



READING IMAGES OF THE VIOLENCE OF IN 12 YEARS A SLAVE

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Abstract

The Main aim of present study is to examine the paradoxical instability of realist images of the trauma and violence of slavery and the discourse that surrounds them within a larger lineage of the history and politics imbedded in the depiction of slavery McQueen's *12years a slave*. Further, Image of violence in the movie represents the oppressive attitudes and cultural biasness of white people towards the black people. This study textually analyses the images of racial violence through the Althusser's concept of ISA (Ideological State Apparatus): social rule, costume, human desires, languages, racial ideology, through which white rules over black people, as finding, these state's agencies oppress the Aspirations of common people. This movie presents all the black characters are suffering from white people on the name of racial discourse. Black people have to suffer and departed from their family due to extreme control of white people. The image of violence presents the condition of black lively, on the whole, all the evidential picture represents the long journey of racial freedom, as representative of black community, Solomon running there to get hope, freedom. The common black people like Solomon compels to follows white oppression, they repeatedly practice it, in long run they became habitual over such racial discourse then black people hegemonized by them. Though black people became victim of racial discourse, people like Solomon uses their technology of self to get freedom ultimately. Therefore, the finding of the study suggests that getting freedom is possible even in adverse situation if a person has early forms of self-knowledge that prepares the way for achievement.

Key Words: Realist images, Aspirations, slavery, violence, hegemonies, technology of self

The story begins with a short flashback of Solomon Northup's (the main character) life as a slave and then his life as a free man in Saratoga, NY, in 1941. Prior to being enslaved, Solomon spends his time with his family and cares them. One day, He leaves home to visit an unknown location. In a park near home, he acquaints himself with two men, whom he had met that night, in Washington, spends time with them during supper. Without knowing, the two men put something in his wine and it eventually

leads to the kidnapping and enslavement of Solomon.

When he wakes up, he notices that he is chained and tries to free himself but is unsuccessful. Later he is beaten by a brute controlling the prison and after serving time in prison, he and several other slaves are transferred by boat across the Mississippi river and finally end up in New Orleans, where a man purchases Solomon and treats him with dignity. At the owner's property, all slaves are introduced to

two brutal men known as John Tibbeats and Mr. Chapin.

While residing here, all slaves work near the swamp by the house and Solomon spends his time playing his fiddle and working on a house. One day he ends up in an altercation with the rambunctious man Tibbeats and surprisingly manages to beat him to the ground with rage, but luckily a resident interrupt the altercation.

Unfortunately, Tibbeats later returns with his men and they manage to beat Solomon and hang him in a tree and attempt to strangle him, but are interrupted by the overseer of the property. Not until later that night Solomon saved by his owner, who removes the rope from his neck and carries him into the house and later sells Solomon to a new owner, in order to save his life. When Solomon has recovered, he is set to work on the plantations, picking cotton but does not manage to pick enough cotton required to avoid punishment. While working on the plantations, he acquaints himself with the young lady Patsey, the most diligent slave working on the plantations.

During several occasions, Patsey is raped by the owner and later impregnated and one night she asks Solomon to kill her and offers him a piece of coin she has stolen from the owner, but Solomon declines the offer. One day Patsey disappears, but eventually returns with soap in her hands and is confronted by the enraged owner, who drags her to a nearby tree and ties her up. As he is about to whip her, he hesitates and forces Solomon to do it instead and he obeys the owner. After several swings with the whip, Solomon is exhausted and with rage the owner takes possession on the whip and continues the brutal act. After the beating, a few slaves drag Patsey into the house in attempt to heal the wounds and as time progresses, the wounds finally heal.

After a long time of working on the plantations, Solomon eventually resumes his work at the house and meets a man by the name of Mr. Bass. He explains his situation to Bass and begs him to send a letter to Solomon's friends up in the north. Surely enough, despite hesitating, Bass promises to send the letter and days later, a man visits the property and confronts Solomon and tells him to

identify a man standing on the road next to the plantations. When Solomon sees the man, he enunciates his name and runs towards the man, known as Mr. Parker and hugs him. Shortly after, he is escorted on a carriage but stops to say goodbye to Patsey and then leaves, as they make haste towards Saratoga.

When he arrives home, he encounters his family for the first time in 12 years and tears are shed. However, one thing has definitely changed in Solomon's life: the birth of a grandson. The new family member born in the family and family creates societies and nation, it is seems that the process of making state is natural but ruling people of state through ideologies is quite political matter. This matter can be analyzed through the Althusser's concept of ISA (Ideological State Apparatus): social rule, costume, human desires, languages, racial ideology, families and materialistic desires are the agency of state, through which state rules over common people, but these state's agencies break the natural desires of the people. In the film, the protagonist character, Solomon and other common characters are compelled to live under the shadow of racial ideology that is enforcing black people by creating racial discourse. As Foucault has said that people who are sitting in the position of power creates racial discourse then they dominate Solomon like character. the common black people like Solomon compels to follows white oppression, they repeatedly practice it, in long run they became habitual over such racial discourse now black people hegemonies by them. Though black people became victim of racial discourse but people like Solomon uses their technology of self and get freedom ultimately.

