetic has been maintained. According to many directors, this is one of the main challenges in movie adaptations. It’s always a challenge managing the details and demands intimate knowledge of the adapted book (Lothe, 2000: 86). But even though it can be tough to create the best version, yet, there is still something special about the film adaptations as: “it is striking how many films [...] take as their starting-point a literary prose text, whether it be a short story or (more commonly) a novel” (Lothe, 2000: 86-87).

Influential American film theorist Dudley Andrew defines three basic modes of relation between film and literary text in adaptations: “borrowing”, “intersecting” and “fidelity and transformation” (Lothe, 2000: 87).

The “borrowing mode” is the closest resemblance the movie is allowed to adapt from the literary text. As the word implies, the main idea and material is heavily influenced by the “generally successful text” (Lothe, 2000.: 87). This could conflict with the artistic authenticity if the artists are leaning too strictly up against the book and not contributing with their individual creativity on screen.

“Intersecting” mode is approaching the adaption with a bit more freedom than the borrowing mode. The artists select what they think is most unique and essential to bring into the adaption and mix it with their own ideas and what fits in a cinematic form. This could be seen as a ‘refraction of the original’ (Lothe, 2000: 87). Most commonly people expect this form to be the most applied but in reality the “borrowing” mode is the preferred one from the artists’ side (Zatlin, 2005: 154).

The third mode, “fidelity and transformation” draws mainly on the gist of the narrative and combines it with a great deal of personal interpretation to fit the cinematic version (Ibid.: 154). But how to perceive the utmost essential part of the narrative can be a challenge and might not correlate with the audience’s point of view. Just like the “fidelity” process described in *Open Windows*, there is a certain amount of material being left out from the books, than can’t be adjusted into the cinematic version.

This type of very fixed categories is to give a general overview of how movie adaptations could be related. Not all adaptations fit specifically into one of these descriptions, there could be elements taken from more than one mode but it's a good starting point for movie adaptation analyses (Ibid.: 88). Another important note is that a 'faithful' adaptation is not always the 'best' one (Ibid.: 91). It is not about creating the best second version of the text. The adaptation is about making the best film version out of something special coming from the chosen text. In addition, the adaptation also depends on the angle of which the filmmaker has chosen to focus upon.

Character description and development is an important feature in both fiction and film and how they are portrayed is a big part of the story as they carry out the performances which create a series of events (Ibid.: 72). "In literature they are a part of a linguistically constructed fiction; in film they are indeed visualized for us" (Lothe, 2000: 76). Characters portrayed in texts or movies can never have the same impact on the reader as real historians and human beings can. But it does not mean that fictional characters cannot be based on real characters and portray their lives less convincingly (Ibid.: 76).

"A concept associated with plot, progression is related to the question of character development" (Lothe, 2000: 79). Concerning character development, one usually distinguishes between flat and round characters. The flat characters remain the same throughout the story. They do not undergo big changes and are therefore quite predictable. The round characters, however, are more vivid, developing and might surprise us through their actions, that are not predictable (Ibid.: 80). The interesting part occurs when a beginning flat character surprises the addressee through their actions and becomes a more round character.

Furthermore, a distinction is made between the "direct definition" and the "indirect definition" of the characters (Ibid.: 81). The direct presentation is explicitly used by describing the character with adjectives and names for instance can different names show different hierarchical statuses of the characters or carry a symbolic meaning. However, this definition was more common in early history fiction, for example in sagas (Ibid.: 81).

The indirect presentation is described in the book as such: "This form of characterization is the more important of the two main variants. It demonstrates, dramatizes, or exemplifies a given character feature rather than naming it explicitly" (Lothe, 2000: 82). Different factors that influence the indirect characterization are action, speech, milieu and the external appearance and behaviour interpreted by the narrator or other characters. The characters are being analyzed on the basis of

their actions and condition. The indirect presentation is more common in modern fiction and films where the addressee is able to perceive the characters in a more abstract and loose context instead of having the description explicitly given by the narrator (Ibid.: 84).

The relationship between the filmmakers and the adapted text they are working with is quite alternating. Some filmmakers decide to explicitly mention the author's name in the beginning or end of the movie by recognizing them for their work whereas others never mention them.

2.3 Film Studies

For certain now the movie *12 Years a Slave* plays an important role for the project. In order to truly understand the movie and therefore draw a conclusion, it is necessary to have a theory where the part of the analysis can be based upon. On that account the book that will be used for this cause will be *Film Studies* written by Ed Sikov in 2009.

Sikov's work includes a variety of film techniques from proper lighting to the position of the camera. Some of the chosen techniques will partake in the analysis where some of the important scenes will be scrutinized down to the last detail.

Making a movie is a way of expression. It can be seen as an art of expressing an emotion or a notion the director wants to project to the audience (Sikov, 2009: 3). The first term to be unquestionably involved in the analysis will be the one of *mise-en-scene*, which is defined as "the totality of expressive content within the image" (Sikov, 2009: 6). By utilizing the aforementioned term it is feasible to find the meaning behind a certain scene, or in other words detect what the scene is trying to convey or meaning to achieve. As it is also spotted in the book, everything within the scene has expressive meaning and expressive value (Sikov, 2009: 6). This gives the impression that nothing in a scene is arbitrary or erratically chosen; in fact it is quite the opposite. All of the director's choices are made in order to get a response from the audience.

Before going further into the explanation of the various terms, it is crucial to define the meaning of the shot. It is a defining part of the process of filmmaking and fundamentally a shot is the result the camera ends with from the moment the recording starts until it stops with no interruption (Sikov, 2009:7, 8). When discussing the shot it is rather significant to include the terms 'master shot' and 'full shot' as well. A 'master shot' involves a shot taken from a long distance, resulting in the

inclusion of essentially everything within the frame (Sikov, 2009: 192). Concerning the 'long shot' the sense behind the term is about taking a shot where the subject within the frame is shown from head to toe (Sikov, 2009: 192).

An interesting term is the glance-object match (Sikov, 2009: 65). It is an edit where the first shot involves the subject and the following shot the object seen through the objects eyes (Sikov, 2009: 65). This technique will be found in the analysis later on.

Furthermore the distance of the camera is another aspect of film techniques which is of equal importance as mise-en-scene. The distance of the camera includes some terms that are worth mentioning and would undeniably improve the analysis. A few of these terms are the ones of close-up which is defined as "a shot that isolates an object in the image, making it appear relatively large" (Sikov, 2009: 10). Also worth mentioning is the fact that by getting a close up of the subject, it is achieved to give a certain importance to it, which affects the audience since it's something surely noticeable (Ibid.: 10). Of course if the subject is a person or even an animal, it is further conceivable to truly notice the face expression of the subject which provides the audience with a better understanding of the situation.

Additionally, it is of importance to include the angle of the camera when analysing a scene. The angle is naturally also a way of passing a certain meaning to the audience, therefore some of the terms that are deemed relevant are going to be mentioned. Naturally these techniques have a certain meaning behind them and just like everything in the field of directing they are chosen to convey a meaning. They can be interpreted in an abundance of ways, but the most logical explanation is by taking in the context of everyday life.

Worth mentioned is additionally the term of composition. In order to avoid confusing the reader it is rather of importance to explain the term of "frame" in this context (Sikov, 2009: 18-20). The term of "frame" refers to the outline of the space where the shot is seen through. Now that the definition of "frame" is clear it is possible to define composition as well. The composition is the position of the subjects or the characters in general and objects additionally (Sikov, 2009: 19).

Last but not least the terms of fade-in and fade-out, which primarily involves the focus of the lense (Sikov, 2009: 190). The following quote states exactly what those two terms entail: "the gradual increase (fade-in) or decrease (fade-out) in the strength and clarity of the filmed image or recorded sound; fade-ins generally begin with a pure white or pure black screen in the case of the image track

and silence in the case of the soundtrack, while fade-outs usually begin with a clear image or sound, which then disappears to white or black or diminishes to silence; fade-ins and fade-outs are often used as transitional devices between scenes.” (Sikov, 2009: 190,191). This too is found later on in the analysis and is being accordingly used.

An elaborate analysis of the movie involving the aforementioned film techniques will occur later in the project. The selection of scenes that are deemed relevant will be followed by the explicit description of the composition of the shot. This will entail the description of objects, characters, location, angle and distance of the shot and lighting as well (Sikov, 2009: 21). After the collection of the information it would be appropriate to produce a coherent text by putting the information with the applicable terminology together.

2.4 Confronting Hollywood’s Construction of Afro-American Culture

The subject of racism has been much discussed over the years and is still a very prominent problem in our culture. Racism can be directed towards various minorities or races but the focus at the moment is racism towards Afro-Americans and not in any kind of context but how racism is experienced in Hollywood and media in general.

This book takes different Hollywood movies from different periods of time and investigates how racism is detected and how the Afro-American culture is being represented.

It is commonly known through history how America was born after the genocide of Native Americans and the slavery of Africans. That is also the reason why America has been and will always be multi-ethnic and multiracial. This quickly led to racism being a big part of American culture up until today (Rocchio, 2000: 4).

Racism is truly a social problem and is linked to neither law nor politics. The problem lies rather inside meanings and beliefs. These meanings are especially expressed by the mass media, which is accessible to the biggest part of the population and plays a big role in forming opinions and passing messages that affect the receiver’s thinking (Rocchio, 2000: 5).

The theories in this book are used in order to analyze the messages sent by the mass media directed towards society, and how by using communication they manage to represent racism (Rocchio, 2000: 5).

In the book there is a belief that racism is not associated with discrimination or prejudice, but is a result of exercising power and violence. (Rocchio, 2000: 6). A good description of racism is defined by Arthur K. Spears who describes it as: “behaviours which indirectly or directly support the inequality of racial hierarchy” (Rocchio, 2000: 8).

