



LUNDS UNIVERSITET

History Unchained

The Visual representation of Slavery in mainstream Hollywood Cinema

A Master's Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

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Abstract

Through Hollywood film history there have been several, mostly inconvenient topics, that have been kept away from public conscience through the film industry and governmental censorship. Amongst the genocide on Native Americans and homosexuality, the topic of american slavery has been underrepresented in mainstream Hollywood. Using the theories of contemporary theorists such as bell hooks and Tim Wise, on racism and racial equality in the United States, as well as current television shows, this thesis aims to find out what political changes have caused this topic to be more prominent in mainstream Hollywood cinema today, as well as how the depiction of slavery has changed since 1915. The thesis deals with the concept of cultural memory as well as how visual input contributes to the shaping of cultural memory, making clear how important it is to understand the role of modern cinema in order to understand society. Using contemporary film theories and following a fixed set of questions to analyze five movies from Birth of a Nation in 1915 to Django Unchained in 2012, this thesis aims to make clear how the depiction of slavery has changed in the last century and how this may affect the cultural memory of american society.

Keywords

Hollywood, Slavery, Django Unchained, Quentin Tarantino, racism

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Historical Background and Problem Diagnosis.....	2
1.2 Relevance of the Work.....	6
1.3 Theory.....	9
1.4 Research Question, Delimitations and structure of the Work.....	13
2. Classical Hollywood.....	14
2.1 Birth of a Nation (1915).....	15
2.2 Gone with the wind (1939).....	21
3. Post Civil Rights Movement.....	29
3.1 Mandingo (1975).....	30
3.2 Amistad (1997).....	38
4. Post 9/11.....	49
4.1 Django Unchained (2012).....	50
5. Conclusion.....	59
6. Bibliography.....	61

List of Figures

Birth of a Nation (1915) D.W. Griffith



From top to bottom left to right
Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4, Fig. 5

Gone with the Wind (1939) Victor Fleming



From top to bottom left to right
Fig. 6, Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Fig. 9, Fig. 10

Mandingo (1975) Richard Fleischer



From top to bottom left to right
Fig. 11, Fig. 12, Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15

Amistad (1997) Steven Spielberg



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

Django Unchained (2012) Quentin Tarantino



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30

1. Introduction

Good historical films require us to think about the contested nature of historical 'truths'; raise questions about the status of particular versions of historical accounts; compel us to critically evaluate our own responses to what happens on the screen; or at the very least give us some sense of what a particular historical moment might have 'looked' like¹

This quote has been chosen by me to make clear that no movie ever can depict the whole truth about what happened in the past, but merely give an idea and perhaps start a process of thought. In mainstream American cinema there is only a scarce number of films which tell the story of the "others". Namely those who in the background helped shape the United States of America to what they are today, the black slaves from Africa on whose backs the American nation has been built. After watching the movie *Django Unchained* by Quentin Tarantino it struck me that it appeared as something I had not seen before, a story that I have not seen told like this in mainstream Hollywood cinema. And it made me think that there must be something new about this movie. The relevance of this presumption becomes clearer with every review I have read about Tarantino's *Django* so far. There is a heated discussion going on about whether or not *Django* is historically accurate, whether it truthfully depicts slavery, questions are asked whether it mocks the African American community, or whether it can even be considered an important and serious movie at all. All these accusations and discussions only show that there is a lot of potential for discourse in this movie. In my opinion it is not important whether or not a movie is historically accurate - and *Django Unchained* does not even claim to be anything other than fiction - but what processes of thought that particular movie starts within the viewer. *Django Unchained* has started a discussion and the awareness of America's part of history that most Americans would rather forget. It is the inconvenient truth that on very large parts the acclaimed free and just United States of America have been built up by slaves. Now with a black President in the White House, times have changed, America has changed and yet people still cannot look past the color of one's skin. If one is to understand the importance of *Django Unchained* in a wider context one has to understand the role of Hollywood in American politics. I've always been of the opinion that Hollywood is somewhat forging what is depicted as American, giving the people a common knowledge base and something to identify with, it is a powerful tool and it is important to

¹T. McCrisken and A. Pepper, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film*, New Brunswick, N.J. Rutgers University Press, 2005. p. 68.

understand its history and mechanisms to understand the importance of a movie as controversial as *Django Unchained*.

1.1 Historical Background and Problem Diagnosis

Of course every nation in human history has its gruesome historical parts, it is highly questionable whether there is any nation that can look at its past and claim that there have not been any violent acts against one or the other groups of people. One could argue that it is in our nature to be cruel, yet what is more important to look at is, how we deal with it later on. For America it is true that most of its history has been glorified and the more gruesome parts, like the genocide of Native Americans and the exploitation of african slaves, have been mostly hushed up. In her Guardian article, *Payback Time*, Tara Mack summarizes this issue quite elegantly when she writes that,

Slavery is hardly a secret. But it is as though we've all come to some sort of tacit agreement that we should discuss it as little as possible. White Americans can use this silence to distance themselves from the guilt and responsibility. Black Americans can use it to distance themselves from the shame. And we can all enjoy the idea that our little arrangement has brought us an awkward but comforting sense of peace.^{2 3}

America is acting as if they were the world police, after helping defeat Nazi Germany in World War II they are the good guys, yet while holding the Germans in shameful and apologetic submission for what they did to the Jews, America is unable to deal and work through its own past. Though just as Tara Mack stated, this silence is not only coming from Americas white population, but seems to be a agreement between both black and white. As if staying silent for a long enough time would eventually cause the problems to go away naturally. History also has shown that this is not the case. Ever since the abolition of slavery in 1865 America still had a lot of work to do in equalizing the „races“, even though its constitution states that all men have been created equal. This fact however did not seem to occur in the heads of most plantation owners of the south who's main income consisted of exploiting black slaves in unpaid labour. Now since this subject seems to be a thorn in most Americans conscience, naturally the most efficient visual

² T. Mack, *Payback time*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2001/aug/11/weekend7.weekend3> (accessed 20 February 2014)

³ One could add here that African Americans also have grown accustomed to being in the role of the victim, which is by far easier than actively working oneself out of being victimized.

instance of American ideology and history distribution, namely Hollywood, has joined the general agreement in keeping this subject in its whole gruesome truth as far away from public as possible. Jim Pines writes that depictions of African Americans have been a part of the American film history from the very beginning⁴. Some of the very early footage is still existing today⁵, with titles such as *Dancing Darkey Boy*⁶(1897) and *The Watermelon Contest*⁷(1896) or *Who said Chicken*⁸(1900) these short images from the past show a clear stereotyping of African Americans. Some of them are still quite apparent in modern day culture, for example the stereotype that all African Americans love chicken and watermelon.⁹ Pines writes about these depictions

These early films were technically rather underdeveloped and were missing the visual strength of later forms of filmic representation, yet still they had a lasting impact on the depiction of blacks in the newly form in medium of mass entertainment. The racial and racist undertone of these cultural depiction in film was especially expressed in comical motives, there often was a an emphasize on grotesque stereotypes based on tales of southern plantations¹⁰

Watching these films I can agree that technically they are not that highly developed, but that is probably due to the technical development of the time they were made in. What is important however is what Pines writes about them in the next paragraph, which is that these early films built up the repertoire for the depiction of African Americans in the early Hollywood era. These „So called ethnic short-film- comedies helped forge the image of blacks as figures of entertainment.“¹¹ Furthermore the context of the depiction of African Americans was mainly focussed around the plantations of the south states.

⁴ J. Pines, *Die Schwarzen im US-amerikanischen Film*. In: G. Nowell- Smith, (ed.), *Geschichte des Internationalen Films*, Weimar, J.B. Metzler, 1996, p. 452.

⁵ Available at, <http://www.indiana.edu/~bfca/home/earlyblackimages.shtml> (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁶ Available at, http://www.t3licensing.com/license/clip/331285_010.do (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁷ Available at, <http://www.indiana.edu/~bfca/features/watermelon.mov> (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁸ Available at, <http://www.indiana.edu/~bfca/features/chicken.mov> (accessed 28 March 2014)

⁹ Stand up Comedian Dave Chapelle quite often makes fun of these stereotypes and everyone seems to know what he means, probably unaware of where they sprung from. See for example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeQ0zm-njyQ> (accessed 30 March 2014) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8YAK8oMEKI> (accessed 30 March 2014)

¹⁰ J. Pines, 1996, p. 452. Original: Diese frühen Filme waren technisch eher plump und ihnen fehlte die bildhafte Kraft späterer, entwickelter Formen der filmischen Representation, dennoch prägten sie nachhaltig die Art der Darstellung von Schwarzen im neu entstehenden Medium der Massenunterhaltung. Der rassistische (und rassistische) Unterton dieser kulturellen Darstellung im Film wurde besonders in komischen Motiven ausgedrückt, wobei häufig groteske Stereotypen betont wurden, basierend auf Erzählungen von Südstaatenplantagen.

¹¹ J. Pines, 1996, p. 452. Original: (...) gehörten zu den ersten sogenannten ethnischen Kurzfilm- Komödien, die dazu beitragen, das filmische Image der Schwarzen als Figuren der Erheiterung festzulegen.

History Unchained

The Mythology of the southern plantations played an essential role in establishing these racist imaginations in an easily identifiable cultural frame. It belonged to a fixed corpus of fundamentally white american cultural and literal motives, which could easily be adapted by the cinema¹²

This Genre was inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowes book, *Uncle Toms Cabin* (1852), which originally spoke against slavery but was used mainly to point out the submissive role of Uncle Tom. Who was seen as the ideal slave¹³. Therefore manifesting an image of African Americans, that clearly made them inferior to the whites. If someone were to try and portray slavery any other way than in *Gone with the Wind*, where Slaves contently serve their white masters, they would have had a trouble funding their movie, „anything to replace them with remains a contentious subject.“¹⁴ There are only very few movies on the subject of slavery that have made it into a wider mainstream Hollywood field of vision. Which is peculiar and raises the question why that part of history was erased. In the book „Movies and American Society“, edited by Steven J. Ross, it is made clear that,

From the appearance of the first films in the 1890s until the present, movies were never just a medium of entertainment. They have simultaneously reflected *and* shaped changes in American society. (...) Movies do more than simply show us how to dress, how to look, or what to buy. They teach us how to think about race, gender, class, ethnicity and politics. And they do so in a way that penetrates our consciousness far more effectively than most things we read or hear in the classroom¹⁵

It can be argued that humans are by nature visual beings, visual images tend to stick with us longer than anything else, „Movies are also more than just images on screen. They are part of the glue of American life.“¹⁶ Ross writes that not only do movies feed people with thoughts on culture and society but also that,

¹² Ibid. p. 453, Original: Die Mythologie der Südstaatenplantation spielte eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Festigung dieser rassistischen Vorstellungen innerhalb eines leicht identifizierbaren kulturellen Rahmens. Sie gehörte zu einem feststehenden Korpus von fundamental weiß- amerikanischen kulturellen und literarischen Motiven, die leicht auf das Kino angewendet werden konnten.

¹³ Ibid. p. 453.

¹⁴ T. McCrisken and A. Pepper, 2005, p. 39.

¹⁵ S. Ross, (ed.), *Movies and American Society*, Oxford, Malden, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002, p.1.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 2.

History Unchained

For over 100 years, movies have served as a powerful means of disseminating ideas to millions of people who would eagerly watch on the screen things they might hesitate to read about. In shaping our vision about the things which we know the least. People who had little daily contact with unionists, radicals, feminists, gays, lesbians, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and various minority groups were most likely to be influenced by what they saw on the screen- especially if they were exposed to the same kinds of images over and over again until they came to assume the appearance of 'reality'¹⁷

And this poses as a critical problem when speaking about movies that depict slavery, what does mainstream Hollywood propose as the reality of American slavery? What are the Americans and especially the African Americans made to believe through watching these movies? Stephan Hoffstadt writes in his book, „Black Cinema, afroamerikanische Filmemacher der Gegenwart“, that cinema inhabits a central role in shaping a collective memory and that this is true especially for Hollywood.¹⁸ Anyone who was born in the 80's and grew up watching popular culture films such as *8Mile*, *Boyz n the Hood* for example can recall at least a few things they would connect with being black or living in the Ghetto. All of which is mainly due to having seen movies about it and not from personal experience in most cases. Hoffstadt works out this theory in connection to a cinematic wave labeled *new black cinema* that was supposed to bring black culture to a wider public. Though in the end only led to the establishment of a very fixed stereotype of the black struggling victimized rapper, who has no chance of escaping the vicious cycle of poverty and being underprivileged.

So the New Black Cinema, which had the ambition to open cinema for black perspectives and experiences, slowly became endangered to be a mere projection screen for white fantasies and fears, just like the general black pop culture¹⁹.

Saying that it becomes clear that there is still a division between black and white, even though no legal rights are in order anymore to keep the „races“ separated. The question is why is that so? As Hoffstadt writes, blacks are no longer a homogenous group, some of them thrive of being the victims, others have become familiar with the white way of life and quite successfully so in some cases, there are many black celebrities, politicians and Barack Obama has shown that, yes it is

¹⁷ Ibid. p.2.

¹⁸ S. Hoffstadt, *Black Cinema, afroamerikanische Filmemacher der Gegenwart*, Marburg, Hitzeroth, 1995 p.9.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.10. Original: So geriet das New Black Cinema, das mit dem Anspruch verbunden war, das Kino für schwarze Perspektiven und Erfahrungen zu öffnen, verstärkt in jene Gefahr, der sich die gesamte schwarze Pop-Kultur ausgesetzt sieht, nämlich als Projektionsfläche für weiße Phantasien [sic] und Ängste zu dienen.

possible for a black man to become President of the United States of America.. Why then is it still a problem to speak about slavery? Why has this topic been carefully erased from the collective memory?

1.2 Relevance of the Work

Since 1915, naturally a lot has changed in american politics, though on a historical perspective African Americans have been trapped in a system of power according to Foucault's theories on education and power²⁰. Initially there has been the brute force with which the slaves were deported from Africa, though according to Foucault this force is not the same as the power system to which the finally slave made Africans were introduced to. A system that was, after its establishment, accepted by all parties involved, and which is still reflected in movies like *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*, where all parties live by the system without question. Even after the abolition of slavery this power system was in existence until the late 1960s of the 20th century. Afterwards it was still hard for someone with an African American heritage to set foot into academic and intellectual circles. As Cornell West describes, especially intellectual African Americans were seated in front of a dilemma trying to fit in with white american society, in the end being neither accepted by African Americans nor white americans²¹.

Since the Civil Rights movement however there has been a gradual change in american society, this is not only visible in the change of visuals in the above described movies but also on a political scale. As Slavoj Žižek writes in his book *Violence*,

Today's predominant mode of politics is *post-political bio-politics* (...) [it] designates the regulation of security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal (...) with the depoliticised [sic], socially objective, expert administration and coordination of interests as the zero level of politics, the only way to introduce passion into this field, to actively mobilise [sic] people is through fear, a basic constituent of today's subjectivity. For this reason, bio-politics is ultimately a politics of fear; it focusses on defence [sic] from potential victimization [sic] or harassment²²

²⁰ M. Foucault, *Das Subjekt und die Macht*. In: Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault. Jenseits von Strukturalismus und Hermeneutik*. Weinheim, Beltz, 1994. pp. 254.

²¹C. West, *The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual*, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 2. (Winter, 1993- 1994), pp. 59-67.

²² S. Žižek, *Violence*. New York, Picador, 2008, p. 40.

Of course fear has always played an important role in politics and *Birth of a Nation* shows explicitly which types of fear were roaming the heads of white americans in the early 20th century. Although today the political fear is no longer focussed on things inside America but rather on an unknown threat from the outside, also known as terror. After 9/11, Americas "races" have closed ranks and it is presumable that this "defending" against an outside threat has loosened up regulations on the inside. The African Americans are no longer the main threat to an american lifestyle, they have become a part of it. It appears the terror of 9/11 could be one of the reasons why Hollywood is opening up to new and more difficult topics. Cinema and politics are and have always been closely intertwined and as Eugenie Mircea writes in her article, *The Postmodern Condition of cinema*,

It is cinema that has the ability to produce cohesion between contents that are realistic and mythical and this because cinema has the potential of transforming abstract ideas into visual signs which can be identified and communicated; to capture and condense the *collective imaginary*, shaping it into stories, making the invisible visible. Thus, the cinema becomes more then ever, the key to understanding subjectivity and our relation to the world²³

As stated in the introduction to this thesis it strives to find out how and why the depiction of slavery has changed. So what is the relevance of it all? In the previous chapters this thesis has given a brief outline of Hollywood history on slavery on screen. As one can see the number of movies about slavery is scarce²⁴ and this thesis aims to find out what has happened in the past century that made them more visible. In Hollywood there are several topics that have been neglected and kept away from the public, mostly inconvenient truths like the genocide on Native Americans or an accurate and neutral depiction of Homosexuals. Along with slavery, these are topics one will rarely see in a mainstream Hollywood film. One can argue that Hollywood is in fact no longer purely american and that due to globalization it has spread worldwide and has been washed down in its purely american ideologies²⁵. Or that after the civil rights movement in the sixties it had to open up to other topics. Yet that still does not invalidate the fact that Hollywood

²³E. Mircea, *The Postmodern Condition of Cinema*, Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies; Oct2013, Vol. 5 Issue 9, p106

²⁴ Of course the movies chosen for analyses are not the only ones. There is a number of movies but in relation to other topics, the number of films on slavery remains scarce.

