

I. Pre-Civil War Era and Apartheid

This research examines Quentin Tarantino's movie *Django Unchained* in terms of representation of slavery and apartheid in the pre-civil war era in America. Applying the episodic format and visual template of classic and spaghetti Westerns to a revenge saga mostly set in the Deep South just before the Civil War, the film makes a point of pushing the savagery of slavery to the forefront but does so in a way that rather amazingly dovetails with the heightened historical, stylistic and comic sensibilities at play. The anecdotal, odyssey-like structure of this long, talky saga could be considered indulgent, but Tarantino injects the weighty material with so many jocular, startling and unexpected touches that it's constantly stimulating. A stellar cast and strong action and comedy elements will attract a good-sized audience internationally, though distaste for the subject matter and the irreverent take on a tragic subject might make some prospective viewers hesitate.

Tarantino's affinity for black culture and interest in the ways blacks and whites relate always have been evident, but they have never before been front and center to the extent that they are in *Django Unchained*. Some might object to the writer-director's tone, historical liberties, comic japes or other issues, but there can be no question who gets the shaft here. This is a story of justifiable vengeance, pure and simple, and no paleface is spared, even the good German who facilitates a slave's transformation into a take-no-prisoners hunter of whites who trade in black flesh.

Unlike most men of the Old West, Schultz is an Old World man of many words, rarely using one where four or five will do as he articulately and amusingly explains himself to a succession of skeptical and well-armed ruffians. After considerable verbal ado, he takes down the leaders of a chain gang of slaves, one of whom, Django (Jamie

Foxx), can identify the notorious Brittle Brothers, for whom Schultz hopes to collect the considerable reward.

Freeing the slave from his chains, well-mannered Schultz is polite and businesslike with the untidy Django in a way the latter certainly has never experienced, putting him on a horse, offering him \$25 per brother if they find them and boldly marching him into a saloon in the next town they hit to the gaping astonishment of the locals. Expressing the character's confidence in his intelligence and a huckster's delight in his skill at the con, Waltz gives a wonderfully large performance that breathes life into the film from the start. There might, in fact, be an element of fair play in Tarantino making Waltz's German an exemplary fellow this time around after the actor's villainous Nazi turn in *Basterds*, for which he won a supporting actor Oscar.

These initial passages serve to communicate how alarming it is in this context for whites to see, "a nigger on a horse." But this is just an appetizer for what white folks will end up encountering at Django's hands before he's done serving up his just deserts using the man-hunting skills taught him by Schultz. In a heart-to-heart, Django reveals that his wife was sold away to another master, but of particular interest to Schultz is the news that her name is Broomhilda and that she speaks German, as she was raised by people from the old country. After Schultz explains the significance of her name, Django resolves to become his wife's Siegfried, to slay the dragon that is her evil master and rescue his bride. Only Tarantino could come up with such a wild cross-cultural mash, a smorgasbord of ingredients stemming from spaghetti Westerns, German legend, historical slavery, modern rap music, proto-Ku Klux Klan fashion, an assembly of 60s and 70s character actors and a leading couple meant to be the distant forebears of Blaxploitation hero John Shaft and make it not only digestible but actually pretty delicious. Some of it is over-the-top nutty, and a few things - like a mass argument that

sounds like a bunch of modern Californians nattering at one another - come off as rather silly. But much of it is inspired or close to it, just as the underlying outrage at the fact that slavery even existed in this country until 148 years ago, is well and truly felt.