Reading an image or Visual reading is the ability to see, to understand, and ultimately to think, create, and communicate graphically. In the literature looking at an image carefully, critically, and with an eye for the intentions of the image's creator. As Baldick has said that "imagery is a "mental picture which appeals to the senses." It can both be figurative and literal. The mental picture of Solomon represents the images of white domination over black people. The mental of Solomon presented in the movies through the cinematographic skill and

it covers multiple skills in the film. These skills can be applied equally to any type of image: photographs, paintings and drawings, graphic art, films, maps, and various kinds of charts and graphs. All convey information and ideas, and allows the viewer to gather the information and ideas contained in an image, place them in context, and determine whether they are valid or invalid.

Image is a representation of the external form of a person or thing in an art. It revolves around some meaningful thoughts and ideas. As Johan said "In a visual age, images are one of the basic modes of communication and the main means to convey social values". The presence of image reflects the certain values and political strategies similarly McQueen creates prolonged, unflinching images of slave torture and suffering, lingering on graphic scenes of brutality, including whipping, hanging, beatings, and rape. Realist cinematography, by attempting to replicate and recreate the real, can be seen as an attempt to create a pure representation of experience, to bypass instability and get outside interpretation. However, realist images also contain an imbedded ambiguity at the very site of their realism.

Similarly In replicating and recreating the real, realist images are framed constantly by what they are not; they are defined continuously and simultaneously by what is not there and could not be represented. Realism, it would appear, cannot get around this fundamental split. In this way, by representing the real, by recreating experience in order to capture meaning, what is instead represented is the very politics of "seeing" itself. Anaheim, Rudolf has defined:

The word "cinema", short for cinematography, is often used to refer to the industry of films and filmmaking or to the art of filmmaking itself. The contemporary definition of cinema is the art of simulating experiences to communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty or atmosphere by the means of recorded or programmed moving images along with other sensory stimulations. (2-6)

Discussion:

Present film creates some paradoxical images in the film to create balance and fragmentation at the same time. The paradoxical ambiguity of realism has specific implications with regards to realist reading images, and to the visual representation of slavery. What does it mean, then, to portray slavery "realistically," and how can we locate this reading? By confronting the viewer with the image of the tortured slave body, by attempting to recreate the violence and trauma of slavery, McQueen's images occupy a fundamental split and it is Framed constantly by what is not there, by what can never be represented, further McQueen's images perform the politics of "seeing," the instability of representation, and the impossibility of recreating the historical trauma and live Experience of slavery. Queens says "Some logical paradoxes are known to be invalid arguments but are still valuable in promoting, image is a numeric representation, normally binary" (55). This inherent ambiguity, the instability and impossibility of McQueen's images paradoxically imbedded at the very site of realism, is performed and in a sense "played out" by the critical Response to the film. Response to the film's realist images of slave suffering and torture, images of the Violence and trauma of slavery, has elicited a competing discourse. Although the film's depiction of the violence and trauma of slavery has prompted widespread and important dialogue, individual critical conversations have been largely devoted to an implicit project of resolving these images, of framing and containing them by arguing for and against what they are believed to engage. As a result, little has been done to examine the politics and implications of this ambiguity itself, and what it might perform. In fact, in the very act of attempting to resolve the ambiguity of McQueen's images, this competing discourse strangely repeats and performs the very paradox of realism itself.

By attempting to capture meaning and exclude other interpretations, these discourses must constantly frame and define themselves based on what is inherently not there, against the very ambiguity they mean to exclude. In this way, the discourse surrounding McQueen's realist images of the trauma and violence of slavery perform a fundamental split

that continuously reflects and implicates the images themselves.



Image:1

Above given image1 is a representation of Solomon Northup, a free northern black man who was captured, beaten and brought to Louisiana to work enslaved. The outward physical appearance shows his feeble condition. He is facing oppressive violence from white representative in white dominated society. In the picture Solomon looking for distance hoping for change and freedom. *The Washington Post's* film critic, Ann Hornaday, said of the film: "Intense, unflinching, bold in its simplicity and radical in its use of image, sound and staging", *12 Years a Slave* in many ways is the defining epic so many have longed for to examine if not cauterize America's primal wound.



Image:2.

Solomon Northup was a man of gifts but he was one man among many. He has pain, suffering and nostalgia of family. His master order him to play music to hide the real voice of enslaved children and women. He is denying the commend of his master from his heart but compels to tune the violin because of harsh command of his master. In the past his violin used to provide entertainment to the people but the same tune of that violin using to suppressed the tragic voices of black women. Here goal man has said that "the same object creates double function according to place" so the violin represents the sound of pain and suffering in the film.