²⁵ J. Kooijman, P. Pisters, W. Strauven, *Mind the Screen: Media Concepts According to Thomas Elsaesser*. Amsterdam University Press. 2004. pp. 212.

remains a large distributor of american ideals and lifestyles and that it is a main player in the shaping of american cultural memory. As Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland state,

Hollywood film in particular is the American art par excellence, like tragedy is the art of the Greeks, the pyramids are associated with the civilization of Egypt, and the great cathedrals with Holy Roman Empire. In this respect, the twentieth century was the American century, and its cinema (...) most consistently enchanted a public, an international public. This is a great historical achievement: a cultural form has been created²⁶

Thus the american society as a whole in its self understanding is largely built on visuals fed to them by the american film industry. When taking that into account it becomes more apparent why it is a big step for Hollywood to open up to inconvenient topics like slavery.

Elsaesser and Buckland write on, that

Hollywood cinema is a world industry, just as much as it is a world language, a powerful, stable perfected system of visual communication. As such it represents real power, not just in and through the cinema: the coding of images on TV, the imaging of politics, advertising, lifestyle etc. goes via the encoding of messages and meaning in and through images, and the image- word combination²⁷

The imagery of Hollywood holds the power to shape what people think and what they do, how they see the world. Just as *Birth of a Nation* has sparked the re-formation of the Ku Klux Klan after its release, due to its content and handling of the civil war story, *Django Unchained* has sparked a heated debate about americas slave past.

²⁶ T. Elsaesser, W. Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American films: A guide to movie Analysis*, London, Arnold. 2002, p.4.

²⁷ Ibid. p.4.

1.3 Theory

The two main authors I've chosen to give an overview over contemporary american theory on race separation and racism could not be more different and yet their opinions and theories do not differ that much from one another. bell hooks is a black female and feminist writer and Tim Wise a white male and anti racism supporter. They both agree that racism has still not left the core of american society and that African Americans to this day struggle with the after effects of slavery.

Quoting Cornel West in one of her articles as follows,

Writing about blacks and postmodernism, Cornel West describes our collective plight: There is increasing class division and differentiation, creating on the one hand a significant black middle-class, highly anxiety- ridden, insecure, willing to be co-opted and incorporated into the powers that be, concerned with racism to the degree that it poses constraints on upward social mobility; and, on the other, a vast and growing black underclass, an underclass that embodies a kind of walking nihilism of pervasive drug addiction, pervasive alcoholism, pervasive homicide, and an exponential rise in suicide. Now because of the deindustrialization, we also have a devastated black industrial working class. We are talking here about tremendous hopelessness. This hopelessness creates longing for insight and strategies for change that can renew spirits and reconstruct grounds for collective black liberation struggle²⁸

bell hooks makes clear the torn- ness of the African Americans as a group, which prevent them to thrive and be defined as a group. The system of defining yourself by the color of your skin is no longer applicable to our day and age, where racism is tabu and yet present everywhere. In her book „Black Looks, Race and Representation“ she further writes on about the struggle that in particular black men face, when trying to find their own identity,

The portrait of black masculinity (...) perpetually constructs black men as 'failures' who are psychologically 'fucked up,' dangerous, violent, sex maniacs whose insanity is informed by their inability to fulfill their phallogentric masculine destiny in a racist context. Much of this literature is written by white people, and some of it by a few academic black men. It does not interrogate the conventional construction of patriarchal

²⁸ b. hooks, *Postmodern Blackness*. Available at: http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Postmodern_Blackness_18270.html (accessed 26 March 2014)

masculinity or question the extent to which black men have historically internalized this norm. (...) there has never been a time in the history of the United States when black folks, particularly black men, have not been enraged by the dominant culture's stereotypical, fantastical representations of black masculinity. Unfortunately, black people have not systematically challenged these narrow visions, insisting on a more accurate „reading“ of black male reality. Acting on complicity with the *status quo*, many black people have passively absorbed narrow representations of black masculinity, perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and offered one-dimensional accounts. Contemporary black men have been shaped by these representations²⁹

These representations of blacks mainly have been multiplied and emphasized not least by cinema and television and yet she writes on that,

Black masculinity, as fantasized in the racist white imagination, is the quintessential embodiment of a man as 'outsider' and 'rebel'. They were the ultimate 'traveling men' drifting from place to place, town to town, job to job³⁰

Which could also be seen as the ultimate idea of freedom and perhaps the source of the jealousy of white men for black men, because,

Within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, rebel black masculinity has been idolized and punished, romanticized yet vilified. (...) Collectively, black men have never critiqued the dominant culture's norms of masculine identity, even though they have reworked those norms to suit their social situation³¹

According to hooks, black people are caught in the struggle to adapt to the white supremacist society while keeping their own identity intact. Which proves as impossible since there is only one or the other, it appears that after all these years that have passed since the abolition of slavery, american society is still not possible to look past the color of ones skin.

²⁹ b. hooks, *Black Looks, Race and Representation*, Boston, South End Press, 1992. p. 89.

³⁰ Ibid. pp.95.

³¹ Ibid. p. 96.

There's not a liberal America and a conservative America; there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America³²

These are Obamas words quoted after Tim Wise book, „Colorblind“ and he quotes them as a show of how America has become aware of its race problem and yet appears still unable to think outside of these set lines of black and white.

On November 4, 2008 (...) television networks began announcing the big news: Senator Barack Obama had been elected 44th president of the United States, thereby becoming the first person of color to win the office in the nation's history³³

Now with what has been mentioned before one could argue that this is a good thing for America, however Wise is convinced that the election of Obama is just a transition from what he calls racism 1.0 to racism 2.0., the first one he defines as follows,

the kind that, in its most extreme moments has precipitated racist murder, lynching, and terror on a grand scale; the kind that led to dozens of white- on- black riots in city after city for much of the early 1900s; the kind that precipitated restrictive covenants and „neighborhood improvement associations“ to block persons of color from moving into white neighborhoods; the kind that even now animates hate groups and hate crimes when taken to its illogical conclusion. It is racism with which we are, as a nation, familiar³⁴

and claims that racism 2.0 is in some ways even worse because it works beneath the surface and claims that if racism 2.0 was the reason Barack Obama won the presidential election, then he is also now the, „new archetype or model of acceptable blackness.“³⁵, which in turn means the same as bell hooks pointed out, speaking about masculinity, that Obama has set the bar for the new standard of blacks who are being accepted into white society. Which is now higher than ever due to his achievements, „his singular victory could actually create higher barriers for the bulk of African Americans“³⁶. Wise writes on that, „If Obama's success reinforces that tendency to isolate

³² Barack Obama, 2004, In: T. Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equality*. City Lights open Media, 2013, p. 11.

³³ T. Wise, *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in Age of Obama*. Open Media Series. City Light Books, 2009, p. 8.

³⁴ T. Wise, 2009, p. 10.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid. p.11.

acceptable blacks from those who 'unacceptable', the consequences for overall racial equity could be negative, rather than positive.³⁷

Thus racism 2.0, has in fact only the improvement that black people can rise to higher positions in society, yes, but they will have to negate their blackness and culture and fit into the white comfort zone. Wise therefore has a critical view point on the whole success of Obama and uses it as a means to show that racism never left but rather transformed into a new kind. The same opinion can be found with Paul Gilroy, in his book „Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line.“, he writes that, „It is impossible to deny that we are living through a profound transformation in the way the idea of "race" is understood and acted upon.“³⁸, he also describes, how through political agendas and the media the idea of race and blackness has changed over the decades³⁹. If one was to watch contemporary american television and news as well as documentaries on race and blackness, it becomes clear very quickly that american society still wants to categorize people very strictly. The 2013 CNN documentary *Who is black in America?*⁴⁰ for example shows that problem quite clearly, both in the content of the show as well as the message it conveys between the lines. As the title states, the question is to find out who is black in America, and targets people who are "biracial", meaning having a white and a black parent, encouraging them to sort themselves in a box of either black or white to find peace with their identity. As if to prove Tim Wise right with the assumption that there is a new kind of racism about, they speak about *colourism* as the new racism. One of the girls is not content in either box and fights against categorization, though in the end admits to being black which is shown and celebrated as a great relief for her. The reason for mentioning this show is because it shows perfectly how uncomfortable Americans are with the idea of not having a racial division lines, of not being able to tell where someone belongs just by the color of ones skin. How confusing it is for them to see a white person acting black and a black person acting white. And Obama's earlier quoted speech comes to mind again along with the question, Why can they not just identify as American? Why does it have to be the color of their skin, which they haven't chosen, that defines who they are?

Because perhaps the scars of slavery have not been closed and the system that defined a persons worth by the color of his or her skin was so inveterate into society that even after more than a century after the abolition of slavery it still lasts. With the theory in mind that racism is not gone

³⁷ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁸ P. Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 11.

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 12.

⁴⁰ Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWcs7YsZVuY> (accessed 2 May 2014)

but merely has transformed and that America appears to be far from solving this problem it becomes clearer why the fact that mainstream Hollywood cinema has opened up to the topic of slavery, is of interest. Though this thesis is not aiming to categorize the movies analyzed by racist content, but rather aims to find out how they depict slavery at a specific time in Hollywood history in connection to politics and society.

1.4 Research Question, Delimitations and structure of the Work

The above outlined problem is what this thesis will look into, as already stated in above chapter, after seeing Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, it felt as if watching something that has not been shown like this before in mainstream Hollywood. To find out whether there is anything specifically different about this movie, this thesis will analyze a selection of important mainstream Hollywood movies made on the subject of slavery. The movies have been chosen according to their amount of mentions in the literature as well as their content. They have to be seen as a selection, since no thesis of this length can cover the whole of a century of Hollywood films on a specific topic. The research question and subject have been chosen out of personal interest. The analysis of the movies will mostly be empirical and psychological, following a fixed set of questions which will in the end lead to a base of comparison with the main movie in question, namely *Django Unchained*. In the following chapters of this thesis I will analyze five movies, as well as give an outlook to a sixth, in a chronological order, aiming to find out how they depict and deal with the topic of slavery connecting it to the specific time they were made in to in the end form an opinion on how the depiction of slavery has changed since the early 20th century and whether *Django Unchained* can be seen as a milestone in the handling of this topic. The chapters are sorted chronologically, every chapter will start with a brief historical introduction into the time period the movies were made in and then give an analyze of said films. To find out how the movies build up the image of African Americans and to form a base of analysis and comparison with later movies I have worked out a set of questions I will ask the material. The analysis of all movies in question will be structured as follows, firstly there will be a brief introduction to the movies background, the story within the movie and the reception of it during its time of making and the present day. Since this thesis is about Americas slave past and its depiction in mainstream Hollywood, the next question will be as to how white people are depicted in the movies, are they the good or the bad ones and why? Who is on the side of the slaves and what happens to that person? This leads to the next question, how are the slaves depicted, are they just as intelligent and human as everyone else, breaching the gap between the "races" with ease, or are they content with their situation in submissive slavery to their white

masters? Since Slavery was not held in place for such a long time without using violence, the analyzing questions will also include how much violence is shown against African Americans and white people, and how that violence is justified or used to raise sympathies within the audience. After that I will briefly look into historical accuracy of the events depicted, to then conclude the overall message conveyed. This will build the base on which the conclusion of this thesis will be set upon.

2. Classical Hollywood

The above mentioned early racism and stereotyping of African Americans reached their peak in the silent film era with D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation in 1915*⁴¹. Which in return for its racist depiction of African Americans led to the formation of the first African American independent filmmakers.

The first generation of black independent filmmakers was active, albeit with uneven success, from about 1910 until the late 1930s. William Foster's Photoplay Company had produced black independent films as early as 1910, but most critics agree that the first major black independent effort was *Birth of a Race* in 1918. Artistically one of the least successful, but one of the most powerful in terms of its political aspirations, *Birth of a Race*⁴² arose primarily in opposition to the radically ungenerous and laughably inaccurate depiction of black people in D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915).⁴³

After watching *The Birth of a Nation*, I can agree with the above quote that the depiction of African Americans is indeed quite stereotyping and unfavorable.

⁴¹ J. Pines, 1996, p. 453.

⁴² Available at: <http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/the-birth-of-a-race-the-great-black-epic-that-never-was> (accessed 1 April 2014)

⁴³ J. Snead, *White screens, black images. Hollywood from the Dark Side*, London, New York, Psychology Press, 1994, p.110.

2.1 *The Birth of a Nation (1915)*

In 1860 pre civil war America, two families from North and South are having close friendship relations. The Cameron's from the South and the Stoneman's from the North seem to get along just fine, visiting one another regularly. Even when the civil war starts their friendship does not seem to be affected by it. During the war both families loose sons in battle. One of the Cameron sons, Ben Cameron is brought to a hospital, greatly wounded but tended to by the Stoneman daughter Elsie. They eventually fall in love and later on he proposes to marry her. In the second half, the slaves are freed after the South lost the war and they become power-hungry and revengeful towards the white population of the South. With the help of Austin Stoneman, Elsie's father, the Mulatto Silas Lynch makes it to a higher position in politics and rises to power in the Southern region where the Cameron's reside. His plan is to build a black Empire with Elsie by his side, whom he has set his eyes on. In defense of the helpless whites, Ben Cameron founds the Ku Klux Klan and they eventually ride out to defeat the raging black dominion over the region and the white people. In the end Elsie and Ben are happily united and married. Peace and order have been restored.

As one may have noticed the above the description of the film material is not entirely from a neutral point of view but more from the one the film suggests. This film is clearly made from a white persons point of view. The white Southerners see themselves helplessly facing dominion by freed African American slaves, they are made out as the victims, suffering not only from the shame of loosing the war against the North, but also being terrorized by their crazed former slaves.

As the title screen of the second part state,

... Adventurers swarmed out of the North, as much the enemies of the one race as of the other, to cozen beguile and use the negroes... in the villages the negroes were the office holders, men who knew none of the uses of authority, except its insolences. The policy of the congressional leaders wrought... a veritable overthrow of civilization in the South... in their determination to put the white South under the heel of the black South⁴⁴

These screens are made out to seem like a direct quote from Woodrow Wilson's, *A History of the American People, Vol. 5, Reunion and Nationalization*, who was the current President of the United

⁴⁴ D.W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation (1915)*, shot 622, 623. Available at: https://archive.org/details/dw_griffith_birth_of_a_nation (accessed 30 March 2014)

States at that time. When in fact they have been shortened to inherit a different meaning as Melvyn Stokes shows in her book, *D.W. Griffith's the Birth of a Nation, A History of the most controversial motion picture of all time*⁴⁵.

Stokes shows the original quotes as follows,

Negroes constituted the majority of... [the] electorates [in South Carolina, Louisiana and Florida]; but political power gave them no advantage of their own. Adventurers swarmed out of the North to cozen, beguile, and use them. (...) [In the villages and country-sides] the negroes themselves were the office-holders, men who could not so much as write their names who knew none of these uses of authority except its insolence. (...) It was there [in the villages] that the policy of the congressional leaders wrought its perfect work of fear, demoralization, disgust and social revolution. No one who thought justly or tolerantly could think that this veritable overthrow of civilization in the South had been foreseen or desired by the men who had followed Mr. Stevens and Mr. Wade and Mr. Morton in their policy of rule or ruin. That handful of leaders... were proof against both fact and reason in their determination to put the white South under the heel of the black South⁴⁶

As one can easily determine the screens shown in *Birth of a Nation* have been slightly manipulated to convey a different meaning. When Wilson actually means to say that black people have been underprivileged and oppressed and therefore do not know how to function on posts of authority, Griffith makes it out to sound as if they are too dumb to understand. Furthermore he suggests an intentional overthrow of the South by policies of the the congressional leaders, completely deconstructing the original sentences. For the average white viewer, who perhaps did not read Wilson's original text, these screens would have probably evoked the feeling of being wronged. When in truth the greater wrong has been to hold the African Americans in slavery and oppression for centuries.