Quite naturally, given the historical setting, the N-word gets a heavy workout, by whites and blacks alike. But much more forceful is the cruelty dispensed by the Southern whites, both as punishment and whim; attack dogs are unleashed on one man, Mandingo fighters, in an homage to the unforgettable 1975 Mandingo, battle to the death in a beautifully appointed drawing room for the wealthy amusement, a woman is locked naked in a metal "hot box," genital mutilation is arranged for a man and much more. For all the film's genre hopping and playful spirit, this dead-serious foundation is never far from sight. And so it is here, as the unlikely pair of Schultz and Django rack up quite a fortune in bounties to finance their scheme to buy back Broomhilda from her owner, Southern scion Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio), a smooth-talking, elegant young gentleman who welcomes Schultz to his vast plantation, Candyland, even if he can scarcely tolerate the presence of his black partner - who by now has traded in his ludicrous bright blue Little Lord Fauntleroy suit for the leather, hat and sunglasses of a fancy-pants cowboy.

In this way, the movie makes an attempt to depict the pre-civil war era of slavery in America although some of the scenes appear more to be hyped rather than being based in reality and research. In order to know the real situation of the antebellum America, many works on the issue can be taken as reference. William F. Muggleston, in his work "Southern Literature as History: Slavery in the Antebellum Novel" explicitly traces back the cause of perpetuation of slavery system in the South. He writes:

The South in the last three decades before the Civil War became an increasingly closed society on the subject of slavery. Several

developments account for this. The increase in cotton cultivation, especially in the Southwest, created a growing demand for slave labor. Following the electrifying Nat Turner rebellion of 1831, the state of Virginia made the fateful decision to keep the status quo regarding slavery, and the rest of the South fell into line with this determination. (3)

The extract shows the interrelationship between labor need in market and its impact on slavery in the antebellum America. The states in the South supported the slavery system unlike the pro-freedom North and this was one of the main issues that sparked the American Civil War. It shows that resistance against slavery and its subversion went hand in hand at the time. One of the best works that provide us with rare glimpse on the situation of slavery what distinguished the South from North can be found in the article “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” written by Edward Pessen and published in *Oxford Journal*. He states:

The most distinctive feature of the antebellum Southern economy, as of Southern life as a whole, was, of course, its "peculiar institution." Slavery had not been unknown in the North, flourishing through much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and persisting in New Jersey until 1846. But it had involved relatively few blacks and had had slight effect on Northern life and thought. Northern public opinion, better represented by the authors of the Federal Constitution in 1787 and the Missouri Compromise in 1820 than by the abolitionists of the antebellum decades, accepted slavery, approved of doing business with those who controlled it, abhorred its black victims, and loathed Northern whites who agitated against it. (6)

Pessen clearly mentions that slavery was not a new thing in the antebellum North. But what marked the clear difference was its institutionalization in order to supply regular slaves for the plantation. It reminds us of the Candie plantation depicted in the movie where slaves are shown to be brutally treated. The ‘Mandingos’ as depicted in the movie were slaves purchased merely to fight to death just to entertain their white buyers. The movie illustrates deep brutality against and abuse of the negro slaves in antebellum period. However, Pessen has an otherwise view that has not been considered by the cinematographers of the movie. He further suggests:

A fair reading of the recent evidence and argument is that, while more slaves by far worked as field hands, slaves also performed with great efficiency a great variety of other jobs, many of them skilled, allowing for significant economic differentiation within the slave community. And, as exemplary workers and as costly and valuable properties, skilled slaves were ordinarily spared gratuitous maltreatment or deprivation. Despite the inevitable brutality of the system, slaves appear to have managed to maintain the integrity of their personalities, customs, values, and family ties. (7)

Unlike the severe brutality depicted in the movie to satiate the expectation of present day angry audience who have little idea of what it was like to be a slave in those days, he carefully states that though the system was itself brutal, the efficient and skilled slaves had a dignity and status of their own. They were perfectly capable of maintaining familial ties and keep their values with little or no intervention from the whites. This has also been supported by several historians like Kenneth S. Greenberg who remarks that physical torture, as depicted in full scale in the movie, shown in plenty of scenes in the movie like locking of Broomhilda in the metal box underground, D’Artagnan’s brutal

death and so on, was not the defining feature of the slavery in antebellum south unlike the accusations from the northerners of that time. In his article, “Revolutionary Ideology and the Proslavery Argument: The Abolition of Slavery in Antebellum South Carolina” published in *The Journal of Southern History*, he states:

When northerners assaulted slavery by emphasizing the general maltreatment of slaves-the wide use of beatings, overwork, largescale starvation-South Carolinians could point to a wealth of evidence in refutation. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman's study of the economics of slavery, *Time on the Cross*, certainly presents the data more systematically than did antebellum South Carolinians, but the earlier statisticians probably persuaded more people. Antebellum Carolinians did not need a computer to tell them what their experience seemed to show them every day physical cruelty was not the defining characteristic of American slavery. (8)

Also several experts in antebellum slavery have opined on the cause of failure of the South to industrialize unlike the North that caused the vicious circle of persistence of slavery that produced more resistance to it as an antithesis. Thomas F. Huertas in his work “Damnifying Growth in the Antebellum south” digs into the persistence of slavery in the South and finds its reason as the failure to be industrialized. He mentions:

Ultimately, some historians contend, slavery, in conjunction with the South's comparative advantage in cotton, may have been responsible for the South's failure to industrialize, since planters, who dominated the southern political system and sat atop its income pyramid, found little economic or political incentive to invest in industry. (7)

The plantation owners like Mr. Candie in the movie have little incentive from the government to invest in modern industries. He purchases and sells slaves for his profit and has no vision to industrialize his estates. His major business is cotton plantation called Candyland. It is depicted so infamous that when King Schultz describes the Candie's plantation in the movie as "He owns the fourth biggest cotton plantation in Mississippi: Candyland," Django instantly recognizes it and says, "Ain't no slave ain't heard of Candyland" which shows the horror and disgust associated with the plantation and the atrocities within. In addition, the senators of the south in late 1850s were getting increasingly anxious about their declining representation in the senate and had to keep up with the pressure from the plantation owners represented by the characters like Mr. Candie in the movie. The obstruction of Senate by the southern representatives under the pressure from the rich plantation owners in order to perpetuate slavery in the antebellum period has been well described by historian Gregory J. Wawro in his seminal article, "Peculiar Institutions: Slavery, Sectionalism, and Minority Obstruction in the Antebellum Senate." He writes,

Southerners, regardless of party, were especially concerned about having minority status in the chamber because their overwhelming interests in the institution of slavery were threatened as their relative numerical strength in the Senate declined. Understanding obstruction in the Senate during this period is important because the institution has been viewed by many scholars as crucial in maintaining political stability over the issue of slavery, which would eventually rend apart the Union. (3)

Thus, antebellum America was a constant battleground on the cause of slavery between the relatively liberal North and conservative south which attempted to perpetuate slavery for regular supply of Negro slaves to the rich plantation owners of the

south whom they exploited both physically and mentally to the full. The southern senators constantly obstructed senate to filibuster the passage of anti-slavery laws which eventually gave rise to the destructive civil war in 1861 that lasted for more than four years. Despite some hyped incidents in the movie it is true that the slaves were treated merely as commodities to suit the economic interests of the owners. The slaves like D'Artagan are bought merely to fight to die as a Mandingo warrior. Similarly, Mr. Candie decides to sell the slave girl Broomhilda when Schultz offers a good amount for her. Gavin Wright, a historian of agricultural practices in America, in his article, "Slavery and American Agricultural History" explores the legal status of the slaves in that period. He mentions:

The property rights of slave owners in North America were secure. Property rights include such aspects of slavery as purchase and sale, accumulation, and collateral. In farming operations, property rights in slaves meant that decisions about location, choice of crops, and family labor participation were largely driven by profitability calculations, as opposed to the complex combination of motives, loyalties, constraints, and preferences that operate in a free society. (7)