Another, more in depth definition is defined by Memmi: “The generalised and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser’s benefit, and at his victim’s expense, in order to justify the former’s own privilege or aggression” (Rocchio, 2000: 8). Therefore according to Memmi the reason behind generalising and attaching certain values and meanings towards a group of people is to actually maintain power. By imagining two components it is possible to picture two groups of people whereas the one group is the accuser and the other one is the victim. The accuser benefits out of the process of generalising when the victim is hurt by getting assigned meanings that describe the whole group. This process is especially seen in the case of Afro-Americans who have been assigned the value of ‘inferior intelligence’ by the white culture. Another trait they are often assigned to is the trait of being violent (Rocchio, 2000: 13).

Since many negative traits have been assigned to Afro-Americans, they were always forced to prove more than anyone else, how these traits were not true in their individual case.

A very appropriate point in the book is the case of privilege, which is described as “an abstract social phenomenon that has a very real impact on individuals” (Rocchio, 2000: 14). In the case of white people, they have never been accused for having ‘inferior intelligence’ therefore they don’t have anything to prove. They won’t be questioned or attacked if they are in possession of something expensive. On the contrary this is not applicable for black people since they need to prove that they are not a stereotype. As it is expressed in the book: “white people do not have to initially prove their intelligence due to their race, white people do not have to initially prove their intelligence, or prove that they are not angry or lazy. Because they belong to majority culture, white people are treated as individuals first” (Rocchio, 2000: 14).

2.5 Charles W. Mills: The Racial Contract – White Supremacy?

The *Racial Contract* is a book written by the Caribbean philosopher Charles W. Mills in the year of 1997. The purpose of the book is to examine a political theory written by Mills in which he examines the role of race within social and political arenas. Mills argues that social settings, for

instance the government, are constructed around “contracts”, which should consider the interest of every individual. These “contracts” consist of racist undertones or at least the core of it is marked with racism as an undertone. Here it is significant to acknowledge that his theory is not talking about the everyday racists who deviate from the law, but rather hidden agendas within the “contracts” as for instance the Declaration of Independence. “The social contract” can be seen as the link between citizens and the government which is partly theoretical and not necessarily written down, it is more of an agreement amongst people to create an obliging and supportive civil society. It is within this “contract” that Mills’ theory tries to discuss whether these rights given from government to the individual citizen are actually treating people equally despite their color and not just aiding the white community in establishing dominance as a race. “My aim here is to adopt a nonideal contract as a rhetorical trope and theoretical method for understanding the inner logic of racial domination and how it structures the politics of the West and elsewhere” (Mills, 1997: 6). With this quote Mills explains what purpose *The Racial Contract* as a book was supposed to have.

To understand the basis of the racial theory, it’s required to have an understanding of what a “social contract” is. Basically the “contracts” are a set of individual liberties as well as freedom that we as citizens of a collaborative society have to give up or delegate to a shared government. The purpose is then that the government will take care of its population, ensuring these delegated rights and interests are protected. An example of “the social contract” could be the American Declaration of Independence, which is a settlement that had the purpose of ensuring the rights of every American, no matter the race.

The intention of creating a perfect equally society through “the social contract”, is what Mills discusses through his theory and tries to argue that it is a contract based on the rights of the white part of society. An example of the doubtfulness in the intentions of Thomas Jefferson were, according to Mills, present when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. The fact that he himself owned slaves makes it questionable as to whether or not his intentions were pure. To some extent this contradicted the significance of the Declaration of Independence and raised the question; why would Jefferson acknowledge this, when he owned slaves himself?

“When white people say ‘justice’ they mean ‘just us’” (Mills, 1997: 122). This quote mentioned by Mills fairly states the questionable reasons and doubts that he had with the Declaration of Independence as part of “the social contract”. It also lays the foundation for the racial theory in

which he questions the authenticity and truthfulness of social settlements in America. Mills believed that the rights given through “contracts” were distributed to mainly the white population.

Throughout his book *The Racial Contract* he mentions several places in history where the rights are portrayed as being given to the people have notions of racism focusing more on the white population than the black. A second important example Mills gives is the case of African American Dred Scott. This case is an exemplification of how Mills claims that the Declaration of Independence (“social contract”) was never meant to include others than white people.

Dred Scott was a slave, who in 1857 tried to sue his own slave master for withholding him from getting his freedom. This was denied by the U.S. Supreme Court, as African Americans could not be American citizens, meaning that they would not be able to sue within the country (Link 8). Scott was defined as “property” to his white slave master, which even though was governed by the Declaration of Independence, still had this loophole. This loophole meant that even though the declaration was to ensure independence and equal rights to everybody, it still protected the slave master from being sued. Mills argued that this case was somewhat a depiction of “the racial contract”, having been part of the declaration from the part, therefore ensuring racism and supremacy to the white part of the population.

The theory as well as arguments all boil down to the conclusion that if this is the case, and “the social contracts” really favor one group of people over another, then it is still relevant in coherence with modern society. The theory goes that white persons actually use laws and political ideas to legitimize and justify the white people’s intentions, thereby suppressing the black community. This basically means that racism has moved from a scene where slavery was acknowledged, and the non-whites were suppressed, to a modern society where white people still rule by governing high paid jobs, political jobs as well as influential job (Cooper, 2015). More comprehensible said by Mills: “People are divided into who matters, and who doesn’t” (Mills, 1997: 67)

Here the connotation with people who matter is the white part of society, thereby creating white supremacy, what Mills mentions as the center of his theory. It is at base a set of rules constructed in social “contracts” that ensure that the black population is not as influential as the white population. White supremacy is also considered a political ideology that as mentioned before is focused around the thought of giving the whites both increased wealth as well as political power. This appearance of supremacy to a certain race is not visible in society, as there is no modern society which would

directly exclude people based on their skin color, or at least they would not acknowledge it, as Mills argues. A contract is set to be an agreement between two or more people, set to focus on these people's settlements. What Mills questions through *The Racial Contract* theory is, whether these settlements actually govern the individual persona equally despite of race.

A division through government given rights is a subject of discussion, but also a very interesting subject in coherence with our project, as well as racism in Hollywood. If the racial contract theory is still relevant in society today, it equally means that some individuals seek favor in this and arguably have an advantage over one another based on their skin color. Thus, it is not apparent with the naked eye, or written in any social contract, it is noticeable that white people govern more influentially political jobs throughout America, arguing that white supremacy, likewise race still matters a great deal.

What needs to be understood in relation to the theory of a racial contract within the "social contracts", is that it consists of different minor agreements or "contracts" which govern both the political, the moral and the epistemological contract. This also insinuates that any declaration, law or government is consistent of different aspects leading to the argument that racisms can function on different levels in society, without us acknowledging it. Mills essentially wants to challenge these aspects, as they are often hidden in society. He tries to explain this way of representing racism through "social contracts" means that they are often more influential and politically strong which is perhaps also why it is so difficult to test but through the racial theory.

We do not want to take a directly political approach with Mills' theory. But instead use his theory as a guideline of what could be seen as modern examples of white supremacy in accordance with the depiction of racism in contemporary America put up against the picture of racism painted in *12 Years a Slave*. Here we have selected a couple of cases (Ferguson & Baltimore) to explain what a term as "white supremacy" means today and then look at how racism could be part of Hollywood at the present day. If essentially as Mills argues, that the base of "social contracts" are founded on ideas from colonial time, which has been brought on through time to withhold non-whites from power, then it is easy to see his beliefs that racism is still a big part of society. Compared to the America depicted in *12 Years a Slave* how relevant is racism in America today?

3. Analysis

3.1 The adaptation

Slavery is an issue our generation of students may not be very well informed about, however it is an interesting part of history, and it is important to avoid repeating these actions of hatred and violence based on differences in race. It is important to be aware of what happened and which mistakes people made in their ways of thinking. The question if our contemporary society has a grasp on this issue should never stop being asked. Therefore it is helpful that the topic is on one hand preserved in literature and on the other hand still presented to us through cinema today. The analysis of Steve McQueen's movie adaptation of Solomon Northup's narrative *Twelve Years a Slave* is an essential part of this project.

Basic points for the analysis will be differences between the book and the movie. First of all the different approaches to character representation, the aspect of religion and the general atmosphere created with the help of various themes will be in focus. The above mentioned theory of Jakob Lothe will thereby serve as a guideline next to Nicholas' and Christensen's work *Open Windows*. In which relations these methods have been used will be further elaborated in the latter part of this paper.

The characters depicted in the movie are often going to appear differently to the viewer compared to the reader. As mentioned in the theory chapter, the visual effects are of great impact and have a saying in how the characters are portrayed. Some of the significant differences between the book and movie concerning the character development will be outlined in the following pages. More specifically the focus will be set on Solomon Northup, Patsey, Samuel Bass and Armsby, Edwin Epps and William Ford.

3.2 Movie Abstract

The movie *12 Years a Slave* is based on the authentic story about the free black man Solomon Northup. The time period in which the story evolves is between 1841 and 1853. Northup lives in Northern New York with his wife and kids where he makes his living playing the violin. The plot begins as Northup is brutally kidnapped by two men appearing to be owners of a circus. They convince him to accompany them to Washington. From here he is sold to a lumber mill in the southern USA and his struggles for survival begin, as well as his fight to keep his dignity. The

movie focuses largely on the psychical and emotional abuse that slaves had to suffer in captivity, based on the thoughts of Northup. He tries to cooperate with his masters to ensure his survival but soon finds out that this may just get him into more danger.

The movie is based on his diary which reveals the terrifying story of how white plantation owners treated and suppressed black people as slaves and how little they actually cared for them. Along the 12 year storyline Northup can be witnessed in his state of decay caused by his abusive masters, at the different plantations. This is a constant condition until he finally meets the Canadian worker Bass, who promises to send his letter calling for help to Northup's friends. Eventually, they come to his rescue, making him a free man once again.

3.3 The beginning of the book

Investigating *Twelve Years a Slave* as a book means researching a slave narrative. In his work, *I Was Born*, James Olney deals with this particular genre and aims at defining the differences between slave narratives and autobiographical work. Since Solomon Northup summarizes a certain period of his personal life, the idea that his book is an autobiography comes up easily. Where are the differences between an autobiography and a slave narrative and why do literary studies need to distinguish between these two?