Further into the movie these wrong doings towards white people and their helplessness gets emphasized by another title screen stating that,

⁴⁵ M. Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's the Birth of a Nation, A History of the most controversial motion picture of all time*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.199.

⁴⁶ Wilson, W., *A History of the American People, Vol. 5. Reunion and Nationalization*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1902. In: M. Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's the Birth of a Nation, A History of the most controversial motion picture of all time*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.199.

The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self preservation... until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the south, to protect the Southern country.⁴⁷

Indicating that the Ku Klux Klan is a necessity to protect the white people from their now freed slave black oppressors. It is understandable how the depiction of the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation* has sparked the actual Ku Klux Klan to form once again⁴⁸, since it is shown as an honorable organization, fighting for a just cause with heroic rituals though yet questionable costumes. As the journalist Richard Brody writes in his article, *The worst thing about „Birth of a Nation“ is how good it is.*

The movie asserts that the white-sheet-clad death squad served justice summarily and that, by denying blacks the right to vote and keeping them generally apart and subordinate, it restored order and civilization to the South.

This is a very clear depiction of events in favor of the white people. They are the good ones and only on the side of the African Americans when they are submissive and know the place appointed to them by their white masters. As shown clearly with the depiction of the Cameron's house slaves, who's main concerns are for the well being of the family they serve and who put the families needs above their own. Going as far as scowling the freed men from the north, opposing to such frivolities as freedom. The person most clearly and forward on the side of the African Americans is Austin Stoneman, who has made the Mulatto Silas Lynch⁴⁹ his protege and when he invites him to a party at his house states that he judges him the equal of any man in the room⁵⁰. Little does Stoneman know that he is going to be betrayed by the man he has helped to be a successful politician. Lynch later on goes mad with power and, as explained in the summary above, tries to build a black empire with Stoneman's daughter as his Queen. It is interesting to see that Stoneman seems fond of Lynch's idea of wanting to marry a white woman, but when he finds out that it is going to be his own daughter opposes the idea rigorously and is thus punished for putting his trust into a black man. In the beginning of the movie the slaves are shown as content with their lives and servitude of white people. When the Cameron's show the visiting

⁴⁸ J. Pines, 1996, p. 454.

⁴⁹ If one doesn't know that Silas Lynch is supposed to be a Mulatto, one would not have guessed from his outward appearance, neither is his hair curly nor his features in any way African American. The color of his skin may appear a bit darker than that of the whites, however that varies in different shots. See Fig 2.

Stoneman's their estate, everything seems to be in harmony, the house slaves are joyful and supporting of their family and the field slaves dance for their masters and their guests. It seems to depict what life should be like. The house slaves are introduced a bit more thorough during the movie, there is a black woman, who is actually a blackfaced white woman and a black man. They are both not pretty people, the woman is best described as curvy, though on modern terms she would probably be fat. And the male servant has no charm to him whatsoever, they both stand in stark contrast to their white masters, who are always depicted and filmed favorable to their appearance. Especially the white women, who's faces appear even and smooth⁵¹, whereas shots of black people usually show their faces grimaced and oddly illuminated. Both of the Cameron's house slaves are very loyal to the family that they serve and seem to have no desire whatsoever to join with the freedmen. Going as far as to beat up freedmen and scorn the free servants from the North that come to visit along with the Stoneman's⁵². Another thing that is interesting about the depiction of African American slaves is their language, it is far more inferior to the whites and mimics a bad southern accent even in the written word. Sentences like, „Yo' northern low down black trash, don't try no airs on me.“, or „Dem free- niggers f'um de N'of am sho' crazy.“, state clearly that the Cameron's house slave is content with her situation as a slave and has no understanding for the concept of freedom, wanting to remain in servitude and is not sympathizing with the freedmen, like any good slave should be. She knows her place in society and perhaps from a psychological perspective is also unable to imagine any other life, since she has been born into servitude and humans tend to stick with what they know. Further into the movie, when African Americans have actively joined the southern politics, they are depicted as chaotic and uncivilized⁵³, not knowing what to do with the given authority, almost as if proving the above quoted title screens right, stating African Americans aren't fit to lead. They seem to have no idea how to behave in congress, are eating chicken and drinking, putting their feet on the table and act overall childish. It is never mentioned that this might be due to them being deprived of any education whatsoever during their slavery and not have anything to do with their level of intelligence. They however pass some bills in their favor, such as the law obliging whites must salute black officers when they see them in the streets and the right to marry white women. The latter of which seems to be a horror vision on white peoples minds to the present day. Interracial couples, as they are called, are frowned upon in the United States even today and are seen as a rarity that should not be⁵⁴. It seems as if above all, the fear that a black man could have sexual

⁵² Fig. 3.

⁵³ Fig. 4

relations with a white woman is the greatest of them all. Even though for centuries black women have been the object of the white mans lust, without anyone in the white community seeing any wrongdoing in that. Since a man does what he pleases with his property, a sentence that finds repetition often when it comes to justifying the acts of violence against African American slaves. Overall the slaves are depicted as uncivilized as unguarded children by nature and nowhere it is mentioned that they might not be able to understand the concepts of politics due to a lack of education and not lack of intellect. One gets the idea that the African Americans were better off on the fields than voting and participating in politics. As for the violence part, there is a lot of violence depicted due to this film being about the civil war. However there are several acts of violence that need closer attention. First of all in the beginning of the movie, when harmony with masters and slaves still exists⁵⁵, there is no depiction of any sort of violence between white and black. Except for the faint hint that slaves had to work hard all their lives in the limping and hunched over way of walking of the old slaves. Later on the violence used by African Americans rises to an unbearable level, driven by the power-hungry Silas Lynch, who's violent rule justifies the formation of the Ku Klux Klan to end this terrorist reign. White people are made out to be the victims of their crazed former slaves violent rule, which becomes even more apparent in the later scene with Silas Lynch and Elsie Stoneman, when the audience sees him clawing and grabbing at her after she turned down his marriage proposal. Later on she becomes the symbol of the helpless whites as she is tied and gagged to a chair, resolving in the very known shot of her helplessly sedated with a black fist threatening her from the right side⁵⁶. The raging blacks do not limit their violence to just white people, they also use it against their own kind if someone refuses to join them as well as the Cameron's house slaves beating up freedmen to protect the family they serve. Overall the violence used by African Americans appears unjust and exaggerated and the Ku Klux Klan is welcomed to put an end to this, their acts seem justified and fitting. Especially after the lust of a black man for a white woman has driven her to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff, it is depicted as an act of honor to take that mans life and deliver him to Silas Lynch's doorstep with a note from the Klan. As the war between the Klan and the ruling blacks starts, it is accompanied and underlined by a screen stating, „The former enemies of North and South are united again in common defense of their Aryan birthright.“ implying that the violence of the Klan against black people is a necessity to keep peace and order and that is their right to do so by right of birth.

⁵⁵ Fig. 1. The slaves are happily dancing for their masters and guests.

⁵⁶ Fig. 5.

As one can easily understand from the descriptions above, this movie lacks historical accurateness, since it depicts events from a one sided perspective and does not show the whole truth. Natalie Zemon Davis writes in her book, „Slaves on Screen, Film an Historical Vision“, that it is basically impossible to give account to every single thing that has happened in history, but that one can give a general idea of that history⁵⁷. It is agreeable that film can give an account to what has happened, be it on factual or emotional level, in my opinion the idea of what has happened is worth as much as knowing the actual facts in some cases. And yet it is also in the responsibility of the one telling history to be as accurate and truthful, about the events happened, as possible. Zemon Davis sets up five main categories for accurate history writing and even though she states that these rules are too strict to be applied to film, they will find mention here to stress how manipulative wrong images of the past can be. First of all one should not try to squeeze the past into models that he or she knows from his or her own lifetime experience. One should make clear where they got their evidence. If there are additional inventions, such as places that could have existed one should make clear why those inventions have been made. People in the past thought and acted differently than we do nowadays, so as someone writing or telling about history one should try to understand the historical figures. And lastly, which is the most important aspect and does very well apply to film, one should not falsify events or hold back evidence, but try to speak true about the past.⁵⁸ *Birth of a Nation* claims at the beginning of the second part, „This is an historical presentation of the civil war and reconstruction period, and is not meant to reflect on any race or people of today.“, indicating that the events depicted are indeed how history happened especially since this screen is followed by the above quoted deconstructed words of Woodrow Wilson's book. Deducting from this it is save to say that this movie is using a pretended historical correctness to manipulate the audience into believing that what they are about to see is what actually happened. And this may as well also be an achievement of Griffith's movie, because as history shows, it indeed had and has a great effect on the people and is to this day discussed controversially.

In essence the overall message conveyed is that whites have the right the defend their birthright of being the leading race and that blacks are inferior and subordinate to them as history has shown us very clearly. The film and the period it was made in shows explicitly that ever since the abolition nothing much had changed in the american society. African Americans were still oppressed and without much chance of getting anywhere near the status of the white american.

⁵⁷ N. Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen, Film an Historical Vision*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2000. pp. 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 10.

Therefore slavery is only visible in this film as an instance that was good and necessary for the southern society to function and thrive and that with its abolition disorder ruled. Slavery is not visible in its gruesome truth, the fact that humans forced other humans into unpaid labor for their lifetime, exploiting their working strength and health for profit is never mentioned. According to this film, the way things were before the civil war were good that way and should have stayed that way. In the next part this thesis will make a jump of 24 years to see whether anything in the depiction of slavery has changed since 1915.

2.2 *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South... Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow... Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair of Master and of Slave. Look for it only in books for it is no more than a dream remembered. A Civilization gone with the wind...

This is the introduction to the movie, *Gone with the Wind* and even this short text drips with Nostalgia for the past. Words and phrases like „pretty world“ and „a dream remembered.“ indicate how wonderful it must have been to live in the Old South, if one was white of course. It is notable however that the word slave is being mentioned in this short introduction. Which means that at least the film is not being ignorant to the fact that there were slaves in the Old South. However the way it is said sounds very harmless in the overall context of the sentence. As if slavery were a natural state and nothing gruesome about it. As well as *Birth of a Nation*, the story of this movie is set in the pre- civil war period and eventually tells the story of the war and what happened after.

The movies plot revolves around the life of a southern girl from Georgia, named Scarlett O'Hara, who is a spoiled plantation owners daughter. She lives in an almost fairytale like world, having no greater worry than how to get the man she supposedly loves to marry her instead of his cousin. Throughout the story she suffers through severe setbacks. During the civil war she has to give up most of her wealth, loses her first husband, her mother and almost her home plantation Tara. She volunteers in a hospital in Atlanta, then strains a horse to death to get home to Tara and there kills a northern Soldier who breaks into their house. She lives through all of this heart-ship without showing any signs of trauma or being depressed. After the war and having suffered through severe poverty, she marries a man for his money and quickly accumulates some wealth to

her name. Her second husband conveniently dies defending her honor after she got herself mugged, riding in a carriage through the woods on her own. There is never a mention that her ex-slave Big Sam actually saved her life in that incident. Since she still can not be with the man she initially claimed to love, she marries the one who had been making advances since they first met, Rhett Butler. However she is still not quite satisfied with that arrangement and makes her discontent very apparent, in the end she drives him out of the marriage. Finally she is wealthy but all alone and it strikes her that all she ever wanted or needed was a home like Tara.

The white peoples supremacy is never questioned throughout this movie, it is considered as a given and accepted by all. The main enemy are the Northerners who destroyed the peaceful and supposedly heavenly order and way of live in the South. The plot centers around the O'Hara and the Wilkes family, both of them plantation and slave owners and both of them living in peaceful harmony with their slaves. They are depicted as God fearing, good, honest and humble people, who love nothing more than their land and family. Nostalgia at its best. Scarlett's mother, Misses Ellen O'Hara even does charity work, tending to those the family considers "white trash". Their relationship with their black slaves is friendly but distant, a clear distinction is made between the "races" and definitely none of the main characters is on the side of the free'd slaves. A fact also interesting is that none of their house slaves have actual names, they are called Mammy, Prissy and Pork, which may as well be dogs names.

As for the depiction of the slaves, the most interesting and present character would be Mammy. She is allowed to show a personality and the only one who talks back to her mistress and master even though Scarlett never listens to what Mammy has to say and shows her annoyance clearly when she's had enough⁵⁹. The way Mammy weasels around her mistress is reminiscent of the way the female black house slave in *Birth of a Nation* behaves around her masters. Both are similar in look and behavior as well, a curvy mother type figure, that has no dealings with war or freedom and thrives in the way things have always been without any desire for change. Mammy is not depicted as mindless however, even if her warnings and opinions are being tuned out by her masters she gets proven right at some points. For example when she warns Mr. Butler that is not alright to let his daughter ride a pony because it is unfit for a girl to show her legs. Mr. Butler laughs it off and later in the movie his daughter dies, falling off her horse. In most cases Mammy's opinion feels a bit comical, especially because she mutters to herself a lot. The first time Mammy is shown, about eight minutes into the movie, she is leaning out of the Tara plantation home, shouting for Miss Scarlett to not go wandering outside without her shawl. As mentioned above

⁵⁹ Fig. 7.

she appears as a curvy mother type figure, again for modern standards she would be very fat. Her features are clearly African American and her skin is quite dark, furthermore the way she is illuminated in the movie is not flattering to her facial features. As well as she apparently is not wearing any make up to keep her skin from shining, which is usually used in movies and on stage. Her face is very round though harsh as well as her tone and way of speaking. The way she speaks English is reminiscent of the way shown in *Birth of a Nation*, for Mammy's as well as the other slaves English is grammatically incorrect and different from Scarlett's and the other whites English. Showing clearly a division between the "races", it strikes as odd that someone like Mammy who has served her masters for all of her life should not take up on the way they speak and remain in her wrong English and somewhat inferior accent. Either nowadays it is hard to understand how distinctions between classes and race forced people to stick with a certain way of speaking and behaving to stay proper amongst society, or this is an explicit way of the movies making a clear distinction between the classes and races depicted. In any case Mammy appears quite harsh in her demands, wanting Miss Scarlett back in the house immediately. Scarlett however rigorously refuses the "command" and does as she pleases. To which Mammy seems discontent but helpless. Her overall attire is flawless, she is even wearing jewelry and a brooch, both look golden but it is hard to tell whether they are. When Misses O'Hara, Scarlett's mother, returns home on the same evening, Mammy is the one shouting the house together to greet the mistress. It is made clear that she has some say in the household, walking around she keeps yelling at everyone to gather, while muttering her own opinions underneath her breath. Her opinions however revolve around Misses Ellens well being, like a mothers opinions would perhaps. „Actin' like a wet-nurse to them low down poor white trash (...) instead of being here eatin' her supper.“; „Got no business wearin' herself out.“, are the mutters one can understand from her, showing clearly that her thoughts are mainly with her families well being.

Later on it is shown how Mammy helps Scarlett to get dressed, when Prissy, the house slave depicted as quite dimwitted, walks in with breakfast⁶⁰. Scarlett attempts to send her straight out the door again to which Mammy refuses, telling her she is going to have to eat every mouthful of this. What is interesting about this scene is Scarlett's reaction, she grits her teeth as she answers with an annoyed tone that she is not going to eat. Indicating that she is on the verge of having enough of Mammy, staring her down until Mammy lowers her gaze in submission. But Mammy does not give up so easily and retries after a moment of recollecting and actually manages to bribe Scarlett into eating, bringing up the issue of scorned love by the man Scarlett believes to be in love with. Which goes to show that Mammy knows a lot about what is going on in Scarlett's life.

⁶⁰ Fig. 6.

History Unchained

Very much later in the movie, while the war is going on and the former wealth of Tara all lost to the war efforts, Scarlett is left to run the plantation with just her sisters, the remaining slaves and her father who has lost his mind over the death of Misses O'Hara.