Image:3

Above given figure 3 show how Solomon was tortured and violated by his master, likewise figure 1.2 shows the brutality up on black people. The white people misbehave with black people on the name of different mistakes of black people, third figure represent the juxtaposition between entire environment and Solomon's internal pain and suffering, environments peace but Solomon was totally in unrestful condition. Likewise, Patsy was being beaten severely by her mistress. Over all these figures represents the whites misbehave towards black.



Image:4

The above figure 4 represent the long journey of racial freedom, Solomon running there to get hope, freedom and pursuits of happiness, his desire for freedom directly visible here. Likewise, Solomon Northup is the major character of the movie. He is a freeman and lives with his wife Anna Hempton and three children. He was a laborer and a violin player and his wife earned living as a cook. Once Solomon Northup was deceived by two con men. They offered him a job as a musician in Washington Dc's circus. When he reached Washington, he was false, drugged, kidnapped and chained. James H Bruch was a slave trader, he was taken to. When he tried to protest, he was threatened and whipped, to get killed unnoticeable to anybody. He was then sold to William Ford who was a good white master. He liked Solomon his creativity that made his work easier

through water ways. But unfortunately, due to some crisis he had to sell Solomon to John Tibbeats. John didn't like Solomon and fought with him and even hanged him for a day without food and water. John then sold Solomon to crueler slave master Edwin Epps. He was very cruel and whipping and giving punishment was a common thing for him. There was another slave named Patsy.

She was timely brutally raped and whipped by her master. Solomon even after going through all those hard times had preserved his sound of silence. He never lacked the faith and believed that if only he was able to write to his friend will free him from the hell. Once a carpenter called Bass came for building making. He was a nice white man; he listened to the story of Solomon and assured him of posting a letter to his friend. Finally, after 12 years of pain, suffering and brutality, he was free. He even reported about James to police on his way back to New York. When he returned to his family, he could see his daughters already married and he had a grandson whom they had named Solomon Northup in the honor of their father. I feel this story is very inspiring, as it teaches us to never lose hope and faith even in the hardest time of life. Sometimes the sound of silence and strong determination towards situation can really turn the things in one's favor, Northup's conscience and stability in such situation made him able to fight and punish the culprit. Visual representation of brutality, pain and suffering of black is presented in a very realistic way. Where by presenting all the images of slavery Mac has proved what they are shown aren't they? 12 Years a Slave is a testimony to the power of the human spirit and the enduring determination of hope. Solomon Northup is deceived, kidnapped, abused, removed from family, deprived of identity, and beaten into a long, weary, unjustified submission. Yet he is never broken. Even in his worst days of sorrow lived under the cruelties of Edwin Epps, he never gives up hope that one day he will be free. He never loses faith in his friends, constantly assured that if he can only get word to the North then they will indeed come to his rescue. And they do. In the end, Solomon Northup's heartbreaking journey that uplifts because in his testimony is evidence that faith and hope can endure and triumph. A reading of images of slave

suffering as resistant to historical domination, is faith and hope can provide a base for life? is there resistance is possible even in painful condition of our lives? is mental hope gives real images of change? Absolutely there may be some rays of hope even in devastating condition of our life, the prime thing is strong determination and sound of silent should be strong. This given shot of film reflects the hopeful journey of Solomon for freedom. His facial gesture physical condition presents the mixture of hope and segregation. This running gesture show the long run for freedom.

Slavery is violent by its very nature. From the physical brutality to the psychological damage enslavement inflicts, a discussion of violence is vital for any conversation surrounding the subject of this institution. In *12 Years, a Slave*, the director, cinematographer, and actors present viewers with a disturbing and uncomfortable final product in what cultural historian Dr. Thomas Doherty says "has already been called the most searing depiction of slavery ever projected on the American screen" (5). By lingering on scenes, a bit longer (sometimes a lot longer) and providing stark contrasts that highlight the horrors of the narrative, the film forces audience members to confront their own discomfort about the subject head on. Slavery is a major theme of *12 Years a Slave*. Slavery is an evil practice wherein one human being owns and treats another as mere property. It is a dehumanizing and malignant practice ended in the United States through the American Civil War. When Solomon is kidnapped and sold into slavery, the Civil War is still two decades off, and the anti-slavery Republican Party has not yet made its mark, nor been founded. Solomon, a free man, is aware of slavery only insofar as he has heard about it, and conversed with the slaves of southerners visiting up north.