Assuming that an autobiographical text would tell the story of an individual's life like Northup's would at first sight not seem to fall out of this pattern. But the truth is that his story is one of thousand slave narratives that share an "overwhelming sameness" (Olney, 1984: 47). If that is the case, there must be a reason why Steve McQueen chose exactly this story to transform it into a piece of narrative cinema. Apparently this book offered something special for him, for he certainly wanted to underline a message. Northup's story is special in the sense that he has been kidnapped from a free state where he lived with his wife and children. Therefore the experiences he makes are shaped by his higher level of education compared to other slaves. Secondly it is especially striking how his identity had been completely taken away and how the person-hood of Afro Americans and their right for justice had been ignored.

At first sight, compared to the movie, the book works rather descriptively. Northup aims to preserve the circumstances of a certain time in a certain place by means of his personal history. Although he added his own emotions to the narrative, the book seems to mostly be a documentation of his time in captivity.

On page one he explains:

Having been born a freeman, and for more than thirty years enjoyed the blessings of liberty in a free State-and having at the end of that time been kidnapped and sold into Slavery, where I remained, until happily rescued in the month of January, 1853, after a bondage of twelve years—it has been suggested that an account of my life and fortunes would not be uninteresting to the public (Northup, 2011: 24).

With these first lines, Northup evokes a rather positive atmosphere and rather curiosity than horror in the reader's mind. He does not give any negative evaluation of slavery but instead gives positive evaluations of freedom, hence an optimistic attitude is strengthened. He talks about being “happily rescued“ (Northup, 2011: 24) and about his “life and fortunes“ (Northup, 2011: 24) instead of misfortunes, which would seem more natural concerning his situation.

Consequently, the motif of hope is present in the book from the beginning, and automatically put in the back of the reader's mind. Although the reader is free to build his own opinion upon slavery and Northup's captivity, he ends up creating an interpretative spectrum on a positive basis.

Furthermore, in the first chapter, Northup gives an overall view over his life previous to slavery. He talks about his ancestors, his wife and children and also about personal experiences he had at work and while traveling, which are related to his years as a slave. He writes as “much [he] deem[s] appropriate and necessary to day, in order that those who read this pages, may comprehend the poignancy of those sufferings [he had] been doomed to bear” (Northup, 2011: 22, edited a.s.). Thus, the narrative text gets a biographical impact and reaches maximum authenticity. Northup's aim is to verbalize his personal fate and consequently to provide a truthful insight in the practice of slavery, an aspect of life with which every American citizen at that time was confronted. The possibility to identify with his story today is given through the statements about the life he had lived before captivity. Thereby a broad audience can put themselves in his position and gain a better understanding of slavery.

But what is the main problem that makes such a narrative in that time necessary and why do the audience need to be reminded of the difficulties of racial inequality? In the same chapter Northup conveys his own connection to slavery before actually being affected by it. He describes how he met slaves several times who apparently did not have such a bad life, “well dressed and well

provided for” (Northup, 2011: 29) and talks about the desire for freedom he could recognize in all of them. He reflects on himself as a human being and having the same feelings as any white person around and therefore he concludes: every person has the right of liberty and every human being is equal to another – a message that had not reached the society member's minds before. Liberty and equality become the main themes of the story, liberty and equality becomes the foundation of every free man.

3.4 The beginning of the movie

The movie starts different than the book. The first scene shows a sequence from the middle of the original story. Northup and some fellow slaves are introduced to cane cutting and afterwards start working in the field while singing a song. After only one minute it is shown how they prepare going to bed in the darkness of their cabin. Northup has some paper and saved some berries from the dinner he wants to use as ink to write a letter. Yet, he fails and goes to bed but obviously cannot sleep. The woman lying behind him is awake, too. The reader is left uncertain about who she is. They have sexual intercourse, a moment that does not appear in the written story at all (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 1:03). That means the director made use of intersection here. Why did he consider that to be a relevant addition to the story? Sexual intercourse is a human need that normally manifests in everybody's life. In showing a scene like this, McQueen reaches the full audience who is introduced to the movie by a comprehensible act: the distance between the issue and the viewer is broken down and a moment of 'that could actually be me' is evoked in the viewer. Besides, McQueen underpins the idea of despair and hopelessness when the woman turns back on her blanket afterwards and starts crying because bodily pleasure is no escape from the cruel, dehumanizing general condition as a slave. Thereafter he shows Northup lying in bed with his wife before he was sold into slavery. It works as a flashback for the viewer who will be even more emotionally touched. Feelings an author can describe in a book need to be presented through actions and character behavior in a movie. This dramatic scene aims to show the contrast between bodily pleasure and a relationship based on love to a person.

3.5 Part Conclusion

The beginning of a piece of art is responsible for acquainting the addressee with the case. Yet, the processes of a book are different than the ones of a movie.

The beginning of Northup's narrative creates an atmosphere and introduces the reader to the documentative story through extensive descriptions of the circumstances. Initially, Northup creates a positive atmosphere.

On the contrary, McQueen's drama raises tension from the beginning to attract viewers and to win their empathy. The central themes of the story are instantly present - the black people's suffering as slaves.

3.6 Revealing movie-scenes

The movie keeps the tension in the next scenes, whereas the book continues to slowly guide the reader through the occurrences. Chapter two of the book contains the conditions of Northup's kidnapping. It is illustrated how the two men gained his trust by acknowledging his skills playing violin. They ask him to accompany and play for them on a journey to New York. Feeling equal among his travel companions and assured of freedom Northup does not have any doubts of their reliability and is cherished to accompany them on a journey to New York where he could both see the city and get new insights into cultural life while playing the violin. The instrument is an important symbol in the book as well as in the movie and keeps appearing in the course of the story even in the worst times for Northup. He tells the reader that on the one hand he earned money with the violin but on the other hand it was his passion. Moreover, in the dark days of slavery his skills occasionally allowed him timeouts to play at different festivities.

Also in the movie the violin is present from the beginning. A dance is shown given violin accompaniment by Northup (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 6: 25). He laughs and smiles and is presented as a happy person in that moment. The instrument is a symbol of hope in the story. In the course of the movie, McQueen positions it a lot more often than it initially appears in the book. Despite making it a symbol of hope he also displays bitter contradictions with it. For instance, when Northup is ordered to play while Eliza and him are sold to Master Ford, his passion and the good intention of music are cruelly abused to dub the inhuman situation (Ibid., 31:45). Here, the screams of a woman who is separated from her children ring out together with the violin.

Later, when he does a successful job for his new master, the latter gives him a violin as a present to demonstrate his gratitude for the great service (Ibid., 38:55). Northup is silently thankful and is shown tuning the instrument on the way back to his cabin. Here it is a symbol for his hope again, Northup experiences appreciation from a person for the first time since he came into slavery. He does not get a violin in the original story though. McQueen seems to emphasize the aspect of faithful optimism with that image. He visualizes the effort Northup makes to survive in a good condition with the goal to reach liberty once more. Again this is a comparatively trivial object but a great amount of viewers can identify with the passion for an instrument and knows the role that it can have in life and how much pleasure and satisfaction you can get out of it.

3.7 Mental violence

Although Northup is gaining a lot of respect from Master Ford, which seems to improve his life conditions as a slave, the movie constantly points out the permanent state of suppression the slaves are experiencing, evidence for that is visible in various scenes. When Eliza and Northup are arriving at Ford's plantation, Eliza is still crying a lot after being separated from her children. The Master is advising them to rest and his wife is concerned why Eliza is crying and expresses compassion in saying "poor girl" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 32:48). However, she dismisses her worries quickly and says to Eliza: "something to eat, some rest and your children will soon be forgotten" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 32:50). The quote emphasizes how the slaves are not seen as human beings and how, although they are not always physically hurt, they are victims of dehumanization and mental insults. Their emotions are not taken into consideration, even though compassion is shown Ford did not buy Eliza's children as well, because the money and the work-force were more important.

Additionally, the soundtrack supports the idea of mental suppression. The movie works a lot with African-American folk songs in the scenes on the plantations. When Tibbeats, the Master's chief carpenter, introduces the slaves to their work in the mill, he makes them sing the song "Run, Nigger, Run" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 32: 16) which deals with a 'nigger' who flees from a slave holder to seek freedom. Tibbeats makes the slaves sing that song like a mantra while rhythmically clapping their hands. He makes them keep in mind what they cannot have and strongly underlines the fact that they are not free and supposed to obey their masters. Especially concerning Northup's situation this aspect can be illuminated as a concept of identity transformation. He, an originally free man, is forced to change his patterns of thinking and to adjust to the lower levels beneath

authorities. The new name he was given, Platt, symbolizes that fact as well, he has to hide his own identity and even his working skills because he is expected to behave like a slave who never attended any kind of real education. Only in his mind is he free and even around his fellow slaves he has to play the role of platt. This is because they are not able to understand his situation.

As stated earlier, the book works rather descriptive compared to the movie. The explanation of Northup's and Eliza's arrival on Ford's plantation is quite detailed, they go on a steamer to pass a waterway and then continue a long journey on foot. Northup gives precise descriptions of the area and the surrounding forests. He also mentions a stop they made in between at an estate of a Mr. Martin because the journey was so long. When they are arriving at William Ford's "quiet, lonely, pleasant place" (Northup, 2011: 73) Northup does not mention that Eliza is crying, instead he only refers to her crying when they leave the slave pen where Master Ford bought them. Hence, the sequence where Rose, Master Ford's wife, advises Eliza to have some rest and forget her children is written solely for the movie. In fact, he did not only contract the scene, he also brought a new influence into the story and intensified the idea of the dehumanizing interactions the slaves had to bear. Here, McQueen made use of the technique of "remediation", he made the choice to leave out rich descriptive passages which are not important for the basic plot and inserted the scene of Rose talking to Eliza, which is only a few seconds long but intensely highlights the message that slaves had to suffer on all levels of life.