Her father confronts her about the way she is treating the slaves and they have the following conversation,

Gerald O'Hara: „(...) I've been talking to Prissy and Mammy and I don't like the way you're treating them. You must be firm with inferiors but you must be gentle with them. Especially darkies.“

Scarlett: „ Yes Pa, I know, but I'm not asking anything I'm not doing myself.“

Gerald O'Hara: „Nevertheless, Katy Scarlett, I don't like it. I shall speak to Misses O'Hara about it.“

Mister O'Hara is the only one ever speaking about how Scarlett is treating her slaves, yet his opinion is being invalidated by the indication that he is going to discuss this issue with his dead wife. Which shows that he is not quite right in the head and therefore his concerns are meaningless. But to stay with the character of Mammy for a moment longer, after the war is over and Scarlett goes to beg for money from Rhett Butler in Atlanta, they come across a group of merry black people blocking the way and Mammy shoo's them out of the way, calling them trash. Just like the black house slave in *Birth of a Nation*, she despises the Northern freedmen. Her facial expression showing clear distress and anxiety at the situation as she beats a path free for her mistress. Ensuring her safe passage through the group of black men. This scene clearly expresses which side Mammy is on. After the war is over and Scarlett has finally married Rhett Butler, she is out shopping with him. Mammy has stayed loyal to Scarlett through all the years of poverty and yet Scarlett does not see any reason to buy her a present for it as she clearly states in a conversation with Rhett,

Rhett Butler: „Don't you think it would be nice if you bought something for Mammy too?“

Scarlett: „Why should I buy her present? When she called us both Mules?“

(...)

Rhett: „Mammy's a smart old soul and one of the few people I know who's respect I'd like to have.“

Scarlett: „Well I won't give her a thing, she doesn't deserve it.“

Rhett: „I'll buy her a petticoat.“

Scarlett: „But she wont take it from you. She'd rather die than wear it.“

Rhett: „That may be, but I'm making a gesture just the same.“

Later on Mammy is cheerful about the birth of Scarlett's first daughter, stating that she has now seen three generations of her family being born into the world. This shows that she has worked all her life for this family, stood by them loyally through all the heart-ship of war and despair and yet Scarlett sees no reason to reward her, she just takes Mammy being there for granted and Mammy is not one to complain about it. The only time Scarlett ever asks for Mammy's well being, the night after Rhett claimed his marital rights from Scarlett, it is merely to evoke an inquiry from Mammy as to how Scarlett is feeling that morning. When Mammy complains about the pain in her back, Scarlett does not even comment or listen but merely waits for Mammy to ask her how she feels so she can express her happiness. Other than ignoring her servants well being this scene is wrong on so many other levels, since it implies that all Scarlett needed to feel content with Rhett and her marriage again was a good raping by her husband. Overall, the character of Mammy does not evolve much during the movie, she was a loyal servant in the beginning and remains a loyal servant to the end. Never questioning the system she has been born into and standing by Scarlett's side no matter what happens. The character of Mammy may have some personality to it, however she is unable to break the chains of the system holding her in place and makes clear through her actions that she does not even want to and is content with her life.

As for the other house slaves, Prissy, the younger girl, is playing an important part as well, though she is depicted as utterly useless and stupid, emphasized by her unnaturally high pitched voice and deliberate way of speaking. Her facial features as well clearly indicate she is African American, even though her skin is not as black as Mammy's. It does however apply to her as well that she is not the prettiest girl, and the lighting and make up do not flatter her features at all. Both Prissy and Mammy appear as a stark contrast to the fragile, pale and yet somehow girlishly pretty Scarlett. Just by watching the slaves one could feel like the movie suggests the reason why African Americans can't be a master race. They are crude in appearance and behavior and can never appear as beautiful as the white people, or so it seems. Prissy also does not seem to be much use for anything else than serving, clearing and washing plates, she has no opinion of her own and knows barely anything else than how to do the above described work. Her stupidity even earns her a slap in the face by Scarlett, when it turns out that she lied about her abilities in aiding childbirth. Which was the whole reason for Scarlett staying in Atlanta to help her love Ashley Wilkes wife to give birth to his child. The way Prissy lifts and kneads her apron while speaking indicates that she has no concept for proper female behavior, mannerism and grace and that she is

barely able to answer the questions she is asked. When sent to the brothel to fetch Mr. Butler to aid with transporting the woman in childbed and Scarlett back to Tara, Prissy is bragging up to Mr. Butler in her unbearably high pitched voice that she delivered the baby on her own, with just a little help of Miss Scarlett. All the while not stopping to fiddle with her apron or her hands, seeming to be slightly seduced by Mr. Butlers charms in an almost comical way. The Prostitutes of the establishment are looking down and laughing at the black girl as if she were some sort of entertainment, since on the level of social hierarchy ladder they are the lowest of the whites, but at least they are still higher than the blacks.

The third house slave is Pork⁶¹, intellectually he seems to be between Prissy and Mammy. Just as Mammy he is permitted to have his own opinions and the movie allows him to express them once the white person has gone, repeating it aloud to himself. As if an aftermath of the conversation, like the Harlequin that speaks truth to the audience when everyone else has left the stage. He too is loyal to the family and seems to have no opinion on freedom, serving Scarlett and her family for the rest of his life. Appearance wise his features are quite crude, the way he keeps his eyes half closed while speaking suggests that it takes him a great deal of energy to even process his thoughts. He is not handsome in any way and just like for Prissy and Mammy it is true that lighting and make do not flatter him at all. His skin overall appears unclean and almost repulsive.

While in Atlanta, Scarlett meets slaves from the Tara plantation and gets to ask about her families well being⁶². Not a single word is spoken about the slaves tattered clothes, their sweaty faces or their hunched way of walking. They are in a general submissive behavior towards Scarlett, when they answer all her inquiries, there is a slave in the background who kneads his hat in an almost bashful manner. Scarlett is clearly not interested in the slaves faith, but merely uses them as a means to hear news about her family and home. Soon the slaves are called back in line by the foremen on horses, most probably being transported to work for the war efforts. Which only shows once more that both black and white are trapped in the system of slavery. Throughout the movie there are only faint indications that anything within the system of slavery has changed, after the war there is the following title screen,

⁶¹ Fig. 10.

⁶² Fig. 8, shows the big Slave called Sam who later saves Scarlett's life, he as well as all the other Blacks acts utterly submissive around Scarlett.

Home from their lost adventure came the tattered cavaliers... Grimly they came hobbling back to the desolation that once been a land of grace and plenty... And with them came another invader... more cruel and vicious than any they had fought... the Carpetbagger.

What is interesting about this title screen is that the precise moment one reads the word *Carpetbagger*, which was a name for the rich northerners flooding the south after the war was over, a black man starts singing a cheery tune. Which one can recognize as „While we are marching through Georgia“, by Tennessee Ernie Ford⁶³. The man is sitting in horse carriage, that is driven by a white man, he has a golden tip cane and his attire is generally fancy, indicating wealth and sophistication. The world seems almost upside down in that image⁶⁴. But no further comment is made upon it as if the audience is left to connect the images to form their own opinion as to what they mean. But they suggest that with loosing the war, the south was flooded with arrogant and rich black people, turning the world of the old south upside down, which is a generally bad thing to happen, considering how happy everyone was at the beginning of the movie when the old order was still in place.

Since this movie is generally about Scarlett O'Hara's life and mischief, very little violence is shown within the movie, apart from Scarlett slapping several people in the in the face. But the fact that she really quickly resorts to slapping people makes it more understandable when she slaps her slave Prissy for lying to her. Therefore not much can be said about the depiction of violence against African Americans. As described above the slaves generally serve their masters contently and without question and therefore there is no need to punish them.

As for historical accurateness, unlike *Birth of a Nation* this movie does not claim to show historically accurate events, or makes reference to any historical sources. It is clear that what the audience is shown here is a mere fiction and probably in the year of its release in 1939 everyone knew that the film was an adaption of Margaret Mitchell's book by the same name, which had been released only three years before⁶⁵. However it is a movie, depicting a time gone by and the image it conveys of slavery is not very accurate in an overall sense. What is probably historically correct about the depiction of characters like Mammy is that, especially for the old house slaves who's lives have mostly been more convenient than the field hands, the concept of freedom did not appeal very much. For various reasons, psychological and economical, where would they go

⁶³ Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrYLR6RwRCw> (accessed 5 April 2014)

⁶⁴ Fig. 9.

⁶⁵ G. Rosenfit, *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind.*, New Jersey, Research & Education Assoc., 1994, p.1.

after being freed? They owned nothing. What else would they work as, when serving was the only life they knew? It is unlikely for the average human person to just throw a life they have always known overboard and start something completely different. Which is probably one of the reasons slavery has been around for such a long time. Humans can grow accustomed to almost anything. Therefore if today one looks back at *Gone with the Wind* and judges Mammy for not just abandoning Scarlett and claiming her freedom after the war, one is making the mistake to forget the mindset Mammy was raised with. Which is one of the things Zemon Davis states in her book, one should not forget. Slavery was a gruesome system, and the movie "forgets" to point that out, but on the other hand even if *Gone with the Wind* is deeply nostalgic in the way it depicts the Old South, there is some truth in the psychological mindset of its characters. Both black and white are trapped in a system they can't think outside of and the movie makes no effort in suggesting it any differently. Therefore the slaves are quite visible in this movie, they are an active part of the plot and Mammy gets a great amount of screen time, conversations and character. However the chains of slavery are invisible, one knows that Mammy did not apply for the job of being Miss Scarlett's personal servant due to qualifications she has, but that Mammy has been born into her position. She still remains there after she could leave and there is never any mention whatsoever that she or any other slave would be victim to sexual abuse, other violence, threats of life or alike. Slavery is a system that is held in place by convenience and fear, these chains are not visible in the movie even if the slaves themselves are. To get an overall sense of the movies mindset and the message it conveys, one has to understand the time it was made in, Melvyn Stokes writes in her book, „American History through Hollywood Film“,

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, there were very few attempts by Hollywood to suggest that slavery itself was not a benign and benevolent institution. This fitted well with the dominant school of historical writing (...) These writers created a nostalgic picture of the 'Old South' of slavery and great plantations. Gracious and cultivated, the white society of the antebellum South had been served (willingly) by black slaves⁶⁶

Stokes suggests that the nostalgic and romanticized view of the Old South was becoming a more and more important part of Hollywood repertoire due to the economical changes during the late 1920s and 1930s. America was suffering through deep depression and reliving the glorious times of the Old South on the movie screen seemed to boost the peoples spirits⁶⁷ - at least that may be

⁶⁶ M. Stokes, 2013, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 39.

true for the white population of America. Jim Pines also writes that this Nostalgia was needed for a Nation that had suffered through depression and was on the verge of another world war⁶⁸. Given these historical circumstances it is understandable why nowadays movies like *Gone with the Wind* reek of almost unbearable nostalgia, they falsified the past to glorify the old days, looking backwards instead of onwards and being generally in favoritism for white people, they convey the message that slavery was a good thing and everything was well when it was still in place. As Stokes writes, these movies opinions haunted Hollywood production for a long time, „The Hollywood view of slavery as a benign system consequently continued to be the dominant one for a very long time.“⁶⁹ It was only until the civil rights movement in the 1960s that sparked a different way of depicting slavery, which the next chapter will focus on.

3. Post Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement of the 60s marked a critical turn of events in the racial relations in the United States⁷⁰

Almost a hundred years since the abolition of slavery and three generations of race segregation, the African American people of America finally rose up to fight for their rights and the acknowledgement as equal members of american society. The Civil- Rights movement, initiated by brave people like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, did not only change the way African Americans were treated in society but also the way they were depicted in Hollywood movies later on,

Blacks were no longer merely portrayed as emblematic figures of embodied liberal ideas (...) Black actors and actresses now appeared in different stories and genres, as well as in roles that were not motivated by skin color or race. (...) Race therefore was not the most important topic in stories involving blacks⁷¹

⁶⁸ J. Pines, 1996, p.455.

⁶⁹ M. Stokes, 2013, p. 41.

⁷⁰ J. Pines, 1996, p.457. Original: Die schwarze Bürgerrechtsbewegung der 60er Jahre markierte einen kritischen Wendepunkt der Rassenbeziehungen in den Vereinigten Staaten.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 457. Original: Schwarze wurden nicht mehr nur als emblematische Figuren porträtiert oder als Verkörperung liberaler Ideale (...) Schwarze Schauspieler und Schauspielerinnen traten nun in unterschiedlichen Geschichten und Genren auf, darunter auch Rollen, die nicht speziell durch Hautfarbe oder Rasse motiviert waren. (...) Rasse war also nicht das wichtigste Thema in Geschichten, in die Schwarze involviert waren.

African Americans were now allowed to have character roles, not just in the comical sense of Mammy from *Gone with the Wind*. This shows how closely related mainstream Hollywood is to the current politics of the time. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner write in their book, „Camera Politica. The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film“, that during the sixties,

the United States ceased to be the sole world power; the American empire was curtailed on several fronts; and the postwar era of 'Pax Americana' came to an end. The country's economy experienced several major crisis (...) The liberal pluralist consensus that had held the country together for decades was broken by the social movements of the sixties and seventies⁷²

The Civil Rights movement was not the only big change in society that occurred during the sixties. There were a bundle of changes that allowed for more liberal movies to be made. The demise of the studio system, the antiwar campaigns, the rise of feminist ideas, gay liberation and the hippie culture are some of the streams that pushed towards a change in society.⁷³ In the end these changes led to Hollywood, who was trying to „hold ,in place the white dominated symbolic order and racial hierarchy of American society‘,⁷⁴ to open up to new topics and approaches to social problems, like Americas slave past. And it let to a movement in Film history that would later be called *blaxploitation*. With films designed for a black audience, about black problems and history⁷⁵. The film that will be analyzed in the next chapter has been born out of the *blaxploitation* era, it depicts Americas slave past from a different angle than both of the movies described in the previous chapters and even though it is perhaps not as well known it still made an important contribution to working up the past.

3.1 *Mandingo* (1975)

The reason this movie is interesting for discussing *Django Unchained* is not only because it offers a new approach to the topic of slavery but also because the main storyline in *Django Unchained*

⁷² M. Ryan, and D. Kellner, *Camera Politica. The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988. p.6.

⁷³ Ibid. p.6.

⁷⁴ McCrisken, Pepper, 2005 p. 161.

⁷⁵ J. Pines, 1996, p.459.

revolves around a style of fighting that did not actually exist in the way depicted in the movie, but which's name has been taken from the movie *Mandingo*.

The plot of *Mandingo* is quite easy to follow and nowadays it is hard to understand what is so outrageous about it, yet during its time it was quite the shocking and controversial plot. Since the 1930s Hollywood filmmaking was ruled by a Production Code, known as the Hays Code, which explicitly forbade any showing of interracial sexual relations, and remained in place until as late as 1956.⁷⁶ The first black and white kiss in mainstream Hollywood film was only shown in 1967 in the movie *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*.⁷⁷ Taking that into account it becomes more understandable as to why *Mandingo* posed such a controversial motion picture in its time. Not only do black and white people engage in sexual relations, but it is also hinted that it is happening not entirely in against their wills. The theatrical trailer to this movie states in the end that „*Mandingo* is the first true motion picture epic of the Old South.“⁷⁸

The main characters are the limping son Hammond of the plantation owner Warren Maxwell. Hammond's cousin and wife, Blanche, his slaves Ellen and Mede. Other characters are the female house slave Lucretia Borgia, the male house slave Agamemnon and the rebel runaway slave named Cicero. After Hammond marries Blanche, he quickly finds out that she has had someone before him, which throws him off and lets his desire for her cease, since she also refuses to tell him who took her virginity and rigorously insists he is wrong. Hammond However can't forgive her and instead buys himself a black woman, named Ellen, to be his bed companion, he seems to have a fancy for black women, since he, for historical standards, treats his slaves with respect. At least in the beginning. Blanche of course notices her husband's favoritism for Ellen and jealously beats her. Which resolves in Ellen losing her child and her husband being even more cold towards her. As a last resort to get back at her husband, Blanche bribes Hammond's male slave, Mede, to sleep with her. This however does not turn out as planned, since she later gives birth to a mulatto baby, which is living proof for her deed and is quickly disposed off. After the child is killed by the doctor and the midwife, Blanche is also poisoned as well as Mede brutally murdered. Agamemnon, who is watching the murder of Mede, picks up Hammond's rifle and threatens both Hammond and his father, in the end shooting Warren Maxwell and running off. This leaves Hammond alone with the devastation his rage caused. It appears it is okay for a white man to have sexual relations with a black woman, the other way around however is not accepted at all and will be punished gruesomely.

⁷⁶ M. Stokes, 2013, pp. 41.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 41.