Image :5

“Relentless cinematic intensity” is prevalent from the very beginning when the camera pushes its way through leaves in the field “closing in like vegetative shackles him (Solomon) cannot hack away”. This scene creates a claustrophobic feeling which sets viewers up for the discomfort to follow. Several times, director Steve McQueen utilizes his actors’ faces to further the themes of distress and pain. According to scholar Deborah E. McDowell, “In giving so much visual and sonic space to the mournful and melancholic—forn looks, grieving eyes, audible sobs, McQueen allows us to consider slavery’s devastating hold on the emotional lives of the enslaved” (379),



Image6.

This nearly silent (minus a storm brewing in the distance) extended shot of Solomon’s angst-ridden face includes a full 14 seconds of direct eye contact. This scene has not received much attention thus far, but I propose that it is one of the most powerful in the film. According to director of photography and camera operator Sean Bobbitt in an interview with Time Light box, this is exactly what he was going for in what he attests is his favorite scene: “His face isn’t moving, and yet we see the whole of his life written in his eyes, the compassion and the horror and the dignity all welled up inside him,” he said, “and then he does that little glance into the camera, it was like a physical blow to the chest. It’s so simple and powerful, and for me that’s what cinematography should be” (qtd. in Moakley). Extended eye contact can be uncomfortable enough in person since, as Dr. Gwyneth Doherty- Sneddon points out, “Looking at faces is quite mentally demanding [especially] when we are trying to concentrate and process something else that’s

mentally demanding”. From a film with so much difficult material for viewers to process already, these moments are all the more disconcerting. Solomon forces the audience to acknowledge his tortured, hollow eyes, empty yet full of pain as telling of slavery’s inherent nature, in such an uncomfortable, sanitized, and unashamed way as to show slavery for what it is.



Image:7

Solomon Northrup resists a white slaver and is left hanging for an entire day. It was an extremely bold choice to devote so much time to this shot, but the gamble pays off. While Solomon dangles on his tip-toes, trying to stay alive, life goes on behind him; the previously mentioned shallow depth of focus comes into play here, where those behind him go on with daily life, just out of focus. The only people in focus are the slavers; the wife who comes to watch on the deck and then walk away. The young girl who risks punishment to feed him water. Behind him, slaves do laundry, trying to ignore his suffering. The editing and cinematography make the audience feel like they are constantly circling him, like the slaves behind, wanting to do something to help but unable to leave their seats.



Image:8.

The climax of the film, where Solomon is forced to whip Patsey, is notable for its use of hand-held cameras in a single shot. The audiences didn’t even realize at the time of watching that it was one

shot, because it was too focused on the intense emotion of the scene. Then, after reading about the film, I realized that there weren't any cuts in the image. The camera gets right into the moment, capturing every stroke of the whip on Patsey's bleeding back. But it does something quite remarkable too – while pushing into the moment, the camera remains invisible to the viewer, because it takes on the actions of a bystander.

Two scenes in particular receive the most attention within critical conversations about the film: the hanging of Northrup and the whipping of Patsey. The incredible violence and inhumanity depicted in these moments certainly render them memorable, but the more subtle aspects of the cinematography are what truly make them stand out from the rest of the film. With the hanging scene, Bobbitt was not about to let the audience off easy. In an interview with the Hollywood Reporter, he said, "Each of the [hanging scene] shots is held for a long period of time, specifically to make the audience as uncomfortable as possible and to force them to reflect on what was happening to Solomon and how terrifying that must have been" (2). Capping off at 1:26 of uncut footage, the film forces the audience to watch as Northrup balances on his toes in the mud to prevent his suffocating in the noose. With little action on screen except for a few slaves going about their business in the background and hardly any noise but the sickly squishing of sludge beneath his toes, this scene is purposefully brutal to watch when the camera finally breaks from this angle, viewers get a moment of respite. The film's next two minutes of Northrup's struggling to stay alive represent the hours he had to wait for his own relief (which, notably, must come at the hands of his master) by showing the daylight changing and other slaves going about their daily activities in the background. "What was very important is that the audience gets a sense of the passage of time, and sense the length of the shots, that feeling of the duration of the day," said Bobbitt. It is important here to reference how this theme of relief without resolution continues through to the end of the film when Solomon is finally rescued from slavery. In that moment, though relieved for his salvation, the audience also experiences unfulfilled yearning for a

happy ending to Patsy's story too as she only fades further into the background, a lingering message of slavery's still unresolved legacy in both history and modern times alike the suffering Solomon faces in his hanging contrasts with the anguish he is forced to inflict on a fellow slave in the other highly-discussed scene: Patsy's whipping. Continuous shooting was important to the crew to depict this extreme inhumanity. Bobbitt said to the Hollywood Reporter: That was always going to be one continuous shot, the audience is given no relief. Once you put a cut in, then subconsciously everyone is aware that they are watching a film, and it lets them off the hook,

Particularly for a scene like that, with the complexity of the emotions and the violence going on, it really acts to heighten the drama and the performance of the actors.