3.8 Physical Violence

Likewise, McQueen remediates the passages showing physical violence. In the book Northup explains the tense situation he experiences with the carpenter, Tibeats. Tibeats hires him from Ford since he is talented in working with wood, therefore he temporarily belongs to him as well as Ford. "One night, having worked until it was too dark to see, I was ordered by Tibeats to rise very early in the morning, procure a keg of nails from Chapin, and commence putting on the clapboards" (Northup, 2011: 81), he states in the book. He does as he has been told and is ordered by Chapin to get another size of nails if Tibeats would not agree on that. Nevertheless, when Tibeats comes to check his work the next morning he is furious and aggressive and wants to whip Northup without any comprehensible reason. Northup decides to defend himself, eventually pushing his Master to the ground and whips him being sure that he has not done anything wrong. The overseer comes around and interrupts the action. Tibeats rides away in great anger and the overseer advises Northup

to stay calm and not to leave the plantation. Northup does as he has been told and waits for more than one hour overwhelmed by “feelings of unutterable agony” (Northup, 2011: 84). The affair gets even more intense when Tibeats returns accompanied by two other horsemen. They bond him with crossed arms at his back and are about to “hang the nigger” (Northup, 2011: 84). They drag him to a closeby tree and he is sure he would “that hour struggle through the fearful agonies of death” (Northup, 2011: 85). Overseer Chapin observes the scene and intervenes before they are able to hang him, he has a pistol in each hand and exemplifies that they have no right to kill the “faithful boy” (Northup, 2011: 85) because Tibeats is the one who deserved the treatment and is wrong himself and because Master Ford, who is absent, still holds the debt on Northup and would lose his money if he would be killed. Tibeats and his companions leave and Chapin orders a slave to run for Master Ford and tell him that effort was made to kill Northup, then he himself leaves into his house. Yet, Northup is left in his position unprotected from the burning sun not able to move an inch since he is tightly bound to the tree and grows “faint from pain, and thirst, and hunger” (Northup, 2011: 90). Only once does the kitchen servant come along to give him a draught of water. Finally, when the sun is already setting, Ford arrives at the plantation and relieves Northup from his position on the tree. During the rest of the chapter Northup goes on describing the next attempts Tibeats makes to kill him until he is finally sold to a new Master because the situation has become too dangerous.

McQueen portrays this fierce situation in the movie as well. He “borrowed” this part from the book and visualizes the scene in a special way to show the pressure and unjustified hatred the slaves had to endure. The fact that slaves are simply possession and objects of pure arbitrariness is present here again. The scene starts at 44:00. Northup got a keg of nails and works on a wooden cabin. Tibeats is approaching him and slowly steps on the building as if he would inspect something. Then he asks for the keg of nails Northup was supposed to order which the latter properly shows him. Still, he shouts “I thought you knowed something” (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 44:45) and kicks a board out of the wooden wall Northup was preparing. He moves backwards so that the camera catches him on the left side of the screen and Tibeats on the right side. Northup claims: “If there is something wrong, it's wrong with the instruction” (12 Years a Slave, 44:48). As a result, Tibeats moves towards him and they start fighting. The movement changes to the middle of the screen.

3.9 Part conclusion

Through the previous analysis it became clear that it was one McQueen's rather great concerns to outline how slavery crossed every level of daily life. Pain was a constant feeling.

It is remarkable how this fact is on one hand visualized through mental mistreatment and on the other hand through permanent whipping, hitting and aggressivity towards the slaves.

3.10 Applied film techniques

In order to achieve a proper and effective analysis of the movie and the abundant scenes the project aims to investigate, we make use of the book *Film Studies (2009)* by Ed Sikov. The most relevant and absorbing scenes will be included in this section in order to draw a conclusion concerning the meaning hidden behind the scenes. The scenes will also be analyzed by shots where the focus will lie on the mise-en-scene aspect (Sikov, 2009: 5) and the composition as well (Sikov, 2009: 19).

The following shot taken from the movie involves two characters from the movie, namely Northup and the chief carpenter Tibeats who is undoubtedly superior to him (12 Years a Slave, 2011: 46:00). By having the mise-en-scene aspect in mind, it is possible to go further and give a detailed description of the image. The aforementioned image is a two-shot since it involves two people having a dialogue, but also a long shot where both the scenery and the two characters are fully shown. The black man Northup is placed in one of the sides of the image, wearing plain clothing consisting of a white shirt and a pair of working pants. This is a contrast to the clothing worn by the white man, which can be described as well-kept and rather expensive, since it's consisted of leather boots and a nice looking waistcoat. It should also be mentioned that the white man is placed on the other side of the image standing upon an unfinished wooden cabin. That gives the impression of the white man being taller which he in reality is not. Still the angle of the camera here is an eye-level shot one which shows the full height of the two characters. The impression that is given here is that there is an implicit sense of inequality in the whole aspect of the setting. Also just by noticing the placing the two men behold it is plain to see that they are not on an equal level.

When discussing about the lighting in the shot, it cannot be said for sure if any additional artificial lighting is applied, but it cannot be denied that the scene is set in the light of day. The presence of light is often interpreted with a sense of positivity, and that is why it is not well suited to the events

in the scene where Northup is being harassed for his way of work. On the other hand, it could be seen from another perspective, such as the fact that Northup stands for himself and not accept getting beaten for something he is not deserving of. In other words it can be said that the light is high key and fairly naturalistic, which makes the whole scene very realistic and relatable to our world.

In a similar manner as described in the book, Chapin interferes and asks Northup to stay where he is. Northup is then displayed sitting on the building waiting. He breathes heavily and the tension of the situation is supported by a gloomy sound effect which can be compared to the sounds of a siren. The given sound effect is fairly alarming and what is achieved here is to make it clear to the viewer that an escalation in the events is about to happen. It is fair to say that a sound effect in a movie sets the tone of the scene and makes the viewer aware of the mood. Again from the mise-en-scene aspect the scene unfolds during noon where it is distinctly bright and sunny. Northup seems to some extent ragged and sweat is covering his face, both as a result of labour but also of the heat. His expressions give away the feeling of disturbance and anguish which can be explained by the fact that he knows that as soon as Tibeats arrives, his well-being will be in jeopardy.

As for the composition the shot is a close-up at eye level and first changes at 48:00. The phenomenon that occurs at this point is the glance-object match as firstly the camera focuses on Northup as he stares ahead, following the change of angle as the next sight is what Northup had been staring which is Tibeats riding his horse. The feeling that the viewer gets is a one of suspense, as the anticipation of what is to come intensifies.

Tibeats and his two companions are approaching. In contrast to the book, they already pulled Northup up in the air on a limb of the tree when Chapin intervenes a second time. The tension culminates when Tibeats lets go of the rope and Northup collapses only getting hold of the ground with his tiptoes. Just as in the book everybody leaves the scene and the spot is on Northup bound to the tree on tiptoes. He is shown from a small distance with some cabins in the background. For more than a minute the camera stands still in that position. Behind Northup the everyday life takes place – people come out of the cabins, they converse while working. They walk along and see Northup's condition but nobody dares helping him. Only when the fellow slave runs towards him to offer him some water, the camera movement changes. One minute and twenty-five seconds have passed. Then the angle switches again and shows Northup's back with Chapin going back and forth on the porch. It changes once more and children are faded-in running around laughing. Also Mistress Ford watches the scene. But Northup is still ignored.

The aforementioned scene where Northup is dreading Tibeats return after he struck him (12 Years a Slave, 2013: 47:44) is worth being analysed from the film techniques' perspective. The scene involves Northup sitting on the unfinished wooden construction knowing that Tibeats will return to avenge Northup's actions. Again the mise-en-scene unfolds during noon where it is distinctly bright and sunny. Northup seems to some extent ragged and sweat is covering his face, both as a result of labour but also of the heat. His expressions give away the feeling of disturbance and anguish which can be explained by the fact that he knows that as soon as Tibeats arrives, his well-being will be in jeopardy.

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McQueen illustrates an additional aspect: Next to the missing freedom and the sufferings from mental and physical violence a slave is also alone. In cases of emergency the dominating thing in mind is his own protection that would not be risked for another slave's life. The situation is desperate and there is no space for reasonable values and terms that should be followed. Fear dominates everything.

Finally Ford arrives on site and frees Northup from his noose. He takes him into his house overnight and lets him sleep on the floor in the corridor. He has a rifle and nervously observes the surrounding area. With the last of his strength Northup grabs Ford's arm and says: "Master Ford, you must know that I'm not a slave [...] before I came to you I was a free man" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 52:21). Ford, however, breaks away from him and rejects to have this conversation declaring that he "cannot hear that" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 52:37) and explains further: "I'm trying to save your life! I have a debt to be mindful of!" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 52:33). By intersecting a scene like this McQueen answers on Northup's conviction that it would have been to his advantage to inform Ford about his actual origin, as he states in the book (Northup, 2011: 72). McQueen shows the opposite - the scene conveys that also Ford is only a puppet of the system who adjusts himself to the circumstances of the time. As director he conveys the conviction that Ford is a generous slaveholder but still a slaveholder who would not overstep certain conventions.

The scenery changes abruptly. It shows Northup's new master citing a bible verse in front of his slaves. The movie does not indicate what happens in between and how Northup got to the new plantation. Edwin Epps, the new master, is called “the nigger-breaker” (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 53:02) and said to be very strict and ungracious. Northup experiences a new life on this plantation, slaves are treated worse, for example whipped regularly. Besides, Northup is confronted with a new kind of work – cotton picking. Northup describes himself as “being unskillful” (Northup, 2011: 116). Another time, Northup intends to describe the surroundings as clear as possible and gives a detailed report about the appearance of the field and the working conditions. He provides an authentic insight which allows the reader a great understanding of the situation and the difficulties he faced.