⁷⁸ Available at, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1priqpSfjvY (accessed 12 April 2014)

As Stokes writes the ads for *Mandingo* and *Gone with the Wind*, have a resemblance⁷⁹, however the moods of the films do not match at all. The first thing that springs into attention is the film music. Whereas in *Gone with the Wind* and also *Birth of a Nation* the film music is not commenting on anything happening in the movie but forms more of a subconscious background noise in *Mandingo* the main title directly comments on what's happening on the screen, lines such as „I was born in this time to never be free.“ or „I am so tired, but I can't take no rest.“, sung by a black man reflect upon the hardships of a slave who has no say over his own life and working hours. The main location the movie is set in, namely the plantation Falkenhurst, comes across as a decaying big house and estate that has surpassed its prime. Unlike the Tara plantation, in *Gone with the Wind* which in the beginning of the movie is a thriving and almost fairytale like place to be, Falkenhurst appears more threatening and somewhat depressing. This is also emphasized by the lighting and camera angles. Most of the time the shots are very dark, only lighting half of the actors faces and keeping the rest hidden in shadows, the viewer gets the notion that Falkenhurst is a very dark and joyless place to live in. The depiction of Falkenhurst sets the mood for the rest of the film, it emits an almost eerie feeling of something bad about to happen. Furthermore from the very beginning one gets the an idea of how the slaves are treated, the movie starts with above mentioned lyrics and black slaves being presented to a trader. They stand in line, patiently enduring the procedure of being examined like cattle. The Trader checks their hands, teeth and genitals before bargaining for their price. This short scene already makes one feel the humiliation the slaves must have felt when being examined and treated like that. The division between black and white is clearly apparent, yet unlike the slaves in *Gone with the Wind* or *Birth of a Nation* these slaves are not happy with their fate and in the case of Cicero, who is being introduced in this scene as rebellious runaway, with a big capital "R" branded into his shoulder, the slaves are also introduced as non approving with the system they live in.

Cicero is an overall interesting character, not only is he rebellious against his white masters, he is also intelligent and knows how to use language as a weapon and how to read and write. He questions the system and the movie permits him his own theme song that plays whenever his thoughts and ideas are present. His opinion forms the exact opposite to Mr. Warren Maxwells world view, who is the owner of the plantation. In one of the first scenes where Cicero speaks he is chained to a pole in a barn waiting to be sold and he argues , „You don't think deep down that Peckerwood know we's as human as he is? What for you reckon he keep us from learning and religion and readin'. Cause they know. They's afraid that deep down we is human.“ Whereas Warren Maxwell states to his dinner guests, that he does not allow his slaves to have any religion

⁷⁹ M. Stokes, 2013, p. 42.

because, „They get's to thinking they have souls they gets to thinking they as good as white folks.“, showing clearly that he does not consider his slaves equal, or perhaps even human, this opinion will be manifested several times later in the movie. But to remain with the character of Cicero for a while longer. Cicero is in appearance not very appealing, his skin is very dark and his features distinctly African American, as well as his facial expressions. He has a broad nose and high cheekbones, very short, black curly hair, when he speaks he widens his eyes, nearly grimacing at times to emphasize his words. However it feels as if he is able to use language and words better than anyone in the movie, even the white people. He speaks truth and he knows it. His character does not make any further developments, he is rebellious in the beginning and he remains rebellious to the end. When he is caught, attempting run away again, he holds a speech before they hang him⁸⁰,

I rather die than be a slave. You Peckerwoods, that's what you are. You Peckerwoods was oppressed in your own land. We was free and you brought us here, in chain. But now we here and you better know. This is just as much our land as it is yours. And after you hang me, kiss my ass

The whites listen helplessly to his speech, the camera zooms in on their faces and in their almost embarrassed and frozen expressions one can read that his words speak truth. Cicero remains proud and unbroken, even if they hang him, he has won and they lost, because through the truth he speaks he has become a martyr. It appears to have been custom in the Old South to have at least a male and a female leading house slave, at least this is what the previously described movies suggest and which is also depicted in *Mandingo*. The female house slave, Lucretia Borgia, fits the type of house slaves described in *Gone with the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*. She too is a round curvy motherly type as well as overly loyal and attached to the family she serves⁸¹. Her clothes are simple but well taken care of, although the family she serves appears to be of wealth she is not wearing any kind of jewelry like Mammy does. Her skin is a very dark brown, and her features typical African American, with a broad nose, big lips and no one would probably describe her as pretty or sexually attractive. And yet it is said that she has given birth to twenty four children. She is very hearty in character, but her personality is not as much present as for example Mammy's in *Gone with the Wind*. Lucretia Borgia is more submissive and operates from the background. Only very rarely stating her own opinion and never being comical. She seems overjoyed to have

⁸⁰ Though it is highly questionable that in real life they would have let him finish or not have gagged him to shut him up.

⁸¹ Fig. 14.

Blanche as her new mistress and welcomes her warmly to Falkenhurst. In a way she is a weaker character than Mammy, for she does not appear to have her own opinion nor ever gets a moment to state it secretly to the audience.

As for Agamemnon, he is one of the characters who develop and live an almost double faced life. On the one side he is the smiling and dumb house slave of Warren Maxwell, on the other side he leagues with Cicero to learn to read and scorns Mede for being stupidly obedient to Hammond Maxwell. In the end Agamemnon's despise for his masters breaks out and he eventually shoots Warren Maxwell.

Ellen on the other hand starts out as a frightened and shy girl. Her face is barely visible in the scarcely lighted scene where she is first shown. Her skin is very dark but her features remain hidden in the shadows. She speaks with a lower submissive tone as not even daring to answer the questions Hammond is asking her. When she is first shown in the movie it is with Hammond, and she does not even dare to look at him even when he tells her to,

Hammond: „Look at me straight into my eyes.“

Ellen: „I can't Master.“

Hammond: „I craves you to do it, Ellen.“

Ellen: „Niggers don't...“

Hammond: „Don't what? Look a white man in the eyes? If you're told to do it, if you're asked to do it, then do it.“

With a lot of difficulty Ellen manages to look up at Hammond, what is seen in Ellen is a black girl paralyzed by fear. Her whole behavior indicates that she has never been shown any kindness and the way Hammond is treating her is quite confusing to her. She does not possess the careless stupidity and acceptance of her role like Prissy from *Gone with the Wind*. Ellen accepted her fate because of fear. The way Hammond treats her, with a gentle respect and patient kindness lets her warm up to him and when he offers her to leave if she doesn't like him, she refuses and admits to liking and wanting to please him. After which he kisses her on the mouth, which seems to be the spark of their fragile and complicated relation.

After Hammond and Blanche got married he buys Ellen on their way home. Blanche turns around on the carriage, to examine her, both their gazes just express jealousy, fear and joy, like any two women who crave the same man. Ellen knows she is of importance to Hammond and Blanche knows that Ellen is her replacement in Hammond's bed. Both women, black and white

are amongst Hammond's possessions with which he does as he pleases - rewards and favors them when he wants as well as punishing them when he feels like it⁸². Later on this almost competition between Hammond's slave and his wife peaks when he divides the gifts of jewelry, originally intended for Blanche alone, between the two. Ellen is wearing the earrings Hammond gave her openly and with pride⁸³. The shy girl depicted in the beginning has found her place and silently triumphs over Hammond's wife. In a close up shot, the viewer gets to see her face and she appears very beautiful, with fragile and delicate features, smooth skin without blemish. Forming almost the exact opposite to Blanche, who is a fluttery, high pitched voiced and scrawny woman, who's almost only benefit is that she is white. Anyone can see at this moment why Hammond would favor Ellen over the fake and hysterical Blanche. And even in the movies gruesome ending, Ellen is the only one who gets away unharmed.

The Mandingo fighter Mede is another tragic figure, his character is interesting because he as well as Agamemnon has two sides to his personality. On the one side he is Hammond's faithful slave on the other side he seems to be filled with self loathing for the things he is forced to do. He does not enjoy his fate but does not see any other way to survive other than to obey. As well as Ellen his body and features appear flawless and youthful, he is well trained and fed, a strong man at the prime of his life. What is interesting is that *Mandingo* does not only show the white sexual gaze upon their black female slaves but also upon the males. Instead of depicting male slaves as sexual predators in this movie both female and male slaves are victims to sexual abuse and rape by their white masters. The very first scene Mede is shown he is up for sale on a slave auction and is examined by a german widow, who heartily reaches into his underwear (which is the only piece of clothing on him) taking her time to feel around. Medes face remains motionless as the white men joke about the widows intentions for the slave, making no secret of her apparent lust for the black man. When Hammond overbids her she leaves the platform, clearly angered and calling him „Schweinehund.“⁸⁴ Mede proves to be a very loyal servant to Hammond, doing whatever he is told to do and when Cicero runs off he is even given a horse to help capture him⁸⁵. In the end of the movie it becomes apparent why Mede was so loyal to Hammond, since he states it before being killed, „I dun think you was somehow better than a white man. But you is just white.“, his tone and facial expression showing great disappointment, most probably feeling deceived and

⁸² This emphasize on the image of a world dominated by white men might have also been fueled by the uprising feminism in the 60s and 70s.

⁸³ Fig. 11.

⁸⁴ German for „Pig hound“

⁸⁵ Though it is questionable where he learned to ride.

somehow stupid that he thought anyone could ever think outside of the system. Medes murder is the peak of injustice, he's been used and bribed and punished with death in the end as the white mans fear of the sexual black male takes over Hammond and all he wants to do is destroy. Like Ellen, Mede is paralyzed by fear, fear makes him obey, fear leads him to sleep with Blanche, and when he finally shakes off the fear and dares to defy Hammond he is murdered. Mede is a very impassive character, who only comes to a realization when it is too late. In the character of Mede the struggle between loyalty and staying within in the boundaries of what one knows on the one side and actively doing something against those boundaries, becomes apparent. Mede is depicted as handsome man, in the prime of his life. The way his body is filmed emphasize his sexuality, strength and beauty⁸⁶. Looking at him through the gaze of the camera one can almost hear the civil rights movements slogan, „Black is Beautiful“. Because Mede, just as Ellen are flawless, innocent, both in body and in character. They are depicted as mere victims of the white sexual gaze and their game of power.

In this movie Hammond Maxwell is the only one who treats the slaves with some sort of respect and in return the slaves look up to him as someone to put their trust in. Throughout the movie there are several scenes where Hammond defies his father and gets him to treat the slaves in a more humane way. Perhaps it is Hammond's bad leg that makes him more soft, or he is just a more humane person, he seems to care for all the people close to him and strives for everyone to get along in harmony. When he finds out that Agamemnon can read he is disappointed not because the slave can read, but because he is going to have to punish him by law, he manages to sooth his fathers wrath about it and bargain a lesser punishment for Agamemnon. Perhaps this kindness is what saves his life in the end when Agamemnon has to decide which one to shoot and decides for Warren Maxwell instead of Hammond. Yet still it feels as if Hammond is being punished in the end. As he loses his wife and his father. Hammond makes a development throughout the movie, in the beginning he is quite innocent, treating his slaves as his possession yet with some respect, though when he finds out his newly wed wife Blanche has had someone before him the first disturbance is cast into his life. After he finds out Blanche slept with Mede and conceived a child with him, he pops and in that moment all bonds he had with his slaves are torn, even with Ellen whom he seemed to have a very fragile and intimate relationship. When she tries to stop him from punishing Mede he shoves her away telling her, „Don't you tell me what to do. Don't you think because you get into my bed you're anything but a Nigger. Now get outta my way.“, right in this moment the fragile bubble of their relationship bursts and it feels like the original order has been restored. Black and white are just not meant to mingle.

⁸⁶ Fig 13.

Blanche is an interesting character, for as mentioned above, she does not seem to have much other benefits other than the color of her skin. She reminds one a bit of Scarlett O'Hara, intelligent in her own way, yet also spoiled and very accustomed to the system she lives in. Unlike Scarlett however, Blanche is not very ladylike in dealing with men. Her hysterical ways drive Hammond away from her and her act of revenge leads to her murder. One aspect that is interesting about her depiction however is that one gets the feeling that she is Hammond's possession as much as the slaves he owns. And that she is only his wife to breed with and nothing more. Her sexual desires get undermined by social conventions. Instead of being happy he has a wife that is more than willing to sleep with him, Hammond is repelled by her neediness and leaves her hungering for his touch. Blanche is a sad figure, almost as tragic as Mede. She is also trapped in the system where her needs and desires do not matter and her womanhood is oppressed by the white man. When she tries to break out of the system and claim the same rights as Hammond and other white men have, she is punished with death⁸⁷. Given the time this movie was made in, this could also be a statement on feminism, not only were the black slaves oppressed by the white american male in these times, but also the white women. They didn't have much other rights than to be a good wife to their husbands.

Warren Maxwell on the other hand seems to be the voice of the Old South, he sees nothing wrong with the system of slavery and has a fixed opinion just how low and non human his slaves are. To him they appear nothing more than cattle and the way he speaks about them give the idea he does not value them more than mere animals. Throughout the movie he is seen on various occasions putting his bare feet on a black boys stomach to rid himself of his rheumatism as his doctor has prescribed. Furthermore he breeds Mede and Big Pearl, a slave girl of the same blood as Mede, as if they were dogs. Overall Warren is a conservative and unpleasant character and one does not feel all too sorry when he is shot in the end. He forms the opposition to Hammond and in the way he treats his slaves reminds the viewer why slavery was an unjust system.

Unlike in *Gone with the Wind* or *Birth of a Nation*, slavery is very visible in its unjust and gruesome ways in this movie. It is neither depicted as necessary, nor normal, none of the main characters except for Warren Maxwell seem all too happy with this system. Violence and sex are openly depicted in this movie, however unlike in *Birth of a Nation* the violence and sexual gaze are not coming from the African Americans but from their white masters. Even though with a mindset of *Birth of a Nation* the brutal murder of Mede would probably be justified, since Mede

⁸⁷ Fig. 15. Blanche holds onto Lucretia Borgia for support as Hammond finds out the child she just gave birth to was not his but Medes. His dark frame in the foreground lurks like a shadow and makes Blanche appear small and vulnerable.

has sexually engaged with a white woman. In *Mandingo* however it is made out to be a cruel unjust act. As one can easily determine there is a change within the depiction of slavery and slaves. In the previously discussed movies the slaves and masters were living in harmony until the civil war disturbed the peace and order. Slavery was not depicted as a cruel system and more as a natural god given hierarchy. In *Mandingo* it is more a system that is accepted by all but that is neither necessary nor rightful. Everyone of the characters seems to know that in the background of their consciousness and their actions reveal that thought. Warren is unnecessarily cruel, Hammond tries to keep his slaves from harm as much as he can and treats them with respect. Even Blanche seems to take a liking in mating with Mede for it is said she called upon him several times after their first encounter. Therefore overall the message conveyed within this movie differs from the previously described, slavery is no longer a necessary aspect of Southern life, but a cruel system that does not benefit anyone involved.

3.2 *Amistad* (1997)

Amistad also differs from the previously discussed movies, not only in the way the story is told visually but also in context. Like the 1977 television series *Roots*⁸⁸, this movie goes back to tell the story about how slaves came to be in America in the first place. The South and southern slave owners as well as actual slaves only play a minor role in this movie, however the institution of slavery is omnipresent, since this movie is about how they were brought to America and how the whole process of this was regulated by American and foreign law. In essence the movie is a typical American court movie, for most scenes are depicting a court room, where the constitution of America and jurisdiction of the law are discussed in length. This goes to show how deeply regulated and implemented the institution of slavery was into the American legal system, even though the North claims to have had nothing to do with slavery, they still have to deal with property claims to the Africans from foreign merchants. It is a movie behind the scenes of slavery, about the legal system that made the trade of 'life-stock', as the Africans are called at one point, possible. Furthermore this movie has more of an important standing, since it as well as *Birth of a Nation* claims to retell historical events after a true occurrence. The story is set in 1839 and is about the massacre that happened on a Spanish ship by the name of *La Amistad*, the cargo, namely captured Africans, start a massacre and slay most of the crew apart from two Spanish men Ruiz and Montez. Who manage to persuade the Africans that if they remain alive they will take them back home. When in fact they betray them and sail for the American coast. Upon landing

⁸⁸ *Roots* is a 1977 TV series about an African man named Kunta Kinte who is captured and sold into slavery in America. The story depicts his struggle against the system until his death. The series is based on the family history of Alex Haley who traced his ancestors back to Africa and wrote a book dedicated to their story.

there the Africans are taken into custody and trial is held, concerning their legal ownership and the massacre upon the Amistad. The trial that starts out as a matter of ownership is turned into a trial about the principles of human rights and the wrongness of slavery. Even though the case is won in favor of the Africans, Steven Spielberg leaves the viewer with a bitter message, when the main character Cinqué sails home the title screens state that he will find his village destroyed and his family gone, most probably sold into slavery.