In this continuous shot totaling a whopping 6:21, the camera includes "multiple perspectives of victim, perpetrator, unwilling participant, and enthusiastic onlooker". This observation is certainly important; thus, it is important to delve further into its implications. The cinematography avoids jump cuts between perspectives since these leaps tend to give viewers the sense of "jumping" into individual characters' heads for certain moments of a narrative. Instead, the film opts for an omniscient, authentic, and continuous shot which shows the events and the various people involved blatantly as they are.

The cinematographic representation in the present film is very creative, one significant element of this scene has gone generally unnoticed, but critiques have said "to draw attention to it here. It is only after following the soap the small, pure, innocent cause of so much violence, wretchedness, and suffering fall gently to the ground from Patsey's hands that the camera finally breaks". But, instead of offering a moment of relief to the audience, it does the opposite: the screen goes straight to a shocking shot of Patsey's lacerated back, "the most extreme and horrid of the many images of bodily harm in *12 Years a Slave*". By doing so, the propose that the film demonstrates how even something or someone, innocent, clean of any stain of guilt, can

be twisted and warped through the violence of slavery. The break between the scenes also shows how, in the life of a slave, there are no moments of relief; even when one expects a reprieve, she may only face further suffering. By imposing this feeling of hopelessness and apprehension on the audience, these scenes force viewers to experience and confront their discomfort with the violence of slavery. By making the audience uncomfortable instead of opting for a more sanitized version of the story, this film draws attention to the twisted nature of slavery through these unrelenting depictions of depravity.



Image:9.

This is a representative image of this film where black people sitting together to share their tragic feeling each other. There is communal feeling going between them .as Mask Dorm has said that “communality is result of pain”. Here is communal feeling going on after getting pain and suffering from white people .so these three people sitting together to share their heartbeat cries. In addition to these scenes of violence, that would also like to emphasize how this film’s cinematography provides stark contrasts which make the audience view these events in a different light than they may have without these contrasts. First, there should examine Solomon’s transition from loving to loathe his one source of solace his violin. At 6:30, viewers receive close-up footage of him taking care of his beloved instrument, which directly contrasts a scene nearly two hours later when he destroys one. The camera zooms in on the violin like the previous scene, only now depicting pain instead of care. Whereas in the beginning Solomon carefully tunes his instrument, now he tightens each string until it snaps, then

breaks the neck in half. I find the fact that the latter of the two scenes follows Patsy’s whipping to be significant: it shows how this act has forced him over the edge to the point where something which once brought him solace is now symbolic of suffering. Several times, setting itself provides contrast. Toward the beginning, the camera focuses on patriotic symbols.

When Solomon is beaten and held in a cell, the camera pans from the barred window up to a picturesque view of the Capitol Building and other easily-recognizable D.C. landmarks. Harvard professor John Stauffer points out how, later in the film, one can see the Washington Monument through a spinning paddle-wheel of the ship taking Solomon south which “zooms toward us, filling the screen, suggesting the closed society in which it heads” (318). In addition to his observation, that would like to elaborate by saying that these juxtapositions of the institution of slavery with contemporary symbols of patriotism serve an additional purpose: they force the audience to the uncomfortable acknowledgement of the horrors in the country’s history and their reverberations into the present. Setting the rest of the film in Louisiana gave the crew the opportunity to present visuals as “an ironic compensation during all the human miseries” since “all would be beautiful were not the impenetrable landscape a natural penitentiary”. I find a prime example of Doherty’s point at 33:00, when the camera shows silhouettes of nature and then pans to a line-up of slaves. Later, when Solomon is whipping the overseer Tibbeats, the wide camera angle shows the violence of the act juxtaposed with the calm of the scenery.

In critical analysis, there should also observe how the use of dark versus light conveys disparity by allowing viewers to experience despair along with Solomon. When he first finds himself a captive, the scene sharply breaks from the brightness of his last meal as a free man to the pitch blackness of his cell.

His flashbacks to the night before are increasingly darker as they progress, symbolizing his descent into a living hell. At the night’s close, the men blow out a candle as they also blow the life and hope from his existence for the 12 years to follow.

