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The Civil War 12 years a slave

The narrative of Solomon Northup is a true depiction of the slavery in the 19th century. The period was synonymous with men being duped in the pursuit for a better life and job opportunities only to be turned into slaves. Once one was a slave then they stayed into slavery for quite a long time being passed from one master to the other. The film “12 years a slave” makes a detailed revelation of the conditions the slaves lived in while in bondage. The portrait of Solomon in his plantain suit shows the true picture of the working conditions the slaves had in the plantations. In his account Solomon recounts the ordeal of being owned by several masters and a unique detail emerges in his narrative where he reports that while in the Pine Woods he received the best treatment¹. This shows that in the wake of all the negativity surrounding slavery some masters could afford to be humane. Solomon account of event while in slavery is indeed a credible source that gives a lot of insights into slavery at that time.

On the other hand Solomon’s experience in Bayou Boeuf is indeed a representation of an all rounded account of slavery. Solomon is unbiased in giving his account of events revealing all the prejudices and attitudes that were existent in that historical period. He thus gives an account of his life in slavery candidly without deviation from the truth leaving it to the audience to be the judge of the facts. The representation of slavery in the film “12 years a slave” is a work of art that at times could

¹ Solomon Northup and Dolen Perkins-Valdez, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*

be said to be an exaggeration of slavery facts. The gory image description of Solomon's encounter is somewhat exaggerated and can be forgiven for being an artistic interpretation.

Solomon Northup's memoir published in 1853 and the movie '12 Years A Slave' have contrasting comparisons that bring out a clear of what slavery was like in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. Though slightly altered, the movie is points out Northup's life perfectly; some of the events in the movie have been changed from what really happened to give the story more life. The movie is a perfect work that brought to light the American story and stamps authority against what American media lies they have been feeding us. The director and script writer got the timing perfectly just like in the memoir where they depict Northup's deception as having happened in 1841 and his acquiring of freedom in 1853. Both the movie and the memoir show him being tricked by one Alexander Merrill and Joseph who claimed to be in the circus business. Northup being a violin player they enticed him with promises of high pay if he joined them in travelling to Washington DC for a circus.

According to Northup's 1853 memoir, he was married to Anne Hampton with three children. On the other hand, the movie 'Twelve Years a Slave' only mentions two children; Margaret and Alonso leaving out their eldest daughter Elizabeth. Conversely, the movie shows Robert being murdered for trying to protect Eliza from being raped by a sailor unlike what really happened according to Northup's memoir which states that Robert died of an illness (smallpox).

Thus, the memoirs and the movie accomplish their primary purpose to tell the slavery

story from Northup's personal account, though differently; the movie directors slightly alter some scenes to add juice to what really happened compared to the real accounts of Solomon Northup's autobiography. Everything in the movie flows in resemblance to what Northup wrote with an ever so visceral force that brings life to it.

Charles Ball narrative of being a slave in South Carolina is yet another story of a black slavery that highlights the slavery issues in the 18th Century. He was born in Maryland but his family broke up as a result of slavery when his mother was sold as a slave. His tribulations do not end there as while growing up his wife is also snatched from him and his children sold as slaves to different slave traders². This describes the life the black slaves went through in the 18th Century. The slave traders did not care about their families as a result of this it led to several broken families. The effect of this on the slaves was that they led a very depressing life and the laborious lives they led in slavery did not ease the pain of losing their loved ones. The movie "12 years a slave" makes a true depiction of the true picture of events as the depression and life of misery the slaves had while in bondage.

Despite escaping from the slave camp and starting a new life, Ball's family was recaptured and returned to slavery. This illustrates the extent of slavery during these periods. Even though he escaped again, his family could not manage to escape. Ball's memoirs are a reflection of the way slaves lived in constant worry and fear of being recaptured by the masters. They were exposed to constant torture by the masters as he

² Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States. A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and Was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War,*

narrates in his memoir how another master walked to him shaking him violently and proclaiming that he was his property and that he had to leave with him for Georgia. In the process of being bought by his handler he said that his purchaser ordered him to put his hands behind his back and bound him with a strong cord. This description by Ball shows the inhumane treatment the slaves went through and how their masters regarded them as animals. The movie “12 years a Slave” does a good job when it comes to the depiction of how the slave masters treated them the inhumane treatment of Patsy in the film by his master such that despite being the most productive laborer in the farm she could not get soap or even new clothe as a reward for her hard work in the cotton plantation instead she is condemned and flogged mercilessly when he seeks this “luxuries” from another master. This depiction by Steve McQueen in the direction of the film gives a true picture of how the slaves were treated during this historical time.

Hughes recollection of life under slavery in Baltimore in his interview reveals a lot of things on slavery especially since Hughes is an older person. His recollection of the slavery days through the interview is quite reliable given the fact that he gives a first-hand account of his experiences in the slavery period. He recollects events in his time while he was so young this shows that no age restriction was applied on slaves³. Instead slaves of all age groups from the young to the elderly were victims of the trade. However according to Hughes the young lads were not badly treated as the elderly. The depiction in the film “12 years a slave” reveal that all the slaves were given the same treatment irrespective of their age. Hughes recalls as soon as they reached around 12 or 13 years

³ We Was Jus’ Turned Out Like a Lot of Cattle”: Fountain Hughes Recalls His Life in Slavery and Freedom, Baltimore, 1944," interview by Hermond Norwood

they could be offered shoes by the masters. They also were allowed to wear the slave dresses. Hughes also reveals that as long as their parents were slaves they the children by default were slaves and had no right of being freedmen by virtue of being their parents children. Hughes was lucky enough unlike other slaves who could be sold from one master to the other. He was not sold from one master to the other.

Hughes experience in slavery complicates the depiction in the film “ 12 years a slave” his experience of slavery is not as harsh as depicted in the film. It can be said his experience was rather a smooth one as he master treated him with decorum that he did not face quite a hard time as revealed in the analysis of the other primary sources.

Olaudah Equiano narrative of slavery is quite different in comparison to the other primary sources explored. His perspective is from a slave who was kidnapped when he was just 11 years and later on sold to British slavers who later on sold him to Virginia⁴. He later on was sold to Philadelphia where he bought his freedom and later on played a critical role in he abolishment of slavery.

His narrative of slavery is an emancipation narrative and the facts he present make it credible source of information. This source is important as it goes ahead in providing content that for the film “12 years a slave” as it shows how the slaves would acquire their freedom. The long extended family the slaves had is depicted in this narrative. The low mortality of slaves is also shown here. This is so because of the poor conditions the slaves stayed in. This sources is thus a very reliable source on the subject matter because of the accuracy of the content it provides.

⁴ Olaudah Equiano, "Olaudah Equiano Chapter 3," ed. Steven Mintz, in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*

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