The movie is mostly told from the perspective of the Africans. In the very first image shown, one can barely make out a face. It is lighted in such dark shades that it looks as if carved in stone, heavy breathing is heard as well as moving, the sound of thunder, waves and the creaking of wood. The person seems to be in agony, the next shot is a close up of presumably the persons fingers trying to scrape out a nail from wet wood. The shots switch between the face and the fingers, emphasizing the effort. When the nail is finally pulled out it is depicted as pulling it from a piece of flesh. The lighting of this scene appears to only be the natural light of lightning. The viewer gets a glimpse of the persons face and can recognize it as a black man in chains, who now uses the nail to free himself. After this there is a jump and several black men are ripping open a crate of what appears to be weapons. They arm themselves, climb out of the cargo room and the massacre on the white, spanish crew of the La Amistad begins. In brief scenes, lighted and darkened by natural lightning it is shown how the raging Africans kill the crew one by one in bloody and gruesome detail. Then the main character Cinqué emerges from the fog and smoke and the crowd of the fighting⁸⁹, he appears almost godlike, a true warrior, his posture straight and confident, his body perfectly shaped and flawless, his gaze concentrated on the kill. Like Mede from *Mandingo*, Cinqué appears as a handsome man at the prime of his life and strength⁹⁰. He is beautiful in his appearance and strength, but in a raw fashion, the Amistad's captain appears helpless against Cinqué and the last thing the man see's as Cinqué kills him is the face of pure rage. Cinqué appears much like a raw beast, a pureblood warrior, though however the viewer later learns that he is a farmer and only managed to kill a lion once by pure chance, that he considers himself not strong but merely lucky⁹¹. The Africans speak their own language, Mede, throughout the film and after they have made the ship their own Cinqué gets into an argument with a fellow African about what to do with the surviving crew⁹². They are shouting wildly at each other,

⁸⁹ Fig. 16.

⁹⁰ Even though we later learn through what he has suffered during the crossing of the Atlantic and it is highly questionable wether someone would be able to firstly look as trained as Cinqué does and secondly be able to move and fight like that after having been constrained by chains for months.

⁹¹ Perhaps in the depiction of Cinqué the image of the strong, wild-born, untamed and warrior-like African lives on. All of the Africans are well trained like warriors.

⁹² Fig. 17.

rolling their eyes and grimacing in a what appears to be a threatening manner. Even though the average viewer cannot understand what they are saying it is clear that they are disagreeing about something. Their whole behavior appears quite uncivilized and animalistic from a western point of view. Their voices are dark and barking. Anyone familiar with the fantasy genre, for example Lord of the Rings, may feel reminded of the Orcs. Which puts Cinqué and his people on a humanoid, yet not quite human level. While Cinqué and the other one argue a third man enters the scene to do, what appears to be a victory dance in front of the captured remainders of the spanish crew, leaving them puzzled. Meanwhile the other Africans have made the ship theirs, draping cloth around them in the fashion of their home country and loudly conversing in their native tongue, they appear quite primitive in behavior, chewing on uncooked and dried spaghetti and misusing a telescope. There are two ways of interpreting this, either they are primitive or they just do not know better, since they are from a different culture. Either way from a western perspective their behavior appears most peculiar. As they sail along the Africans go back fully to their native behavior, wearing turbans and draped cloth, singing african sounding songs. Cinqué distinguishes himself from the crowd by remaining aware and suspicious of the spanish crew. The first culture clash the movie promotes is when they drift past a ship of white people, who are having a candlelight dinner with classical music on deck. Both parties merely stare at each other in fascination terror and surprise.

There is a jump of six weeks and the ship is in a sorry state, they are out of water and go to shore to collect some, when the ship is seized by an american vessel and the crew as well as the Africans are taken into custody. Cinqué is trying to escape by swimming towards the sun, but ceases his movements, drifts for a moment before he sinks, it appears he decides for life and is pulled into the Americans boat. As the Africans are led to prison in New Haven, Cinqué is paying close attention as to where they are brought and when he refuses to enter the prison cell is brutally forced into it. There is a sad tune playing as he sheds a tear at the repeated loss of his freedom. Cinqué remains the observer for a while at the start of the movie, trying to make sense of what is going on around the group of Africans. Naturally there are several incidents of misunderstandings, cultural and communicational. The Africans as a group are confused and understand only that they are imprisoned, but do not know why and who these white men are and what they want. When a group of Quakers comes to sing in front of the prison, Cinqué and a fellow African look outside, watching them. They try to figure out who they are,

African⁹³: „Who are they, you think?“

⁹³ I will call this person merely African, for in the movie a name is not specified for him.

Cinqué: „Looks like they are going to be sick“

African: „They're entertainers!“

Cinqué: „But why do they look so miserable?“

They do not know that the Quakers are a christian organization that is for the abolition of slavery and therefore on their side. When the judge Baldwin wants to speak with the Africans they listen for a while but then judge them all idiots and leave. The Quakers aim to bless the Africans for their court meeting and one of the Africans called Yamba merely yells at the Priest in Mende „I'm not afraid of you, or your medicine.“ and takes his bible. They do not know what is going on in the courtroom in the beginning and that they are supposed to be silent. It becomes clearer that their depiction in the beginning, when shown on the ship, was not intended to show them as being stupid, but merely as from a different culture. The western and african culture are just too different to not clash. The behavior of the Africans and Cinqué seems to shift between what appears savage and primal to the westerners and trying to conform with the American ways. Their first appearance in court is in strong chains and rags, they speak loudly and in a confused manner, only slowly learning that they have to be silent in that room. When one of the Africans die, they start what appears to be a burial or mourning ritual, shifting back to their primal ways of doing things. They speak and sing in a repetitive manner appearing as a closed off mob to the prison guards, shouting at them with Cinqué shouting the loudest. Their ranks closing to the startled and puzzled prison guards, who's fears are painted into their faces. Meanwhile the Christians are back, singing and clutching their bibles. The movies works a lot with the contrasts of the two cultures, the raw clash of their ways and beliefs. There is a shot of one of the christian women holding her bible in white gloved hands, then it moves over to Yamba who is also holding the bible, making a connection between their beliefs. As well as Cinqué being the link between the Africans and the white people, as he more and more begins to understand the white mans ways.

At first Cinqué denies any ability of his to help out with the case, until Baldwin mentions the Lion Cinqué has killed back in Africa. An African themed music starts again and although Cinqué is in a dark dungeon like and damp looking cell, one can get the impression of his African heritage as his face becomes calm and thoughtful and reminiscent of his past. It appears in this moment he grows again in strength and presence as he retells the story of the Lion. The movie puts him into a weird counterposition to Joadson⁹⁴, who remains silent like a statue as the story is told. It appears as if Cinqué is telling the story to Joadson, who is a black American, instead of Baldwin who is white. Afterwards Cinqué seems to be won to support the case in court. He is

⁹⁴ A black freed slave abolitionist, who will be described in detail later.

shown in the witness stand telling his story with the help of translator James Covey. The Africans all appear in white shirts, as a sign of their innocence perhaps? Cinqué is distinguishable from the rest by wearing a beige vest. He stands upright and proud, answering the defendants questions truthfully. However the Court seems skeptical of his testimony and calls more witnesses to the stand, among them is Captain Fitzgerald from the Royal British Navy, who tries to prove that the Africans were illegally transported to America. He however is being cornered by the defendant, visually the tension in the room is shown by the Captains hands leaving sweat stains on the wooden bannister of the witness stand. The sound of the speakers turns off and is replaced by the sound of nervous tension building drums. The viewer is put into Cinqué's position, reading all the visual signs that it is not going so well for their case. Until Cinqué speaks to the surprise of all in english, „Giveth us free!“. The American flag, the symbol of freedom and all what America stands for, waves in the background window as the courtroom stares at Cinqué in silence for a moment. As Cinqué rises from his chair the music rises as well, a chorus chanting to his demands for freedom. He stands up tall, his chained hands raised in a begging manner, crying for freedom in this moment ridiculing the whole court system. Making clear that he and the other Africans are human beings, held captive and discussed over like property, when what they deserve is to walk free like any other human, for they have not committed any crimes against the law. It could be read as a statement against slavery in general and raises the question what it is that gives one man the right to put his other in chains and claim him as his property. The camera closes in on the faces of those present in the courtroom, black and white faces, their gazes serious and thoughtful. When the Africans appear to hear the final judgement their clothes have changed again, from just white shirts, to vests and in some cases even jackets and ties. They look less threatening and uncivilized than they did in the beginning, but rather like a group of serious African Americans who await their judgement calmly. Their faces are no longer filled with confusion, they seem to know exactly what is going on and appear to have made an invisible transition behind the scenes, from unknowing , unaware foreigners and possible property to westernized victims of the Wests legal system. However, after they are set free they celebrate with a bon fire in the prison ground⁹⁵, primal drumming, whistling and chanting is heard as the camera still stays outside of the stone cold confinements of the prison walls. The Prison Court is in utter chaos as the Africans celebrate their victory. They seem to have thrown away all of the westernness they had acquired and displayed in court. Cinqué, who has meanwhile risen to the place of being the spokesman for the Africans, sits calmly amongst the celebration. When Baldwin approaches him to tell him that they almost won, Cinqué naturally is very disappointed. He goes to question the white mans system ripping the clothes, that connected him to this system

⁹⁵ How that was allowed on Prison Ground is beyond me.

from his body and becomes a mere shade in front of the fire⁹⁶, yelling at Baldwin and Joadson in Mede. Just like the the primal looking warrior he was back on the Amistad⁹⁷, he is back to his natural self, realizing that he does not understand their world, even though he tried to conform. Again the cultural differences are emphasized. He yells at them, „What kind of place is this? Where you almost mean what you say? Where laws almost work? How can you live like that?“, He then starts singing loudly and quite primal, yelling in a threatening way. His skin so dark he merges with the background. His face grimaced wildlly, eyes wide open, and his voice deep and guttural, there seems to be nothing left of the civilized Cinqué that was shown in the court earlier. It becomes clear that even though he tried to conform is not of that world. He remains as untamed as a beast, hitting his chest and pointing his finger at Baldwin, the viewer is aware that Cinqué is willing and able to kill for his freedom. He keeps up his repetitive singing and chanting a while, for someone who does not speak Mede this most probably has a threatening and confusing effect.

After Cinqué turns around to join with the crowd of the other Africans, there are close ups of both Baldwins and Joadson's faces as they look onto the raging Cinqué, it is hard to read their emotion, it seems to be a mixture of shock, realization and sadness. When Cinqué is again shown in front of the fire, this time in profile view, one can see his african features, but also read from his gestures that he is disappointed more than he is angry. The shot also seems to put him in a different world, since without context one could guess that it is showing an african man in front of a fire, most probably in Africa. Perhaps Baldwin and Joadson realize in this moment where Cinqué and the others really belong and that they cannot be americanized. That thought is being persisted, when John Quincy Adams, the abolitionist and Ex- President, and Cinqué bond over an African Violet in Adams' conservatory.

Cinqué is willing to give the American legal system another chance with his trust, but this time he does not deny his heritage, for he claims to have called upon his ancestors for help, keeping with his cultural beliefs. He has become the the sole symbol and representative for the group of Africans, he is the African, since when they go to court for the last time, he is alone. His attire is very smart, and kept in light colors. When he is shown during Adams lengthy speech in front of the Supreme Court, it is mostly in a line with, James Covey who is originally African and a translator for Mede and Joadson. They form a historical alignment from pure African, to converted African to pure American, giving the viewer a visual representation of how the Africans converted into american society. While Adams speaks a mellow music is is playing in the background, a mixture of horns and violins. It appears as a typical soundtrack for grand final

⁹⁶ Fig. 21.

⁹⁷ Fig. 16.

speeches in mainstream Hollywood, the grand final speech that is the turning point and justice prevails. When Adams speaks of Cinqué's ancestors the mellow music changes to more primal sounding drums and flute, there are counter shots between Cinqué and Adams, indication of their mutual understanding of one another perhaps. As he applies Cinqué's method for guidance to their case the shot of the row Cinqué is sitting in changes in perspective, now making Cinqué the first in line, just as Adams speaks of understanding, „We understand now, we've been made to understand and to embrace the understanding that who we are is who we were.“. This sentence could mean several different things between the lines, for African Americans, considering the perspective of the shot given with these words, it can mean that they should not forget their African heritage and wear it with pride. For the white audience, the words of Adams apply more literal, since he is saying them referring to his own ancestors, who fought for a free America where all the races are created equal as the American Declaration of Independence states, which means the whites should not forget the idea of freedom on which America is built upon. After that speech the Court decides that the Africans „ (...) are not slaves and therefore cannot be considered merchandise. But are rather free individuals, with certain legal and more rights. Including the right to engage in insurrection against those who would deny them their freedom.“ The sentence is read by an elderly man with a shaky voice, who is representing the law amongst other elderly men. Historically it might be correct that elderly men were leading the courts of America, visually it seems like a statement on the antiquated American legal system on slave trade. Cinqué is then free'd and looks upon his wrists, slowly stretching his fingers. Even though he has never been an actual slave, the system of slavery has left its marks on his body, his wrists are scarred from the chains and his fingers stiff from holding them still in confinement. He goes to thank Baldwin in English and Baldwin answers him in Mede, a show of friendship perhaps? The movie ends with the Africans sailing home, however the way they stand on deck of the ship, in rows, dressed in white shirts and staring into the sunset along with the sad music playing in the background, one could get the impression they all died and are on a spiritual boat. Their expressions appear solemn and holy. Cinqué is the only one wearing the cloth draped in African fashion. The title screens tell the viewer that he will sail home only to find his country at war, his village destroyed and his family gone. There is sad chanting in the background and as Cinqué is staring off into the sunset a tear rolls down his cheek, the last word of the song understandable as „Africa“ and the boat floats towards the sun before the movie ends. In general the Africans are shown as torn between their native ways and the ways of the world they have been brought into. They are being mystified and shown as strong minded and cold blooded warriors on the one side and childlike and unlearned on the other. They are not really slaves in the sense of the slaves in *Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind* or *Mandingo*. Which is the whole issue of the movie, they

have been born free and are therefore free. The system of slavery is only indirectly shown, yet it overshadows the whole film. What is different about the previously discussed movies is that *Amistad* shows in detail an example of how the slaves from Africa came to be in America. Through the back flash of Cinqué's story it is told how he was captured from his village. It is shown that at its core slavery is a profitable trade and that back in Africa the different tribes are not at peace, Africa was not and today is still not a Union and the rivaling tribes of course noticed a chance for profit in capturing and selling their enemies to the white slavers in exchange for goods and weapons. The part of the movie that depicts the passage from Africa to the point where the Africans revolted on the *Amistad* is visually the strongest part of the movie, since there is barely any narration, just pictures and music undermining what is going on. The Africans are transported worse than cattle, in chains and beaten onto the ship. Their bodies forming an almost indistinguishable black mass. Their exposed naked skin is beaten and abused. A priest is assuring the sailors and African captives that God will forgive them. The actions of the white ships crew to bring order into the chaos appear random and overly cruel, one of the Africans is shot with no distinguishable reason. The white crew appears almost faceless and in their cruelty stand in stark contrast to their naked and screaming victims. The Africans are stacked and chained into the ships cargo room, they are being beaten at random and chained in rows, men, women and children alike. There is chaos and confusion as the screaming Africans are sorted into the tight cargo space. The scenes are gloomy and barely lit by daylight, giving an impression of what it have been like to be crammed into these spaces⁹⁸.

What follow are glimpses of the horror in the cargo room during the crossing, again lighted only by what appears to be lightning as the ship sails through a thunderstorm. A woman is desperately clutching her baby⁹⁹. The mass of people is winding in agony and in the background the music is filled with drums and a sad, slow humming chorus, emphasizing the gruesomeness and horrors of the visuals. The next morning a portion of the African captives is dead and cast into the ocean, while the crew plays a tune off an antique music box. Then two of the captives are whipped brutally, streams of blood flow around their feet, the reason for this cruel punishment is not apparent for the viewer. Only that these scenes give a general sense of the trauma that the Africans and Cinqué have lived through. While the whipping goes on the Camera shows the mother with her child that had been depicted earlier in the cargo room. They have the sun in their back and the mother appears quite calm and at peace, when just a scene later, she sits upon the bannister and deliberately falls backwards to drown herself with her child. The food is poor and not enough

⁹⁸ Fig. 20.