Later, when a fellow laborer betrays Solomon's trust, light from a lantern goes away, leaving him in the pitch black with only his despair. He throws his letter into the fire, and viewers, watch as the embers slowly fade away, creating a growing sense of hopelessness as Solomon's hope dies along with them, Cinematographic temporality also aids in this depiction of contrasts while also contributing to our discussion of discomfort. By using combinations of long takes and close-ups, Bobbitt creates a sense of "slow-as-molasses meteorology" (12). Even when the camera does move unencumbered, the freedom it depicts is contrary to the subjects it captures. According to Doherty, in order "[t]o evoke Solomon's stranded and locked-up condition, McQueen keeps his camera horizontal and close to the ground, taking his time to look straight at a vista or a face, with a minimum of non-diegetic music" (7). Indeed, along with emphasizing Solomon's lack of freedom, the film also demonstrates how his relativity in regards to time is completely dependent on his master. According to McDowell, "At every level of *12 Years a Slave*, McQueen 24 Hampshire meditates on time and measures progress in painfully incremental steps and stages, For Solomon, as for the viewer, time passes all too slowly" (376). Whether it be progress on Solomon's difficult road to freedom or his daily labors at the hands of his abusers, the painstakingly slow pace forces viewers to look at suffering far longer than they would wish. Through these cinematographic strategies of temporality and disparity, we can come to a further appreciation for what this film accomplishes in terms of its depiction of slavery. Along with adding emphasis to their respective moments, these techniques also aid in the overall depiction of this brutal institution's violent nature. *12 Years a Slave* presents audiences with such difficult viewing material that is free of sanitization. By doing so, it puts the audience members in a situation where they must either turn their eyes from the violence before them (as we so often do) or face that brutality and what it means that we are so disconcerted by it. However, much we might want slavery to be the straightforward, sanitized problem of the past that so many films make it out to be, *12 Years a Slave* forces us to face the fact that this peculiar institution

still has reverberations into the present. Solomon Northup's slave narrative, *12 Years A Slave*; Narrative of a Citizen of New-York, Solomon Northup, kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana, achieved a remarkable degree of success as an abolitionist indictment against slavery. First published in 1853, three years after the Fugitive Slave Act, Northup's narrative served as an important cultural symbol of slave life on southern plantations during antebellum America before the Civil War. Born into freedom, Northup was kidnapped into slavery at the age of thirty. Lured to Washington, D.C. in 1841 by the promise of easy employment, fast money, and adventure, Northup was in reality drugged, beaten, and sold into slavery within sight of the nation's capital. According to historian Ira Berlin, Northup "joined the mass of black humanity someone million in number that was forcibly transported south to reconstruct the plantation economy on new ground, as the center of American slavery shifted from the production of tobacco and rice in the seaboard states to that of cotton and sugar in the interior." Between 1790 and 1860, approximately one million African Americans were transported from the Upper South to the Deep South in the domestic slave trade.

Likewise, *12 Years a Slave* is one of the most authentic descriptions of slavery from the viewpoint of the slave himself. Extreme violence is central in Northup's narrative; he emphasizes that the slave owner's authority was only maintained by terrorizing enslaved black people they owned with relentless physical and psychological violence. Whips, paddles, shackles, and the stocks make repeat appearances, especially in Solomon's description of his life as a newly kidnapped free man. Stripped of his clothing and nailed to the floor, Northup endured blow after blow to his naked body after he awoke in a slave pen; his enslavers paused only to ask if their prisoner would accept his new status. As Northup recollected, it was only after the paddle broke and his enslaver seized a rope to continue beating him that Northup was finally silenced into accepting his new identity as a slave. In these scenes of brutality, Northup insisted such sadistic events were so traumatic that he could still

feel them while writing. "I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. Even now the flesh crawls upon my bones, as I recall the scene. I was all on fire. My sufferings I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell." The major theme in Northup's narrative is the constant and unrelenting hardship of plantation work. This images that Northup captures in his descriptions of life and labor on the plantations of Louisiana depict the sheer exhaustion, monotony, and fear that each slave struggled with physically and psychologically. As Northup recalled although Patsy was a faithful slave and worked in the cotton fields for her master's profit, she became the helpless victim of her master's lust. Patsy's mistress took her jealous anger out on her female slave instead of finding fault in her husband. "Nothing delighted the mistress so much as to see (Patsy) suffer," noted Northup. He continued, "more than once, when [master] Epps refused to sell her, has she tempted me with bribes to put her secretly to death, and bury her body in some lonely place in the margin of the swamp." (12). Doubly abused by the sexual terror and physiological torment of her master and mistress, respectively, Patsy's story represented the brutality of slavery experienced by bondswomen. At the hands of white men, Northup made clear, black women were sexually and physically exploited with impunity during slavery. This normalization of sexual exploitation of slave women reflected the racist perceptions and stigmatization of black women. Similarly, Female slaves also faced the separation of families and children. In his account, Northup noted the intense emotions of female slave mothers at the auction block. Relating the remorselessness of white slave traders who disregarded the feelings of slave mothers separated from their children, he recalled the intense grieving of a female slave named Eliza after she had been forcibly separated from her two young children. Eliza was overwhelmed with grief when a new white master purchased her children and not herself. As Northup noted, all the time the trade was going on, Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy [her child], unless he also bought herself and [her other small child]. She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man

answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively.

Forced to confront with the realities of fleeting motherhood as a slave, female bondswomen suffered terribly from the emotional separation of themselves and their children in the uncertain world of the American slave trade. By displaying the abuse black women suffered during slavery, from sexual terror, physiological torment, and the separation of families, Northup's narrative was able to evoke sympathetic antislavery feeling in the Northern states in the decades before the Civil War by exposing the horrors upon its innocent victims.