3.11 The condition of arbitrariness

Northup also elaborately describes the people in his surrounding. “Master Epps was a roustering, blustering, noisy fellow, whose chief delight was in dancing with his 'niggers', or lashing them about the yard with his long whip” (Northup, 2011: 114-115). Initially, McQueen focuses on the paradox that Epps enjoys the slaves dancing and expects them to be cheerful and motivated. He demonstrates how the slaves are objects to be watched like animals whereas the privileged white people are the masters and can use them for pleasure any time. This is another point depicting the dehumanization of slaves.

After a day of work in the cotton field, Northup lays in his cabin at night. Suddenly, Epps opens the door and comes in dancing with a lantern in his hand. “Get up, we dance tonight” (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 59:55), he shouts. He orders Northup to get his violin and they rush over into the Epps' house. Northup is then playing the violin while Epps is clapping and the slaves stand in a circle and dance. Epps is smiling and takes pleasure in watching them, but despite the contradictory cruelty McQueen brings another facet into the movie in that scene, which is the particular tyranny black women had to undergo in slavery

The situation of a girl called Patsey is pointed out, who Northup also presents in the book. Epps is especially attracted to her and stares at her while she is dancing rhythmically, moving his own body, too. The power and control he has over her and the fact that she is his possession make the situation even more appealing for him. Consequently his wife is jealous but not able to act and change something since the 19th century is still a time when women have been less privileged than men.

Hence, her only chance to get rid of the anger is to project it onto Patsey. In the scene she goes to a table, takes a glass bottle and throws it in Patsey's face who collapses.

Epps does not seem impressed, neither by Patsey's screams of pain nor by his wife who asks him to sell Patsey and threatens him to leave him otherwise. He replies that she would be the first person he would send away and that she should contain herself. (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 60:29)

McQueen intersects this scene, which does not appear in the book. In contrast to the movie Northup declares in the book that the "mistress often upbraided him, declaring she would return to her father's house at Cheneyville" (Northup, 2011: 126). Northup does not imply that she is jealous of Patsey but that she is angry with Epps because he behaves inappropriately. Why did McQueen change this attitude and intersect a new idea in a compressed scene? Similarly to what he did with Ford he demonstrates that slavery affected every person, who was closely confronted with it, on every level of life. Being confronted with slavery means being confronted with hate. Being confronted with hate means a constant negative influence on the mind. McQueen shows how Mistress Epps develops uncontrollable anger but cannot settle the issue with her husband to whom she is inferior to.. She compensates her feelings in violating Patsey who is the real victim of the general situation. McQueen expresses that everybody on a plantation is part of the system and concept of slavery which has a negative impact on the individual's mental condition. A state of lawlessness and the absence of values led to a state of impulsiveness and indifference.

This effect is illuminated on the basis of Patsey's violent treatment several times who therefore becomes a key character of the story. McQueen visualized her character that can be analyzed by means of the "indirect definition" theory from Lothe. She is introduced as a rather calm person. She does not speak a word in the first scenes she appears in. Her facial expression, however, is intense and indicates that she is a thoughtful person, for instance when her look follows Northup after his first day of cotton picking (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 58: 10). McQueen also decided to present her sitting in the meadow while she is doing handicraft dolls with simple natural devices (Ibid., 58:27). It is implied that she has creative skills and feels the urge to break out of the daily routine of cruelty. She tries to distract herself, the dolls symbolize the hope and desire for freedom, the desire to express and feel beauty in life.

An important moment occurs when Northup retrieves Patsey from a neighboring plantation where she had rested after being injured. It is Master Shaw's plantation. Patsey is having a conversation with Mistress Shaw and they drink tea together. She asks Northup to sit down and join the

conversation. Patsey is shown in a relaxed mood. It seems she found comfort. She smiles and laughs and mindfully listens to the mistress who is talking about Master Epps' "constant condition of anger" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 68:4). Mistress Shaw is a black woman and explains Northup: "Where once I served now I have others serving me" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 68:54). Through this statement McQueen suggests the idea of surviving that dominates a person's mind. The question if it is better to suffer or to watch others suffer without interfering can only be answered selfishly. Mistress Shaw as a former slave herself who now prefers watching other people suffer. Despair is present in every scene.

At first sight, Patsey seems to be a flat character who is not likely to change at all. She is always portrayed as a young, captive girl who does a good job in cotton-picking and yet does not seem completely hopeless. Her state of mind changes in the course of the plot McQueen suggests. Her situation with Epps is not getting better and also Epps wife puts her under a lot of pressure. He rapes her and she excludes her from the slightest delightful thing. The last rest of a positive attitude is destroyed and Patsey is suddenly portrayed as a broken and resigned character. One night she approaches Northup whispering "Platt, are you awake? I have a request. An act of kindness. [...] take my body to the *shore* of a swamp, take me by the throat, hold me low in the water until I still and without life bury me in a lonely place" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 79:20). She does not want to live anymore since she cannot find anything valuable in life but is too weak to attempt suicide herself. Northup rejects to support her idea responding "it is melancholia, nothing more" (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 79:44). Desperately she begs him to kill her but he stands by his answer. McQueen let her reach a state of depression that is not reversible anymore.

The tension reaches the climax in the movie when Patsey goes to Shaw's to get a piece of soap to wash herself and Epps does not believe her because he is jealous of Shaw and thinks he has further interest in Patsey. He wants her to admit that but Patsey is resistant and declares that she would rather die than committing something she has not done. She rejects all the accusations. As punishment Epps is about to whip her but recognizes that he is not able to hurt her first. He gives the whip to Northup and orders him to whip her instead. When he notices that Northup does not strike her with full power he takes over the whip again and severely injures t her back until she loses consciousness. (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 108: 58)

Patsey does not want to be subdued anymore and noticed that it does not matter what she is doing, Epps treats her however his mood is. She claims the value of justice when she refers to god as the

only relevant judge to her. By all violation on her body she stays strong in mind. A feeling of exquisitely, preposterous despair is evoked by the director the audience can identify with.

Subsequently, Northup takes Patsey to a cabin where fellow slaves take care of her wounds. He watches her in a state of shock and starts crying under her sobbing. It seems he seeks comfort in playing the violin which he is tuning in the forest in the next scene. When a string snaps he loses his mind and breaks the instrument (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 114: 33). As discussed before, the violin represented the constant faith Northup always kept in mind. Aforesaid action symbolizes the final destruction of hope.

3.12 Part conclusion

Next to the stylistic devices, that both Northup and McQueen make use of, concerning the movie also film techniques give an important insight on the author's intentions. The inferiority of slaves is evidenced through camera movements, lighting, sound effects and glance-object-match methods.

This impressive adaptation led to the awarding for Best Picture in the category drama.

In addition, the attention is directed to the special situation of female slaves, who had to suffer rape and hatred caused by jealousy. Thereby the even stronger oppression of women in that time is illustrated.

3.13 The ending of the movie

As one of the last scenes in the movie it is rather relevant to include an analysis of the scene whereas Northup has been freed and is being taken away from Master Epps' plantation, as an important scene of heavy emotional weight (12 Years a Slave, 2013: 123: 41). This scene involves Northup being driven away from the plantation in a horse carriage while looking back at Patsey, to whom he just said goodbye. The scene starts by having the background in focus whereas Northup is placed on the right side of the screen and out of focus. Just before Northup turns his head he raises his hand as a farewell to Patsey, resulting in gasp by Patsey and her instant faint. The next shot is a close-up and eye level to Northup's face as the background is now out of focus while Northup is in focus. By having the mise-en-scene aspect in mind it is crucial to inspect not only Northup's face expression but also his posture. By looking at his posture it is possible to see that his body is not faced directly ahead, but could rather be explained as half tilted towards the back and half tilted to

the front. His emotions are heavily expressed on his face, making it hard to look away. His feelings can be interpreted in various ways, but however someone decides to read his emotions, an unmistakable feeling seen on his face is the emotion of realisation. In that moment it dawns on him that after all these years of slavery, he was finally free. Still it would be impossible for him not to think of Patsey and how he was the only one she could really count on. A part of the composition of the scene is the sound effects which are worthy of being mentioned. . The music being played is an instrumental which could be described as rather melancholic. Also the sound made by the horses is also quite distinct. As it was mentioned above another sound is Patsey's gasp. As soon as Northup is looking forward every other sound is muted except for the instrumental music.

3.14 Solomon Northup as the protagonist

Solomon Northup is the main character as he wrote his memoir with descriptions of his life during captivity. He is portrayed differently in the movie version compared to the book.

The book compared to the movie is very descriptive as mentioned before. The detailing is an authenticity marker and makes it a unique narrative that has also been helpful for historians in researching slavery and the conditions the slaves had to undergo. Northup fittingly writes in his memoir: "My object is, to give a candid and truthful statement of facts: to repeat the story of my life, without exaggeration" (Northup, 2014: 18). It is then up to the reader to discuss whether or not this has succeeded, but originally that was his intention.

Solomon Northup appears rather calm for an innocent free man being taken as a slave, which is an admirable trait and provides an uplifting spirit. It also makes him a likeable character since he is not being aggressive about his unrighteous situation unlike some of the other captives e.g. Eliza who constantly cries and complains about her despair (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 40:00).

Lothe mentions how a name can have a significant meaning attached to the character. Since Solomon Northup was his birth name and not given to his character in the movie, the theory does not apply accurately but it is still fitting considering the name Solomon is of Hebrew origin and derives from the word shalom which means "peace". Northup's peaceful aura is not just shown through the visual performance portrayed by the Oscar-winning actor Chiwetel Ejiofor in the movie, but also in the his memoir where he tries to stay calm in situations where others have

already given up. This could for instance be when another female slave Eliza is being separated from her children and is in constant agony and not able to stop crying. Northup talks to Eliza, but does not break down with her. He keeps working very hard everyday since he “was not allowed to be a moment idle” (Northup, 2014: 107) but obviously misses his children, wife and life back home. In the end when Northup is finally reunited with his long lost family he finds out that his daughter Margaret has named her newborn son after her father Solomon Northup. Margaret is in a sense passing on the “peace”, the powerful strength and courage that Northup has been a symbol of. It is a new time, a new era where slavery is hopefully not a part of their lives anymore.