⁹⁹ Fig. 20.

for everyone. The desperation of the captives to feed is shown by images of hands reaching out frantically to the crew and their pots of what appears a sort of porridge. Cinqué is shown defending his portion of food almost animal like, perhaps an explanation as to why he still has strength left to fight when they take over the Amistad later on. The last act of pure cruelty is shown when the ship seems to have too much cargo, the ships captain decides to throw a portion of their captives into the ocean, drowning them alive. The sad music that had been playing the whole time reaches its climate and from a shot that follows the drowning Africans into the water, to the ocean, the camera zooms out to show a large group of Africans walking the shores of Cuba, the camera swings along the black mass of people to a table on which two white men are counting coins. A very visual statement of the direct profit of the cruelties the viewer has just seen, making a direct connection between the cruelties and recklessness of slave trade and profit. A further connection to slavery is the character of Theodore Joadson, he appears as a freed ex-slave and a member of the anti-slavery society. He could also be seen as the link between the Africans and the African American viewers, since firstly the movie character behaves like any of the white men depicted in the movie and secondly his real life person, namely Morgan Freeman, seems almost inseparable from his movie persona. This gets further emphasized when he and Baldwin go to search the Amistad for evidence. The music becomes threatening as Joadson ventures into the dimly lit cargo room of the ship, he has a lamp with him, that scarcely lights the room however. The faint rattling of chains is always with him, he finds traces of dried blood and scratches on the wood as well as bushes of hair. But what he mainly finds is an assembly, a jungle of chains¹⁰⁰. They are shown in different variations as the light of his lamp goes over them, the lighting dark and gloomy, the music becoming eerie and the chains seems to spark to life, telling stories of horror, they become the visual representation of the cruelties done to the Africans. Joadson's face shows growing fear¹⁰¹, perhaps also because he is an ex- slave and knows the feeling of chains all too well, he seems to be a link between white and black, between African Americans and Africans. Watching him feels as if watching an american going through his ancestors past. The chains keep clicking and rattling as if having a life of their own, until Joadson is so scared and startled he trips and falls, his light goes out as the lamp lands on the floor, trapping him in the dark. As he shouts for Baldwin his voice sounds shaky and scared, „Light.... light the lamp Mr. Baldwin...“, After Baldwin pulls him out from the chains, Joadson still seems quite startled and somewhat traumatized by what he has seen.

Except for the character of Joadson and the african translator James Covey, the black people in this movie appear as a factor, an object in the different white peoples interests. The Abolitionists

¹⁰⁰ Fig. 18.

¹⁰¹ Fig. 19.

want to use them as a sign, as martyrs in their cause, the President van Buren is only considering the case important for his re- election and Queen Isabella of Spain wants to demonstrate and manifest her power. The only one who's motives are not quite clear is the lawyer Roger Baldwin¹⁰². He is shown in the background at the first court hearing and then appeals to the abolitionists Tappan and Joadson to help the Africans in their case. He states that he sees the case as an affair of property and that he is certain they have a chance of winning. Other than making money of it, Baldwin does not seem to have any other motives in helping out the Africans. He is the visual opposite of Cinqué, blonde hair, fair skin slender nose and frame, scholarly glasses and a man of many words. However next to Cinqué his character appears quite shallow, the viewer learns nothing of Baldwins past or his ambitions, he just appears out of nowhere and seems determined to help the Africans no matter what. He doesn't seem to have any political opinions either and in the end it appears as if he has merely done all this for what is right and just.

The other white people are depicted just as shallow, Lewis Tappan is introduced in connection to Theodore Joadson and seems to belong to the abolitionists, he is willing to let them die as martyrs for the cause of the abolitionists. Other than that radical opinion there is nothing more distinct about his character, even his features are rather blunt and probably no one would call him handsome.

President Van Buren and Isabella of Spain are depicted as mere figures of politics, they both appear quite childlike and disinterested in the case other than to secure their political standing. Van Buren is mostly shown on tour for his re-election or having dinner. Whereas Queen Isabella is shown in an almost golden heavy baroque castle, with her doll by her side and surrounded by adults. They stand in opposition to one another but both the President and Queen Isabella seem to have no real connection to the world outside their politics and appear quite ignorant to the suffering of the Africans.

Another white character that finds himself fighting on behalf of the Africans later in the movie is John Quincy Adams, he's an ex- President and is firstly introduced when Tappan and Joadson approach him as fellow abolitionist and asking for his help. Adams refuses however and is only later won for their case. In the end he is the one who persuades the Supreme Court to let the Africans go free and thus wins the case for them as described above.

¹⁰² Natalie Zemon Davis notes in her book, *Slaves on screen*, that Baldwin was „not an unknown young property lawyer, but a forty-six-year-old defender of fugitive slaves and black education. (p.80)

As Zemon Davis describes in her book, „Slaves on Screen“, „Viewers would come away from *Amistad* with a general sense of the movement of events.“¹⁰³ and that the historical strength of *Amistad*, „is in its portrayal of the Africans, and most strikingly in its representation of the seizure of Cinqué, the Middle Passage, and the revolt.“¹⁰⁴

In T. McCrisken and A. Peppers book, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film*, one can read that *Amistad* has been criticized for not being historically correct, to which they write that what needs to be discussed

(...) is not whether a film like *Amistad* is ‚historically accurate‘ but rather why it sets out to represent the past as it does, what it omits, what it includes, why it was made and for whom, and why it is important to situate our discussions of it in the context of present day debates about race, identity politics and the emergence of new formations of global power¹⁰⁵

It is always the representation of an artwork in its particular time of making, which is an important aspect to consider and not the question whether the depiction of the past is correct, because we can never truly know how events exactly happen. But we can analyze today's interpretation of the past to make statements about the present. McCrisken and Pepper continue that thought when they write that,

the fact that Spielberg chose to make a mainstream film in which the prime movers in the global slave trade are Spanish rather than American needs to be discussed in the context of (a) Spielberg's position and status in Hollywood; (b) the role and function of Hollywood films more generally in American and global culture and politics; and (c) the neo-liberal agenda which has shaped the films (...) imagination¹⁰⁶

It is interesting that even though the film is set in America, the Americans are not the evil ones and in the end decide to free the Africans, naming them individuals with certain legal rights. While in other parts of the country ironically slavery was in place for at least another generation. The only American who speaks in favor of slavery is an old fashioned South state senator by the name of John Calhoun. Who is depicted quite unflattering at the Presidents dinner table.

¹⁰³ N. Zemon Davis, 2000, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ McCrisken, Pepper, 2005 p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 49.

Overall this movie stands in contrast to the previously described ones, because firstly it is about a real event and people who have actually lived and secondly it shows how the Africans came to be in America. There are similarities to the 70s television series *Roots*, however when *Amistad* was made the era of blaxploitation had long passed and *Amistad* is retelling the story to a new generation of viewers.

4. Post 9/11

September 11th is so unique and historically important that it does not even require the year to distinguish it chronologically or historically from any other date. (...) September 11th has become *the* American tragedy of our times¹⁰⁷

America has not been the same since that day, As Tim Semmerling writes in „ *Evil Arabs* in American Popular Film“, the fear oriental people has been just as manifested in american society through movies as has the fear of black masculinity¹⁰⁸. However through the events of September 11th, it appears the fear of arabs has become more real than the fear of black masculinity. Just as Orwell suggests in his fictional but highly political book 1984, there is no better way to unite a Nation than to wage war against the "other". Through 9/11 the american society has moved together more closely to unite against the terrorist threat. And one could argue that now since the African Americans are not the main enemy of the white supremacist order anymore, Hollywood as distributor of american society, has opened up to more daring movies about americas slave past. In the following chapter the movie *Django Unchained* will be analyzed and briefly compared to the movie *12 years a Slave*, which is one of the latest movie on american slavery. However it does not quite fit the general means of production of the previously described movies, they are all mainstream Hollywood cinema made by white men. *12 years a Slave* however has been directed

¹⁰⁷ T. Semmerling, *"Evil Arabs" in American Popular Film. Orientalist Fear*, Austen, University of Texas Press. 2006, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ It should be pointed out here that 9/11 is as stated in the quote an American tragedy. Though it has shocked most of the first world and western society, it still leaves a larger thorn in American society, since the attack was directed at the American people, an act of war so to speak that has not happened to America before. So even though in perspective to other tragedies that have happened in the world on 9/11 and in the years following 9/11, the event of that September appears small, yet it is important to understand what it has caused to the american society in order to understand what has changed since.

by a black man and a british black man at that. However it is interesting to get a faint glimpse of how a european director approaches the story of slavery.

As will be described in the following chapter, *Django Unchained* and *12 years a Slave*, differ in some ways of their predecessors.

4.1 *Django Unchained* (2012)

Now this movie is different from the previously discussed movies in one aspect in particular, namely that it can not be discussed in separation from its director. Quentin Tarantino, an upstart Hollywood director out of practically nowhere, has had a history of making, brutal, comical and controversial movies. His most known are probably *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Kill Bill I* (2003) and *II* (2004) and his most recent before *Django Unchained* (2012) had been *Inglorious Basterds* (2009). Tarantino is one of the few directors in Hollywood that have developed their own specific style, making their movies stick out and recognizable, giving them the attribute of being advertised with the directors name. People go see his movies because it is a Quentin Tarantino movie and not necessarily because of the context, through the fame of his previous movies Tarantino fans have a certain expectation of what is to be seen in Tarantino's movies. However, just as the a movie has a positive and serious ring to it when it is called a Steven Spielberg movie, it has a somewhat unserious perhaps even comical ring when it is a Tarantino Movie.

Susanne Kaul and Jean Pierre Palmier write in their book „Quentin Tarantino. Einführung in seine Filme und Filmästhetik“, that,

Tarantino's movies have often been connected to postmodernism, because they form a self- reflecting patchwork of quotes and mix certain genres as well as high and low art (...) Also the disturbing or amusing connection between comedy and violence are part of Tarantino's trademarks. His films are often judged as questionable in their content, yet masterfully made on a technical level¹⁰⁹

The most criticism Tarantino received was for the depiction of violence,

Critical voices mainly address the depictions of violence, which are present in all Tarantino movies (...) Tarantino is indifferent to those critics. For him violence is

¹⁰⁹ S. Kaul and P. Palmier, *Quentin Tarantino. Einführung in seine Filme und Filmästhetik*. Paderborn, Fink, 2013. p. 13. Original: Tarantinos Filme sind häufig mit Postmodernismus in Zusammenhang gebracht worden, weil sie ein selbstreflexives Patchwork aus Zitaten darstellen und diverse Genres sowie hohe und niedrige Kunst vermischen (...) Auch die verstörende oder erheiternde Verbindung aus Komik und Gewalt gehört zu den berühmtesten Tarantino-Trademarks. Seine Filme werden häufig inhaltlich und moralisch als fragwürdig, filmtechnisch aber als meisterhaft eingestuft.

entertainment. Effect is more important than meaning, because causing bliss is his highest goal¹¹⁰

This is also true for *Django Unchained*, which has mostly been criticized for its violence rather than its topic. Critics have expressed mixed feelings with the movie, comments like, „[Quentin Tarantino’s] love of junk has led him to mix nonsense with the actual brutalities of slavery.“¹¹¹, or,

Just what is Tarantino trying to prove with *Django Unchained*? (...) Like the Spaghetti Westerns and '70s blaxploitation pictures from which it takes its cues, it's a form of kicking and screaming against social injustice¹¹²

are more on the skeptical side while other critics praise Tarantino’s handling of the topic of slavery. Just as Edward Gallafant writes in his book „Quentin Tarantino“, there is a newness to Tarantino's style that has not been experienced before in mainstream Hollywood cinema¹¹³. And it is this aspect that led to the investigation of this thesis, on whether or not *Django Unchained* depicts a new approach to slavery in mainstream Hollywood.

While there are several different layers in the movie such as Django’s revenge motif, the connection to German mythology through Dr. Schultz story of Siegfried and Brunhilde, the question of what is justice and moral and the mixture of genres like Western and Blaxploitation, this thesis will mainly focus on the depiction of the specific characters and most of all slavery. The main plot is set in 1858 and revolves around the freed slave Django, who teams up with the white German ex dentist and now bounty hunter Dr. King Schultz. After Django has helped Schultz identify the Brittle Brothers, Schultz sets him free as he had promised Django in the beginning and even offers to help Django to retrieve his wife Broomhilda from a plantation called Candyland. This venture goes horribly wrong, Dr. Schultz loses his life over his pride and Django is up against the whole plantation, though in the end manages to use his language skills taught by Schultz to turn the situation in his favor. Triumphant over everyone in a glorious revenge scenario, he frees his wife and ride off with her as a free and self esteemed man. Although the ending shows Django as a strong proud free man, the beginning things look quite different. The

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 9. Original: Die kritischen Stimmen richten sich vor allem gegen die Gewaltdarstellungen, die in allen Tarantino- Filmen vorkommen (...) Um diese Kritik kümmert sich Tarantino nicht. Gewalt ist für ihn Unterhaltung. Wirkung ist offenbar wichtiger als Bedeutung, denn das Berauschen ist sein höchstes Ziel.

¹¹¹ Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/01/django-unchained-reviewed-tarantinos-crap-masterpiece.html> (seen. 21.Feb. 2014)

¹¹² Available at: <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/24/166898958/tarantinos-genius-unchained?ft=1&f=1045%22> (accessed 21 February 2014)

¹¹³ E. Gallafant, *Quentin Tarantino*, Essex, Pearson Education Limited 2006. p.7

movie starts out with Django being part of a chain gang of slaves, muscular black bodies against rocky desert stones, the brute scar lines on their backs indicate the abuse they must have suffered through. While the title screens are shown and the song Django by Louis Bacalov and Rocky Roberts plays in the background¹¹⁴, the viewer sees the black men (who are obviously slaves) being walked through deserted and hostile looking landscapes, day in and day out through scorching sunlight and blistering coldness. They are accompanied by two white men on horses, in the end the chain gang of slaves is merely limping along, deprived of all their strength.

Then Dr. King Schultz comes into the picture, like some otherworldly person. The way he rides his carriage into the scene, the large tooth on top of his wagon bobbing up and down he almost appears similar to Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings*. Like Gandalf, he is wearing a grey robe, and appears linguistically and intellectually above the other characters. He does whatever he pleases and there is no one match enough for him to stop him from doing so, the rules of that world do not seem to apply to him, or so it seems. But back to the depiction of Django.

The way the viewer first gets to see him is as a broken down individual, he does not dare to look Dr. Schultz into the eyes, very much like Ellen from *Mandingo*, he keeps his gaze down and answers in a low submissive almost scared tone¹¹⁵. He has learned to fear the white man and not trust his actions to be friendly even if they seem so at first. Django is just like any other black slave on that chain gang. After Django is bought and paid for by Dr. Schultz, and is ordered to take the horse and coat of the white man Schultz shot dead. Django throws off his ragged blanket, a motion that is underlined by an artificial swooshing sound and is the first indication of Django's initiated road of transition. When the surviving white man yells out, „Nigger don't you touch my brother coat.“, Django walks over to him to kick the dead horse that is crushing the mans leg to intentionally cause him further pain. He then rushes to get dressed in the dead mans garments in an almost childlike manner. After Dr. Schultz has a word with the remaining members of the chain gang they decide to follow Django's example and throw off their blankets in the same manner as he did, their chains rattling ominously as they limp closer to the man trapped beneath his horse. As to be expected of a Tarantino movie, the slave traders brains splatter gloriously as he is executed¹¹⁶. Django watches the whole scene with strange fascination

¹¹⁴ Which is also the exact same song that plays in the very beginning of 1966 Sergio Combucci's Django. Who's main character, Franco Nero has a guest starring in Django Unchained. Probably by personal connection of Quentin Tarantino to the genre of Spaghetti Western, a form of tribute perhaps.

¹¹⁵ Fig. 22.

¹¹⁶ Fig. 23.

and growing curiosity, then follows Dr. Schultz, sitting up straight on his horse now, with a new confidence growing.