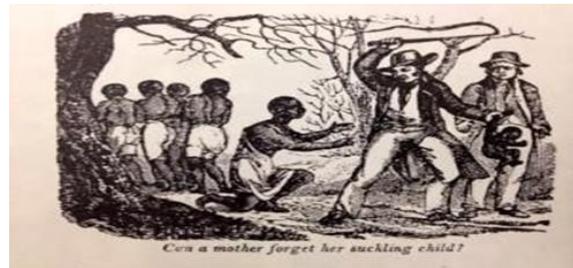


Image: 10.

Separation of families and children

The Imbalance between Mistresses and Female Slaves.

In examining slavery, the focus on the cycle of abuse tends to remain on the interaction between female slaves and their male masters. Any relationships existing between the mistress and female slaves were often overlooked, or downplayed as being friendly or even familial. As shown in popular slavery films like *Django Unchained*, and even mildly in *12 Years a Slave*, female slaves were often depicted as being workers within the home who fulfilled many of the roles a traditional homemaker would, from cooking to cleaning. In contrast, because the domestic tasks were well-taken care of, mistresses developed relationships with these slave women in a quasi-friendly nature, as displayed in works like *Gone with the Wind*. In the duration of the Margaret Mitchel novel-based film, the bond between Scarlett O'Hara and Mammy is portrayed as more of a maternal disposition where the slave acted as a nanny for a young woman until she grew older. *12 Years a Slave* shatters this serene portrait by

deploying characters such as Mistress Epps and Patsy, showing the darker side of the mistress-female slave interactions as being one of hatred and jealousy. To fully understand this shift in presentation of women in slavery, it is important to understand the false mutual oppression of both women in slavery. Often, it seems that both sets of women were subjected to dominance by the slave master, leading to both groups being viewed as victims. Although this is true, we less often examine how this can lead to the mistress's abuse of the female slave to empower herself. Lastly, it is equally important to expose the clash between the women's roles in slavery that transformed into a relation of violence from a mistress towards a slave.



Image: 11. Violence from a mistress towards a slave.

Upon looking at slavery witnessed in *12 Years a Slave*, it could be argued that mistresses and female slaves were found in the same predicament in their oppression within patriarchy. Master Epps belittles Patsy, a female slave that is highlighted as his favorite for the amount of work she can accomplish in comparison to the other slaves. This earns her the title of "Queen of the Fields," which in turn captures the plantation mistress' attention. Outraged by the energy Master Epps places in praising and eyeing Patsy, Mistress Epps demands for her husband to end his improved attitude towards and treatment of Patsy. Master Epps refuses, for he thinks of himself as the ruler of the entire plantation, his wife unequal to his status, and blatantly ignores her requests, leaving the audience a glimpse of how mistresses were oppressed by their husbands.



Figure 12

Although the mistress was ranked higher in the social hierarchy, both the mistress and the female slave answered to the male master of the land. Mistresses were viewed as psychological slaves to their husbands through their lack of equality in status. Within her essay Charlotte Arbogast goes into the shared "property" state of both women saying, "The confines of gender for white women in southern society also meant that upon getting married, white women turned into a form of 'property' for their new husbands". This reality was showcased in several ways that dominated a mistress' typical life. She was expected to serve as a child bearer, maiden of the household, devout Christian, and entertainer, everything that comprised the picture of domesticity. Typically, the slaves belonged to the master. As a result, oftentimes there would be a power struggle between a mistress and her husband, as any orders from the husband would override requests by the mistress. An imbalance in slave control between masters and mistress could thereby be attributed to the gender-specific roles within the community in which slavery occurred. Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, American historians and professors at assorted U.S. universities, explain the lack of feminine power due to her domination in the private circles (i.e. household function concerns), whereas her husband was within the public circles (associated with politics and economy) With his role being the financial provider, this introduces another layer of complexity of reliance that the slaves and mistress both had concerning the master. Without the men to supply money and conduct business, the mistress and slaves were thought to be lost, as the mistress held little social standing; meanwhile the slave held none at all. For example, both women and slaves did not have a voice within politics to interject their own opinions for change, which speaks to the mistress' near-nonexistence and the slaves' nonexistence in the realm of politics. Mistresses themselves were still involved in social networks more so than slaves, as they did have certain rights and were active in engagements with other society members, which were key rights that slaves were deprived of.