A remarkable difference in the last scene in the movie is how the director has chosen not to mention the moment where Margaret initially does not recognize her own father when he steps in because she was so young (Ibid.: 319). This is a cinematic move to make the movie end on a light and uplifting mode after all the sufferings we've seen him go through.

A defining part in Northup's life portrayed in the movie is when a slave dies and a group of the captives are gathered and singing a song to honour him and to keep their spirits uplifted.

During Northup's captivity, he is going through all kinds of emotions dealing with frustration and injustice in trying to survive the harsh slavery life. At one point, though, it appears that he has come to terms with his place among the other captives as there is nothing else he can do to fight it but surrender himself to God. He has seen how quickly it can go downhill when living a life under the rules of the Master. This happens when a slave dies of dehydration on the cotton field (12 Years a Slave, 2013: 98:27) and the slaves gather around to sing the song "Roll, Jordan, Roll". Singing was an important part of keeping the slaves' spirits up and alive. As seen throughout the movie, there are several chants and songs but none of which Northup proudly participates in. When "Roll, Jordan, Roll" is sung, the camera shoots close to his face which in approximately one minute displays a wide range of emotions for Northup (Ibid.: 100:31-101:42). From sad to anger and at last the hope shines through when his voice is being intensified and he starts singing along loudly and proudly. It is an intense, raw, and emotional scene that is pivotal for Northup's state of being and sanity. This song is a contrast to the song performed earlier in the movie “Run, Nigger, Run” which is demeaning to the slaves and of amusement for the white overseers and to test their limits of perseverance.

These two songs are both not described in the book and did not happen the way the movie portrays it. The director chose to add these scenes to give the movie an added dimension that plays well with

the character development of the slaves. Especially the “Roll, Jordan, Roll” spiritual is an uplifting scene, that gives the addressee a respite from all the tough scenes. (Whipp, 2013)

Solomon Northup’s legacy still lives on as he has since been recognised and honoured by several institutions, media forms and by musical tributes. The city of Saratoga Springs, where Northup lived with his family, has established the third Saturday in July as Solomon Northup Day in honour of his memory and in remembrance of the freedom and injustice issues still going on today: “The celebration of this day remains a way of ‘remembering’ so that we, as Americans don’t forget how far we have come and to encourage youth to speak-up for human freedom and justice” (Saratoga Spring, 2015).

3.15 Part conclusion

The protagonist is the main character of the story who leads the addressee through the plot. In adapting *12 Years a Slave*, it was McQueen's choice to give him basically the same traits as displayed in the book.

However, it is not so much about Northup's characteristics but more about the emotional changes he undergoes and about the extent to which slavery shapes his identity. McQueen portrays how a calm, composed and positive Northup suddenly is challenged by hatred, hopelessness and cruelty. It can be said that he is not only the protagonist but also the hero of the story, who keeps up faith and who does not allow that the circumstances to destroy his personality.

3.16 Armsby contra Bass

An interesting contradictory relation is the one between Armsby and Bass. Being the protagonist in the movie, Solomon Northup inevitably must face one or more antagonists who are going against him and his will. Northup has been suppressed by several Masters and overseers, but in one specific sequence where Armsby at first appears as a friend but later turn into an opponent of Northup. This happens when Northup decides to ask Armsby to do him a favour and post his letter, which is directed towards his family or friends in the North (Northup, 2014: 230). However, he feared that Armsby would betray him and tell Master Epps about the letter (Ibid.: 231). Armsby wanted Epps to hire him to become an overseer (Ibid.: 234), so to improve his own position he felt it necessary to tell Epps. This is a big betrayal and obstacle for Northup, who could have received a helping hand but instead he is being detained once again.

This scene is also met in the movie adaption, which adds a level of drama as he is risking his life when trusting a complete stranger to deliver a letter that could set him free.

Fortunately for Northup there is a helping character later in the plot whom Northup writes very highly of. This is Samuel Bass played by the famous actor Brad Pitt. His role is not a big one but of great importance. Bass delivers the letter Northup writes to his friends and family and it actually gets through so he can be freed. Bass is one of few characters who are portrayed most accurately. Most of Pitt's lines in the movie are taken directly from the memoir such as: "These niggers are human beings [...] you and men like you will have to answer for it" (Northup, 2014: 267-268 + 12 Years a Slave, 2013: 104: 19). There is also an element of surprise for the viewer as most of the white people in the movie are portrayed as superior of the black slaves and very demeaning. Bass, however turns out to be the final hope and solution for Northup's liberation.

Pitt makes a cameo appearance which has its benefiting factors for the movie sales and presentation. Pitt also works as one of the executive producers, so he had a strong voice in the casting process and movie development.

3.17 Religion

Religion plays a major role in both the book and the movie. Therefore it felt like it was an important aspect of this adaption which could not be left out of the analysis. During this story it is shown how religion is being used for two very different things. The white slave owners use it as a means of showing their slaves that this is their place in the world and that they serve God by serving them. But for the black slaves religion is seen as a way of salvation, a promise of a better future. This is especially visual several times throughout the movie where the slaves are singing African American folk songs. The focus of this section will be on William Ford and Edwin Epps in relation to religion, since these two both are a big part of the story and are kind of opposites. Furthermore, there will also be a short analysis on how the slaves were influenced by religion.

Religion is mentioned frequently throughout the story. But some of the most important mentions occur in relation to William Ford and Edwin Epps. Both of these men use the Christian doctrine but for two very different intentions. Ford uses it as guide for how a man should behave and Epps uses it as a tool for controlling his slaves.

In the book William Ford is described as a good Christian man, even Northup describes him as a kind and noble man even though he holds him in captivity (Northup, 2014: 90). That Ford is a good man is implied quite a few times throughout the book both through “direct definition” and “indirect definition”. Northup even says “Were all men such as he, Slavery would be deprived of more than half its bitterness.”(Northup, 2014: 90).

In the movie you see fewer but stronger examples of “indirect definition” that depict William Ford as a good man. This is because of the aspect of “remediation” which does not allow the same amount of examples as in a book. Therefore the director and writer of *12 Years a Slave* have chosen the most important indicators that William Ford is a good and kind man and transferred them to the movie. This is shown, both in the movie and the film, when William Ford at one time gathers his slaves and reads from the scriptures (12 Years a Slave, 2014, 35:07) and “he spoke of the loving kindness of the Creator, and of the life that is to come” (Northup, 2014: 97). There are several other examples of William Ford being described positively in the movie, for example when he listens to Northup instead of overseer Tibbeats and lets him clear a passage for transferring lumber over water (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 36:25) or when he saves him from being hanged (Ibid., 52: 16).

Most of these are both in the book and the movie but some of them have changed slightly. For example a scene 30 minutes into the movie where you see William Ford contemplating if he should also buy the slavegirl Eliza's daughter as to not split up the family, but ultimately he cannot afford it and buys only Eliza and Northup. In the book this happens before you even see William Ford and it is actually another unnamed slave owner who is a part of this interaction (Northup, 2014: 80-81). But by letting William Ford do this interaction he is not necessarily as a good man but at least a man with some empathy. This is of course quite a paradox since a man contemplating whether to buy one or two slaves does not really sound like a good man. So throughout the story you see different sides of William Ford.

He never doubted the moral right of one man holding another in subjection. Looking through the same medium with his fathers before him, he saw things in the same light. Brought up under other circumstances and other influences, his notions would undoubtedly have been different. (Northup, 2014: 90)

This is said by Northup some time after he came into the possession of William Ford and that, even though he was his slave, Northup also thought that he was a good man. All these examples aim to show the different sides of slavery, which is one of the rather important messages that the director wanted to show - slavery was not as black and white as some people think. Not all slave owners were necessarily evil but more of a product of their surroundings.

After the incident at William Ford's farm where Northup is almost hanged, Northup is sold to another plantation where the Master is not as kind as Ford. Although Northup tells him that he really is a free man who was kidnapped and sold into slavery, Ford still doesn't help him because he is afraid of the implications of accusing someone of such a crime (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 53:35). Northup only tells him this in the movie, whereas in the book Northup never mentions this to Ford. But this intends to show the viewers that even though he is kind to his slaves he is also a slave to the system.

When Solomon Northup first arrives at Edwin Epps cotton farm he and his fellow slaves are immediately greeted with a preach about how well a slave should follow his Lord's will or he shall be struck down with many lashes (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 54:35). This is depicted quite differently in the book. In the book it is William Ford's cousin, Tanner Ford who preaches from the Bible in the exact same way as Edwin Epps.

"And that servant which knew his Lord's will,"—here he paused, looking around more deliberately than before, and again proceeded—"which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself"—here was another pause—"prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Northup, 2014: 127-128)

This also aims to show how white people used Christianity as an excuse for enslaving other people which is an important aspect of this story so why leave the character Tanner Ford out? There can be several reasons for this but *fidelity* is probably one of them. The written narrative gives a better opportunity for a big group of characters but bringing this into a movie would only serve to confuse the viewers, but another and maybe more important reason is to further increase the twisted characteristics of Edwin Epps. By giving Epps this sequence the director uses "indirect definition" by showing Epps twisting something from a religious doctrine for personal gain. Several times throughout the latter part of the movie Epps is described through "indirect definition" as a violent

and cruel man. He rapes the slavegirl Patsey and whips his slaves (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 1:13:28). So here the idea of Epps as the bad guy of the story is increased.

Several times throughout the story the slaves sing, both in relation with funerals or just while working in the fields, it is a way of holding their spirits upright. Most of the songs mention god in some way or another, because religion also played a big role in the lives of the slaves. Some even owned Bibles, like another slave at Ford's plantation called Sam. Even though he could not read he owned a Bible which Northup would read aloud for him (Northup, 2014: 97-98). In the movie you also see the burial of a slave who died of dehydration (12 Years a Slave, 2013, 1:39:42), here they start singing "Roll, Jordan, Roll", which has the verse "my soul will rise in heaven". So they know that he is in a better place now. This is also one of the first times Northup is seen voluntarily singing along. This may be because he is losing hope and he is trying to keep his spirit high by singing.