The next town they ride into is Daughtrey in Texas as the title screens indicate, the people there stop whatever they are doing and stare at Django, not able to comprehend seeing a black man on a horse. Visually this is emphasized by the two of them riding past the gallows in slow motion, the loop of the rope framing Django's head¹¹⁷. This could be read as what he is facing with his actions or what these people might want to do to him. As confident as Django might seem riding that horse into town, he still has not quite understood what the strange Dr. Schultz is about, their differences are quite apparent at that point still. Schultz's language and appearance are way above Django's level, he is obviously wealthy, wearing a posh coat and even his horses harness are adorned with gold embossings. Django on the other hand is quite rugged in appearance, his hair is a mess, his beard untrimmed, he is scarred and scared faced in torn and bloodstained rags. He stays silent in the beginning and merely observes, his language and behavior nowhere near the flamboyant attitude of Dr. Schultz. When he does speak up he keeps his voice in a low submissive tone and listens to Schultz's answers like a child would listen to a mentor. The second change within Django's character appears when Schultz lets him pick his own clothes for an act on the plantation Schultz expects his bounty to be hiding. Django asks him skeptically „You's gon' let my pick up my own clothes?“, he then picks an outfit that is ridiculously fancy, however he now has a new haircut and a trimmed beard. Indicators that he is starting to reclaim his own identity. For the first time in the movie, slavery upon the plantations is shown, however this picture seems a bit off, for there is a stark contrast between slaves on leisure time, strolling around or sitting on swings and a black women being dragged to being tied up and whipped brutally for breaking eggs. This contrast makes even clearer the grotesqueness and gruesomeness of the slavery system. The third change in Django appearance occurs when Schultz officially sets him free. They both shake hands upon their renewed partnership and Schultz's promise to help Django free his wife Broomhilda after the winter. Django changes his attire again, this time to a more Cowboy looking style, he gets his own saddle, with a „D“ embossed in it, starting an almost apprenticeship under Schultz's lead. He learns to read, to use language and to shoot and more and more distinguishes himself from the other slaves. When the winter is over Schultz and Django venture to Mississippi, the City having its own intro title screens that scrolls along from right to left over the screen along with lines of black slaves walking in both directions down a muddy road. After drifting off into a more western theme, with grand landscape shots and two men on horses riding along through

¹¹⁷ Fig. 24.

deserted land, the movie gets back to the subject of slavery, when Django and Schultz come up with a plan to rescue Broomhilda.

Through the invention of the sport of Mandingo fighting the power of the slaveowners over their property gets emphasized and pulled into the area of the grotesque, even if it is not a historical real sport it still makes a point of how just how wrong it is to claim someone else as their property. There are two men fighting for their lives, not even their freedom, just their naked bare miserable lives while whites and other blacks look on all trapped in that system more or less. The slaveowners consider them mere animals, wild beasts that fight each other for their masters pleasure. However it is made clear that the slaves despise this, the slave who wins the depicted Mandingo fight, does not look pleased and just like Mede in *Mandingo* has traces of regret upon his features. As mentioned above the film has been criticized for its violence, but frankly there is nothing non-violent about the concept of slavery and the visualizations of the violence caused by this system have a their rightful place in a film such as this. Violence and elegancy get grossly mixed together, however the apparent light mood of the onlookers and the neutral faces of the slaves in the room change to horror and sadness when the fight nears its end and winner is forced to kill his opponent. The slaves gazes tell stories of cruelty and the coercion to play along in this cruel game¹¹⁸. Django however lives to his role as a black slaver. Even though in the slave hierarchy this makes him the lowest of the low. He goes as far as to openly criticize white people, „You don't wear a hat in the house white man. Even I know that.“, pulling a white slaver of his horse after being insulted by him and talking back to another white slaver by the name of Billy Crash,

Billy Crash: „Oh, now you are one lucky nigger.“

Django: „You better listen to your boss, white boy.“

B.C: „Oh, I'm gonna go walking in the moonlight with you.“

D: „You wanna hold my hand?“

After which conversation a rap song starts, commenting on Django's development.¹¹⁹ Django plays his cruel role so well that Schultz decides to have a word with him, and Django beats him with his own teachings,

¹¹⁸ Fig. 25, Schultz is not amused about the cruel blood sport and loses his cheery façade for a moment, the girl next to him his close to tears and in Fig. 26, the black bartender turns a sad gaze towards the gruesome scene.

¹¹⁹ Rick Ross, 100 Black Coffins.

Schultz: „Don't get so carried away with your retribution. You lose sight of why we're here.“

Django: „You think I lost sight of that?“

S: „Yes I do, stop antagonizing Candie. You're going to blow this whole charade, or more likely get us both killed (...).“

D: „I'm not antagonizing him. I'm intriguing him.“

S: „You're yelling abuse at these poor slaves.“

D: „I recall the man who had me kill another man in front of his son and he didn't bad a [sic] eye. You remember that?“

(...)

D: „What you said was that this is my world and in my world you gotta get dirty. So that's what I'm doing. I'm getting dirty.“

And with that Django wins the argument against his mentor and rises above him.

What follows is one of the most cruel scenes in the movie, when Calvin Candie has his dogs rip apart a runaway Mandingo fighter that is of no more use to him. The slave already looks beat down and generally finished, his right eye is swollen and bruised and his face is disfigured from taking too many hits¹²⁰. When he refuses to fight another fight for Mr. Candie, he ceases to have any further value for the slave owner and thus Mr. Candie condemns the slave to become dog food. The gruesomeness of this scene could be called sickening. However the only one emotionally touched by it appears to be Dr. Schultz, who later is shown not able to get the images out of his head. Which later cause him to lose his nerves and the situation at Candyland escalates into a shoot out and a bloodbath as could be expected of a Quentin Tarantino movie as well as the unexpected turn of events. The screen goes blank when the viewer expects Django to be shot by the the group of men circling in on him, however he is shown hanging upside down, naked, in what appears to be a barn. He is back at where he started, though now he is not the same man inside as he was before. His punishment is to be sent to a mining company that works their slaves to death, Django however uses the language and persuasion skills he has learned from Dr. Schultz to talk the slavers into setting him free. After Django reveals his true self to the other slaves and rides away on an unsaddled unbridled horse - which now appears as free and untamed as he is¹²¹ - the one slave that had been giving him hateful glares now looks after him in admiration and pride, a smile appearing on his face. Django is indeed free, and with great self esteem and pride rides out to take what is his, and his inspiration at that moment sparks in the other slave.

¹²⁰ Fig. 27.

¹²¹ Fig. 29.

Django's quest for revenge peaks in these last scenes and he gets back at everyone who has done wrong, he kills the trackers who let the dogs tear up the runaway Mandingo fighter and executes every single white person in Candyland. Just as in *Inglorious Basterds*, Tarantino offers a revenge that never happened.

When Django finds Dr. Schultz body in the stables, he kisses his own hand and lays it upon the others head, speaking „Auf Wiedersehen.“, which translates as Dr. Schultz earlier pointed out, to „Until we meet again.“, showing the connection he had to the german man. In the end Django blows up Candyland in defiance of the old house slave Stephen's words, who claimed that there will always be a Candyland, meaning that the system that makes a place like Candyland possible is inevitable and indestructible. By blowing up Candyland, Django proves a point and makes very clear that no system is forever.

The old house slave Stephen is an interesting character, persona- wise he appears to be a mixture between the good, loyal Uncle Tom and the character of Mammy. He treats Calvin Candie, who is his master, in a similar fashion as Mammy treats Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. In a patronizing way he questions Candie's actions and is in need of a little extra persuasion to do as he is told as well as venting out his own opinions, in a low tone, while fulfilling his masters wishes. He as well as Mammy, has internalized the system of slavery and can not think outside that system, but have also found quite the comfortable spot to be for themselves in that particular society. The first time Stephen is introduced he is signing a cheque in Calvin Candie's name and with Calvin Candie's signature, indicating that he has quite the amount of say in Candyland. This is further emphasized when he is the one pointing out to Candie that he is being framed by Dr. Schultz and Django. He waits for Candie with a glass of liquor, explaining to him in detail what he thinks of the both of them, Candie and Stephen almost appear as equals when they sit opposite each other, banding up against the intruders who obviously think they can bend the laws of the slave system¹²². Stephens involvement in this system and somewhat brainwash become more apparent in his last words to Django, even after being shot in both knee caps by him.

Stephen: „You ain't gonna get away with this Django! (...) You can run nigger, but they gonna find your ass! (...) This Candyland, nigger! You can't destroy Candyland! We been here! There's always gonna be a Candyland!“

Even when facing death he can't imagine a different system, Django's defiance of that system disturbs him so much, that he wants him dead just as much as the white people do. However, as

¹²² Fig. 28.

stated above, by blowing up Candyland, Django quite visually proves him wrong¹²³. The other slaves are depicted as having found their place in the system, their gazes sometimes revealing that they are not content with it, however they stay silent and endure. Unlike in *Gone with the Wind* or *Birth of a Nation*, this system is only deemed a good one by those in power and not by the majority. The difference to *Mandingo* is that the sexual gaze of whites towards their black slaves gets reduced to a mere minimum in *Django Unchained*, so much that sexuality mainly exists between the lines of conversations. A comparison to the depiction of the slaves in *Amistad* and *Django Unchained* proves difficult, since the slaves in *Amistad* are not really slaves and closely connected to their african heritage, they have an identity and aren't disconnected with their heritage. Character wise Cinqué and Django are comparable in their depiction, they both learn to use to the ways of the white man to their benefit. Which is relatable to bell hooks theory that a black man can thrive to something in american society if he adapts to the ways of the white mans rules¹²⁴. They are also both strong black men, warriors in their own ways, headstrong and handsome, ready to do anything to be reunited with their loved ones. As Zemon Davis writes, being separated from their families was one of the biggest traumas of slavery¹²⁵, and this is also shown in *Django Unchained*, when he and Broomhilda get intentionally sold separately as punishment by their former slave owner. Apart from Dr. Schultz the white people in *Django Unchained* are all in favor of slavery and do not get away with their opinions. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Schultz appears as someone from another world, and quite frankly he is from another world, namely Germany. He claims himself that he has only spent four years in America so far, yet his english sounds more sophisticated than any other characters in the movie. One could also interpret him as being a symbol for a humanistic education, he speaks several languages and appears to be well read in both history and fiction. He functions as a teacher for Django, who grows from his lectures and becomes the strong self esteemed man he is towards the ending. This could also be read as a statement on education, that with the right tutoring and knowledge base, one can rise to greatness and as mentioned above, Django surpasses Dr. Schultz at one point and manages to beat his mentor in an argument. Due to his education and standing above the ways of the Americans, Dr. Schultz also appears weaker than they are, because when the bill of sale is issued for Broomhilda he can not rid himself of the images of the slave that had been torn apart by dogs. Like any educated humanistic mind would, he is appalled by that experience. He stops the woman from playing Beethoven's „Für Elise.“, which in his mindset appears as a gross clash between primal violence against a helpless human being and the civilized high culture for which

¹²³ Fig.30.

¹²⁴ b. hooks, *Black Looks, Race and Representation*, Boston, South End Press, 1992. p. 91.

¹²⁵ N. Zemon Davis, 2000, pp.38.

Beethoven's music stands. In the end he gets himself shot, by not conforming with the other white people and shooting Calvin Candie instead of shaking his hand. It is questionable whether Schultz knew he was going to die after that or whether he choose rather to die than become one of them.

Calvin Candie on the other hand appears as antagonist to Dr. Schultz and unpleasant character from the start. He has internalized the opinions and ways of life of the Old South so much that he willingly accepts the so called science of Phrenology to back them up, as he so visually demonstrates to Django and Dr. Schultz when learning of their attempted fraud. He is visually, verbally and behavior wise an opposite to Dr. Schultz. Whereas Candie dresses colorfully, has a small beard and his ivory cigarette holder appears to be his main accessory, Schultz prefers grey tones, has a larger beard and no need to play with an accessory at all times. Candie pretends to be an intellectual, preferring to be called Monsieur Candie, even though he does not speak french, while Dr. Schultz is an intellectual and does in fact speak french. Furthermore Candie appears to be in need to prove himself, his actions loud and rash, always yelling for attention, while Dr. Schultz remains calm and collect mostly, though that might also be due to their age difference. Overall their differences eventually build up so much tension that they battle to win over the other, which leads to both of their deaths. In a way both characters are overdrawn, but if one wants to put any meaning into that it could be read as humanism kills slavery.

As for the violence, as mentioned above, the detailed depiction of violence is a Quentin Tarantino trademark and is almost expected of a Tarantino movie. Violence is omnipresent in Django Unchained and blood flows richly. However there are some visual representations that point to the violence of slavery as well, for example the scar marks on almost every slaves back and the runaway „R“ that is burnt in both Django's and Broomhilda's faces, as well as the bruised and beaten face of the slave D'Artagnan, who gets torn by the dogs.

Overall, even though this movie is about the subject of slavery and depicts that particular system in all gross detail it still has to be regarded as highly fictional and postmodern in style. Tarantino makes no effort in being historically or politically correct, just as he did with Inglorious Basterds, when he permitted the Jews a revenge scenario, he did with the american black slaves. Tarantino aims to entertain in the first place¹²⁶, however someone who has no idea about americas slave past might as Zemon Davis put it for *Amistad*, walk away with a general sense of the actual historical

¹²⁶ S. Kaul, J. Pierre Palmier, 2013, p.7.

events¹²⁷. And just as if needing to manifest the impression *Django Unchained* may have left within the viewers in 2013 the movie *12 Years a Slave* came out. It will not be analyzed in length in this thesis, however it is interesting to compare it briefly to *Django Unchained*, because *12 Years a Slave* has quite the different approach to the topic and puts a heavier emphasize on being historically correct, which could however be seen as its weaknesses because it also appears as too political correct. Again the main character is not aided by an American but by someone of a different nationality, namely Canadian, furthermore the language the protagonist and other captive slaves have reminds one of a stage play rather than a movie. They speak in structured and sophisticated english, rather than the southern or american accent mainly used in *Django Unchained*. Whereas *Django Unchained* most probably refers to a younger generation and is closely related to popular culture, *12 Years a Slave* appears to have been made for a more mature audience, just like *Amistad* it is not using the topic as a means to depict violence but rather to raise awareness for a certain historical period.

5. Conclusion

As shown in the theory part African Americans are to this day divided and torn by the after - effects of slavery as well as by the question of what defines them and how to fit into white supremacist society without giving up and negate everything about black culture. On top of that the visual representations of slavery in mainstream Hollywood have remained scarce in number and have been like most topics of inconvenience, such as homosexuality or the genocide on Native Americans, kept away from the public eye and conscience. This thesis has outlined how Hollywood is an instance for the distribution of opinions, ideas and ideology and how it has shaped the imagination and cultural understanding of America from the very beginning of film history. As well as showing how in early Hollywood from the 1915s to the 1960s, a sort of natural racial division has been distributed through films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*, where there is no questioning of the system of slavery and it is depicted as a God given order, and its destruction shown as the invitation of chaos. The Civil Rights Movement in the sixties has brought some clarity into the condition of racism in America, however the film historic era and genre, namely blaxploitation, that it sparked was short lived and soon died out into stereotyping once again. It was not until the 1990s that attempts were made to revive the topic of slavery and educate a new generation on how America was built up in the first place. This thesis proclaimed that Obamas election as the first black President can be seen as something positive on the racial front, however critics such as Tim Wise remain skeptical and propose not a demise of

¹²⁷ N. Zemon Davies, 2000, p. 79.

racist ideas but rather a transition. Films like *Django Unchained* and *12 Years a Slave*, give hope that the American society is changing because the visual input through Hollywood is changing. Though perhaps just like racism as an ideology adapted to the modern times, so did the visuals. In *Gone with the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*, one could speak of racism 1.0, whereas nowadays one has to look deeper to detect it perhaps. The initial question of this thesis is how the representation of slavery has changed through mainstream Hollywood history.

Through analyzing the above mentioned films in conclusion one could say that the representation has become more accurate to the historical facts and leave the viewer with a general sense of what happened. However in connection with the theory on racism it becomes clear that even though the visual representations have moved on to a more genuine depiction of what happened in the past, it is still not embedded in American society, the struggle for racial equality is far from over in America, and perhaps a first step would be to cross out all the categorizing words in front of American, and start defining everyone as simply a citizen of the United States of America.

Therefore a statement can be made only on the change of the visuals, it is apparent that the depiction of slavery has changed in the last century, from gross stereotyping and unfavorable depictions of African Americans, in *Birth of a Nation*, to highly sophisticated and wronged people in *12 years a Slave*. Since this thesis did not have empirical analyze at hand it is hard to say how these changes in mainstream Hollywood have affected the American society as a whole, given the theories on racism and latest news reports as well as television shows it is still highly questionable whether the more accurate depiction of slavery has changed anything in the way Americans, black or white, think of their past and themselves. The film industries interest in the topic of slavery may as well just be a marketing interest for new topics, given the discussion that Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* has caused it might as well be true that in allowing these topics Hollywood is merely harvesting a new market. These are theories however and only time will tell how the topic of slavery will develop and whether it remains prominent enough to be embedded into Americas cultural memory as a large and important part of American history.

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