When considering the mistreatment of female slaves at the hands of their mistresses, the

physical harm is what comes to mind primarily. Even women who did not own slaves themselves sought out slaves as the gateway for them to achieve true housewife status. Within his study, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Harvard University professor William Johnson develops the idea that:

If a mistress was to have house slaves, they would clear her of having to perform the physical labor of being a housewife. She would still be credited as being responsible for a successful domestic life without having to endure the physical labors of doing so, fulfilling her time leisurely with her family and hosting acquaintances. (79-162)

Here, the abuse of power over house slaves was something that seduced many mistresses and led to violence as a possible coercion tactic to encourage obedience. Despite domination being necessary in order to secure social status, others have shined a light on the emotion aspects of producing such violence. Conflict would arise in that “many incidents involving the cruelty of a mistress also involved a female slave’s alleged intimacy with the master”. Arguably, the free women who committed these infractions against slaves felt threatened by slaves who were supposed to be of a lower social standing than them. The mistresses’ real anger stemmed directly from the very system in which they found themselves. Michaela Davis discusses the challenge to their position that the mistresses felt and the inability they had to confront their husbands about the white male supremacy that prevented them from advancing on in the hierarchy. Thereafter, the mistresses would oppress any slaves that had relations (unwanted or not) with her husband in order to deprive him of one avenue of pleasure he sought out. Within the movie, the compliance of Mistress Epps with the slave system is appalling and one that makes the audience root against her. Her use of violence towards Patsy was a theme throughout the movie that was sickening, a derivative of the grotesque animalistic advances of Master Epps on Patsy. As Patsy improves throughout her time at the Epps’ plantation, this awards her the attention of Master Epps. While he takes a greater notice of her, Mistress Epps is in the wings, watching

exactly how far Master Epps will take his taboo relationship with Patsy. Soon enough, Mistress Epps notices that Master Epps finds attraction in the qualities she does not possess herself, such as extreme physical labor productivity. A particular scene (1.8) below reflects the mutual sharing of agony between Patsy and Solomon, they are seeing hope and freedom in their eyes but both are victims of racial discrimination.

Likewise, Epps and his chosen partner, Patsy. During this parade of lunacy on behalf of Master Epps, Mistress Epps enters the scene to investigate what it is the slaves are performing. This is when her eyes are set on Patsy, with whom Master Epps has taken the liberty to dance. Upon doing so, she disrupts them and comes face-to-face with Patsy. She finds herself torn because she has been beaten out socially by an individual who is supposed to be inferior to her status. Once she realizes this, she confronts Patsy by shattering a glass and raking it down her face. Screaming in agony, a confused Patsy has blood rush profusely from her face and is taken away to be cared for. The scene illustrated above refers to many reasons why white slave women were active participants in the cruelty against their slaves. If it did not scare obedience into the slave, the purpose was then to find a way to disrupt any relationship between the slaves (Patsy) and master (Master Epps). Collectively as females, both sets of women were subjected to mental abuse from a typically controlling and overbearing white male master, admittedly. Despite this similarity in circumstance, female slaves emerged as the individuals suffering the most abuse, becoming sexual objects for masters to prey upon. Alongside, they became victims of the mistress’ violence for these unwanted sexual advances from the master.

Although the Scarlett O’Hara’s and Mammy’s of the film industry would have consumers think otherwise, there was a much darker side to the relationship between the two women who held the master’s attention, unwanted (by the slave) or yearned for (by the mistress). This dimension of the mistress-female slave relationship is a side often kept within the darkness of the same shadows that conceal the painful truth of being a female of color in the Confederate South.

In this regard, this shot contextualizes the paradoxical instability of McQueen's realist images of the trauma and violence of slavery and the discourse that surrounds them within a larger lineage of the history and politics imbedded in the depiction of slavery within visual culture. Taking the ambiguity of McQueen's realist depiction as its own political site, where the audience is confronted simultaneously with the violence of slavery as well as with the inherent impossibility of its representation, this analysis probes the ways in which McQueen's realist images actively resist and exceed the historical frame, getting at fundamental questions of trauma and representation in relation to the violence and collective memory of slavery.

Conclusion

Through these cinematographic strategies of temporality and disparity, this film come to a further appreciation for *12 Years a Slave* accomplishes in terms of its depiction of slavery. Along with adding emphasis to their respective moments, these techniques also aid in the overall de-paction of this brutal institution's violent nature. *12 Years a Slave* presents audiences with such difficult viewing material that is free of sanitization. By doing so, it puts the audience members in a situation where they must either turn their eyes from the violence before them or face that brutality and what it means that we are so disconcerted by it. However, much we might want slavery to be the straightforward, sanitized problem of the past that so many films make it out to be, *12 Years a Slave* forces us to face the fact that this peculiar institute still has reverberations into the present.

In this regards, McQueen's *12 Years of Slave*, perhaps the most pervasive revolves around the film realism specially its realistic portrayal of the violence and trauma of slavery and the image of tortured slave body. Solomon's demeanor throughout his journey that mental hope gives real image of change and hope and faith can be base for life even in such harsh situation of life was the problem detected by the researcher. Taking Foucault concept of technology of self, it is proved that sometimes sound of silent and self- stylization works to end the difficult situations of life.

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