At the beginning of the movie, when Northup is on a boat on his way to be sold, a slave got killed and thrown overboard. Another slave then says "he is better off, better than us" (12 years a slave, 2013, 24:40). For many slaves death was a kinder fate than captivity. This quote is only uttered in the movie and not in the book, but this indicates how lost the slaves really felt.

3.18 Part conclusion

It is clear that religion influences a lot of the characters, although in different ways. William Ford was raised to be a good Christian man and even though he pities the slaves he never once questions the morality of holding another person in captivity. He is a product of his upbringing and his surroundings. Then there is Edwin Epps, who has no kind of empathy for his slaves whatsoever. He whips them when they do not perform their jobs well and rapes the slavegirl Patsey. One time in the movie he is reading from a religious doctrine, but only to teach his slaves obedience. William Ford and Edwin Epps are both products of a cruel system, but they are still opposites. Epps is a twisted person who does not even care about his own wife, even though he refuses to sell Patsey when his wife demands he still whips her without giving it a second thought. In contrast, Ford protects his slaves and feels pity for them. He even protects Northup from the wrath of overseer Tibbeats.

Most of the slaves could not read so they expressed their devotion to God through songs. Many slaves lived and died in captivity but through song and spirituals they could dream of a better future. Most of the time Northup seems reluctant to join in singing, only at the funeral of another slave he

joins in. The director, through “indirect definition”, shows us that Northup is also beginning to lose hope of seeing his family again.

3.19 Racism in America and Hollywood?

To develop a movie means to make a statement as well, as shown through leading analysis. The director aims at reaching a certain audience and has an image of how, in our case he, wants it to be perceived by the addressee.

So far, the analysis tries to suggest which particular troubles and miseries slavery aroused. The movie is a documentation on behalf of a black man adapted to fit into today's circumstances – movies did not exist as a medium when Northup wrote his memoir.

It was considered to be interesting to have a closer look on the society the movie impinges on today. This section focuses on Hollywood as an institution as well as the Academy Awards and giving a perspective on how and if skin colour plays a role when selecting a winner. This has been done to figure out an understanding of how the themes from *12 Years a Slave*, as for instance racial differences, still play a role in the contemporary American society. The chapter will furthermore attempt to bring in Mills' racial contract theory to see if there is a relation between what is happening in Ferguson and Baltimore in relation to Hollywood. Within this chapter we have chosen to focus on an article published in the newspaper Los Angeles Times (Horn and Smith, 2013) examining the jury as well as the voters with the focus on the differences in who these people are and whether skin colour really plays a vital role within the institution.

The Academy Awards which is now better known as the Oscars were held for the first time in 1929 (Academy Story, 2015). It was set out to put an effort into praising and acknowledging the filmmakers, the actors as well as the writers, basically anyone who had been part of making the movies prior the award show. The Academy Awards as they were presented were set out to be an award show that would not judge people by their skin color, religion or previous performances, but solely on their performance in the respective movie they were nominated for. This is likewise why there shouldn't be any questioning today assuming that the jury of voters should be consistent of equal parts of both whites and non-whites. Just as it should be equally consisting of women as well as men that were to govern the decisions of who should win thereby producing the most general picture of who the public wanted to award for their effort.

This effort to generate a public opinion through a jury consistent of different parts of society, despite their colour, would also eliminate the risk of creating a type of “racial contract” within the established rules. Likewise it would also respect both the moral and political relation (Mills, 1997: 14) in the “social contract”, or rules set out from the beginning. But one thing is the intentions set out when establishing the rules, another thing is how it actually works in practice, and that is what this article from “Los Angeles Times” is focusing on. Furthermore, the article is written in 2013, just prior to the Academy Awards, where *12 Years a Slave* was about to be nominated and win several Oscars. This situates the survey on voters within the article very well in coherence with our main objective of examining the movie and the themes within.

3.20 Who are the voters?

As mentioned earlier, the Academy Awards show was made so that the public could pay tribute to the film as well as actors they loved to see on the big screen. Therefore a jury consistent of more than 6000 individuals were set out to give a general view of what the public judges as worthy of an award. In a modern and evolving society as America, which has also had racial struggles in the past, it should be of importance to hear every part of society despite gender or race.

The survey, presented in this chapter, analyzes who these 6000 voters are and how the statistics of gender and race are divided. What perhaps is quite shocking is the fact that 93% of the jury in 2012 were white, likewise a total of 76% of these were male (Horn and Smith, 2013). Based on the statistics it could be argued that the jury neither represents everyone nor shows the full opinion of the population as it was set out to do. With a total of 93% being white, Mills’ theory could very be the foundation for a discussion of whether “white supremacy” was present here. As mentioned before the Awards are meant to administrate the opinion of the vast majority of America, but how can this be done, when mostly the votes come from the white part of society?

Hollywood and the Academy Awards would arguably never discuss this division of races as a case of “white supremacy”. This would both be a challenging opinion and quite frankly an unpopular one which imaginably has its roots in the past focused around America’s history. As portrayed in *12 Years a Slave*, America has had a past where slavery was perceived as an everyday thing and where the white part of population ruled (“white supremacy”). Now slavery is eliminated after being declared illegal, yet racism still exists and is a subject difficult to challenge in coherence with modern America. A statement implying “white supremacy” in an institution as the Academy could

be denied as an idea because it is so difficult to prove. Arguably this has something to do with America's past, also a feeling of guilt is present. Mills claims that "statements of such frankness are rare or nonexistent in mainstream white opinion today, which generally seeks to rewrite the past so as to deny or minimize the obvious fact of global white domination" (Mills, 1997: 27).

This to some degree puts forth the part of Mills' theory about racism which is very difficult to discuss and to prove it in coherence with, for instance, the Oscars. Thus, due to the guilt of prior events in history, the selection of a jury does not have anything to do with race. But whether we look at it one way or another, it is a strange decision to have 93% of a jury be white, while it is set to represent society as a whole, and not just half of the society.

Creating a jury consistent of so many individuals from one class, no matter if they are black or white, raises the question whether this is right or wrong. The American screen writer John Ridley, who wrote the screenplay for *12 Years a Slave*, also noted this irony (Horn and Smith, 2013). Having a movie primarily centered around white people exploiting black people as slaves and then having a predominantly white jury nominating it for the Oscars is quite ironic. This however leads to another part of Mills' theory about white people oppressing the black. Mills argues: "The whole point of establishing a moral hierarchy and juridically partitioning the polity according to race is to secure and legitimate the privileging of those designated as white/persons and the exploitation of those individuals designated as non-white/subpersons" (Mills, 1997: 32-33).

This quote highlights how for instance the jury, mainly consistent of whites, juridically as well as morally could nominate *12 Years a Slave* for the Oscars. An awarding of a black man and a movie which mainly deals with racism and suppression would mean that the jury could not be accused of racism. According to Mills' theory it would legitimate and secure the whites major presence in the jury, showing that they would have no trouble seeing a black person win, and thereby overrule any accusations of racism within this social contract.

Of course this is an example of how Mills' theory could be used in practice and it would be difficult to give raw evidence that this was how the jury functioned. It equally explains how the theory of *The Racial Contract* works on several different levels within, for instance, a social setting as the Academy Awards. Likewise it explains how the white population could be legitimating their privileges, which in this case is a majority of seats in the voting jury. What the direct consequence of this division between the races would be is up to interpretation. Also to decide whether it is

political, economic or simply just a twist of fate would require extraordinary knowledge of the individual in the jury.

The survey examining the jury, found in L.A. Times, also reveals the criteria for becoming part of it: “people can become Academy members in one of three ways: land an Oscar nomination; get a recommendation from two members; or get an endorsement from a membership committee or the academy staff” (Horn and Smith, 2013). With a percentage of 93% whites it could be argued that changing the race ratio to a more equal number would be rather difficult now that one of the groups is already keeping most of the seats in the jury. While the requirements from the beginning were not meant to include everyone, preserving a stylish and formal group of voters, this exclusion has imaginably formed a different connotation, keeping Mills’ racial theory in mind.

What is perhaps the most interesting aspect regarding Mills’ theory is the possible economic effect the racial inequality could have on the movie industry. Hollywood is a vast economic competitor in the movie market and the Academy Awards are undoubtedly a very influential part in choosing movie trends. Therefore it is interesting to study how influential the jury’s choice for nominations actually was in the business and study whether a primarily white jury, actually was setting the agenda for a whole movie industry, which supposable were meant for everyone.

3.21 Racial issues within America

As mentioned in the introduction, the focus was set on the cases in America that could be used as examples of Mills’ racial theory, which are Ferguson and Baltimore. Since our focus was mainly on describing how racism possibly still functions in Hollywood, more specifically the Academy Awards. Accompanied by Mills’ theory, the two cases are examples of how racism still functions in broad daylight but hidden behind juridical and moral contracts. These two contemporary cases are rather interesting looking at through the perspective of Mills’ theory, as they both fit several of the focus points that Mills wanted us to look at.

What Mills throughout his theory emphasized was the issue that racism has changed from being completely obvious, in reference to owning slaves, to a society where the whites still suppressed the black people. Racism is hidden behind politics because white people justify the suppression of the African-American people through laws. The case of Ferguson was and is a perfect example, as the statistics from the city point towards Mills’ theory of racial suppression. 29% white and a black community consistent of 69% is one thing, but in looking at how the influential jobs (City Council,

Police Sector, School board) are spread out, it enforces Mills' theory as the minority of whites govern most of these (Cooper, 2015).

These jobs control the taxes and the policies in the city (City Council), securing its citizens through laws (the police sector) and adjusting the guidelines for the children's education (School Board). Having a majority of one race governing these jobs, no matter if they are black or white, surely enforces the belief that not everyone is equal. The case of Baltimore shares common values with Ferguson, but whether "white supremacy" through racism really is the case is difficult to prove, but certainly a theory worth discussing as it perhaps depends mostly on each individual's perspectives and beliefs.

3.22 Part conclusion

Upon studying the Academy Awards and its voters in relation to Mills' theory it became evident how difficult a topic like racism is to discuss and prove. Having a jury consisting of mainly one part of society, will certainly mean that the influential part is heard but leave a minority of people, who perhaps are not forgotten but just does not have that much to say, behind. This could already be viewed as racism through Mills' theory - a way of withholding the black community from gaining influence. Studying as well as proving this would be rather difficult, as it would demand knowledge concerning each individual and their standpoint towards other races. Arguing that racism is present in these cases could very well backfire as it may as well just be a sheer coincidence and leave the impression that something is implied, which is wrong.

It is a thin line to walk on when discussing racism, but this is also what Mills wants to prove with his theory. If someone denies the fact that white communities withhold the black ones from gaining influence, the belief that white people hide behind rules is already supported. These rules are created by a government set to be equal for everybody but instead end up papering the white part of society. What the theory does present is the possibility of opening racism and "white supremacy" as a subject of discussion in modern America, but it leaves the perspective up to the individual.

What is probably most evident when looking at the society in *12 Years a Slave* in comparison with contemporary Hollywood, as well as America in general, is how racism has changed. As mentioned in the analysis America has moved from a country where whites governing slaves was completely normal to a society where the focus is on portraying everyone as equal. But the question here is

whether racism just vanished with the elimination of slavery from the American Constitution or actually, as Mills argues, is still present.

The conclusion to whether racism is still present in Hollywood and America is a matter of discussion. The Academy Awards as a representation of Hollywood and Ferguson/Baltimore which represent America in general are three cases share notions of what Mills' theory is trying to prove. The American society has come a long way from the America which is presented in *12 Years a Slave*, but it is undeniable that it is not still present in contemporary America, the question is just on which levels and to what extent. As John Ridley, screenwriter of *12 Years a Slave* said when asked, what his thought of the movie being nominated was: "It's been a terrific time for people of color, but black people especially have a long way to go, and it will take a long time to change" (Ridley, John in Horn and Smith, 2013)

4. Discussion

This chapter will consist of a discussion of some of the questions raised in our analysis and a discussion of what other approaches this project could have taken in examining this field of study.

The intention of the movie is to tell the story of a single African-American slave's history and thereby illustrate a very obscure period in American history where suppression and "white supremacy" was a common thing. It is clear that the movie was not intended to be just a media to express entertainment but rather to tell the story of how unjust a society could be, following the ideals of racial division. Throughout the movie, the viewer is given different examples of how the white ruled and kept their slaves 'on a short leash'. The black people were treated as animals which clearly exemplifies a racial issue being a norm at that time. Therefore it is impossible, as a viewer living in a modern American society, not to rethink whether these racial issues still are implemented in society or not. In doing so, the movie acts as a voice of those who could not be heard in the period the movie depicts. Additionally, McQueen raises awareness to a broad audience especially the American people and stresses how wrong the whites were in suppressing the black people, instead of being a unity.

4.1 Social Taboo

Racism is often characterized as a social taboo, and something people are not very fond of addressing as an issue. *12 Years a Slave* attempts to break this taboo by expressing the concern of it even being part of American history. How could the white people actually behave and justify their methods in controlling the black people? And could it happen again? These are some of the questions the movie raises and tries to remind people of when watching it. It is an adaptation of what has happened, and a subject that needs to be discussed, so history will not repeat itself. Here it is also important to notice that, following the premiere, the movie drew a lot of attention through the media and thereby allowed the initiation of a racial debate in the media, which could potentially lead to further equality amongst races. It is clear that if a society wants to move forward it is not by sweeping its issues under the rug but rather raise awareness and a platform for discussion like the movie does.

As it has been depicted throughout the paper, the much discussed movie *12 Years a Slave (2013)* is an adaptation of an autobiography, therefore the events manifested are to a great extent true events. It is not an unknown fact to most people that slavery was a reality and a brutal and inhuman one at that. Consequently, the scenes within the movie are treated as occurrences that either have happened or could have happened.

Since a movie is a form of art for a director, it is up to him or her how a movie should be adapted, according to what the message is. As it was drawn out from the analysis, there were parts of the movie that were not met in the book meaning that the director chose to add them to his work. These parts were not of great consequence but passed a meaning nonetheless. This fact proves that an adaptation cannot be treated as a precise representation of historical events though it can still be reliable.

It can be appreciated that an adaptation, as the one this paper focuses on, can pass a message on to the audience therefore make the viewer understand the reality of the events depicted in the movie. Additionally, the movie reflects abundant emotional responses, which are one of the main goals when producing a movie, as with any kind of art.

4.2 The memory of Solomon Northup

As mentioned in the analysis, the city of Saratoga Springs has made the third Saturday in July a day to commemorate the memory of Solomon Northup since 1999. This act of commemorating an important historical person, who experienced such a horrible aspect of society, is an important tradition to maintain. There are two sides of such a tradition, which are both important. One is to remember the deeds of Solomon Northup and honour his action towards slavery. The other is to make sure that the horrors of racial oppression are not forgotten. By doing this, people are reminded of the importance of standing up to racial inequality. Events like the ones in Ferguson and Baltimore show that racial inequality still exists in contemporary America. People are still subject to racial stereotypes but by remembering past examples of racism you make sure that people are aware of these problems.

4.3 Different approaches

During this project we realized how big and controversial the racial debate is. There are plentiful articles on this subject discussing if it still exists to some degree. Therefore we had to narrow our subjects down to the two events which unfolded in Baltimore and Ferguson and the Hollywood film industry. But there are several other approaches which could have led to different approaches than the selected one. This project could have taken a much more historical approach with an analysis of historical documents and accounts, which could have given insight into the era of slavery. Furthermore, the project could have focused on the evolution of slavery and looked at historical accounts from influential persons throughout history, like Martin Luther King. The results of such an analysis could reveal how racism has developed over time and what we can learn from past events.

Another approach could be to just focus on either the book or the film. This way a more thorough analysis could have been completed. By so, an analysis of the movie could have focused on which film techniques and aesthetic tools were used to influence the viewer's opinion on the racial debate. Likewise an analysis focused solely on the book could have been used as comparison with other accounts of slavery from that era. This could give a description of that time period where racial suppression ruled throughout America. Additionally, the account of Solomon Northup could have been compared with other important historical accounts, like the account of Anne Frank. Such a study could help us understand how racial oppression works and how it should be avoided.

Within our study, we only look at the Hollywood film industry to a certain degree, but a different approach could have focused on the evolution of the Hollywood film industry. By looking at older movies and seeing if there are any African-American nominees, we could investigate whether racism has existed in Hollywood and to what extent. To do this, a comparison of who won, their performance and skin color could give us an idea whether the jury of the Academy Awards was judging by color or not. If this was evident, a discussion concerning what effect this has could be interesting as Hollywood has a great influence in the film industry.

5. Conclusion

McQueen created a historical monument with his movie *12 Years a Slave* as a work of remembrance. He raises awareness of the characteristics of slavery by the use of many themes throughout the whole story. The film subsists on authentication. The latter is evoked through the use of themes that enable identification for the majority of viewers. Our investigation unfolded diverse strategies McQueen made use of.

First of all, his adaptation is a selection of the most intense scenes of Northup's narrative. He skips most of the large descriptive parts without destroying the gist of the story.

Secondly, symbolism is a constantly present aspect in the movie. On the one hand, McQueen highlights certain artifacts with a meaning, as for instance the violin or the dolls Patsy produces. On the other hand, the character portrayals indicate his contradictory ideas of suppression, despair, hope and faith. He illustrates those themes by means of their use of religion based on the different interpretations of the bible. The abuse of religion as an instrument of power is one of McQueen's strong arguments. In summary it could be determined that the time was a hypocritical one and that arbitrariness dominated the everyday life.

In addition, all his ideas are supported by relevant film techniques. Our analysis sought to display the frequent use of the "glance-object-match" technique. The close ups on the character's faces intensify the particular scenes and strongly depict the emotional condition of the relevant character. Inequality, suppression, freedom, and hope are the contradictory main themes of the story. McQueen illustrates that hope and the search of liberty are not strong enough to detain a violent misuse of power. With this extensive, complex piece of art he eventually shows that it's crucial to remember, that we need to be aware of what went wrong and moreover to see which viral negative effects it had. Hatred achieves nothing but restriction and mental impoverishment is the lesson McQueen teaches.

The second part of our project aimed at investigating if and how these themes are still a part of contemporary America. Our examination of the highly influential jury of the Academy Awards was based on Mills' theory that discussed whether an Oscar jury of mostly white people represents racism in America's Hollywood film industry. The theory revealed the flaws of this white majority who in fact governs the most influential decisions and depicted it as possible suppression. Aside from Mills' theory a clear distinction between imaginable and legitimate accusations concerning a racial division in the jury could not be achieved. Mills theory does not aim at the depiction of white supremacy in America but at a constant discussion on the racial discourse. In dealing with slavery

the movie *12 Years a Slave* becomes a part of that discourse. It is clear that America has progressed from the scenery presented in the movie. Our analysis shows that racism has changed, as Mills tries to argue, racism has been relocated in a society where the government tries to portray every individual as equal.

By virtue of our debate about Hollywood we involved the contemporary American society as well, represented through the Ferguson and Baltimore cases. Both shows clear tendencies towards racism since a public discussion evolved about the reason for the shootings. It is not clear if a crime has happened or if the actions are based on arbitrariness towards the black people.

Those cases support the idea that racism is still present but in a different form. The analysis of *12 Years a Slave* also shows that at least McQueen suggests that racism is a relevant issue in America today that needs to be directed towards the society through mass media. McQueen speaks on behalf of the blacks who so often become the object of society in contrast to the white people.

Racism is a concept that is difficult to challenge but it will continuously exist as long as differences in the appearance of people exist. Appearance and looks are a human key stimulus, yet a society's attitude should always be based on tolerance and understanding.

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