Similarly, Django reverts the prevalent status quo about slavery, the slaves gradually began to revolt and according to Wright, "Over time, they perfected numerous techniques to foil their owners' demands and expand control over their own labor and lives" (7). The revolution favored by the characters Schultz and the freed slave Django himself was inevitable in the south despite the southerners' attempt to coax the northerners and the outsiders to accept the institution of slavery as something for granted. This is particularly corroborated by the article, "Friends and Foes of Slavery: Foreigners and Northerners in the Old South" by Dennis C. Rousey who claims that southerners

were still optimistic about the acceptance and support of the institution from the outsiders and surprisingly rare foreigners and northerners dared to speak against it. She claims,

This pattern of actual slave use was not necessarily obvious to all native southerners at the time. For southerners who favored an open-armed welcome to foreigners and northerners, there was, however, apparent evidence around them to encourage confidence in migrants' support for slavery. Very few foreigners and northerners were so bold or foolhardy as to proclaim publicly their opposition to, or even misgivings about, the peculiar institution. For optimistic native southerners, the silence of many outsiders might be construed as support for slavery and for opportunistic southerners the votes, labor, or consumer market represented by the outsiders could easily outweigh considerations about securing slavery as an institution. (9)

The extract above matches well with what the movie depicts. Schultz is one of the rare foreigners who dared to act to demolish the institution of slavery. And towards the end of the movie Django shouts, "I'm that one nigger in ten thousand." Scores of negroes are depicted in the movie but none is as brave as Django to revolt against the system. The ordinary negroes instead are subservient and even ready to kill and torture their fellow negroes. The so-called strong Mandingo Negro warriors are physically strong but mentally so weak that they are ready to fight until death against each other just to entertain the brutal plantation owner like Mr. Candie and his rich guests. Rousey further elaborates her claim that "Those native southerners who argued for welcoming and including foreigners and northerners could also cite evidence of explicit and enthusiastic support for slavery from some white migrants to the region, especially those who were

quite prosperous.” So, in line with the logic presented by Rousey, the film depicts the realistic aspect of the slavery system in the south. The hypocrisy of Mr. Candie and the subservience of Stephen, the head slave of the plantation complies with the proposition put forth by Slavery expert Peter Kolchin, who, in his article “Variations of Slavery in the Atlantic World” writes,

During the generation before the Civil War, defenders of southern slavery engaged in elaborate word games to show that real slavery existed not in the South but in the so-called free states and Europe. Although no one else went quite so far as Mississippi polemicist Henry Hughes, who renamed slavery "warranteeism" (slaves were "warrantees" and masters were "warrantors"), many southern ideologues insisted that the South's so-called slaves lived in comfort if not luxury compared to the peasants of Ireland and Italy or the "wage slaves". (5)

Mr. Candie himself acts as the warrantor of the slaves including Broomhilda and takes pride in exploiting her. This has been realistically depicted in the movies nevertheless, at times, the depiction seems more fanciful and less adhering to the facts. One instance of this is elaborated by the article of Juliet E. K. Walker discusses on the black entrepreneurship during the antebellum period of slavery. In her article “Racism, Slavery, and Free Enterprise: Black Entrepreneurship in the United States before the Civil War,” she highlights and explores the existence of black entrepreneurship during the era of slavery that might stun any modern reader. In reconstructing the early business history of black America; Professor Walker emphasizes the diversity and complexity of antebellum black entrepreneurship, both slave and free. With few exceptions, prevailing historical assessments have confined their analyses of pre-Civil War black business participation to marginal enterprises, concentrated primarily in craft and service

industries. In America's preindustrial mercantile business community, however, blacks established a wide variety of enterprises, some of them remarkably successful. The business activities of antebellum blacks not only offer insights into the multiplicity of responses to the constraints of racism and slavery, but also highlight relatively unexplored areas in the historical development of the free enterprise system in the United States. She explains:

Blacks, both slave and free, participated in America's antebellum economy as entrepreneurs within the tradition of creative capitalists.

While historical sources exist to document their business activities, few historical studies examine antebellum black entrepreneurship within the commercial context and social setting of the nation's free enterprise system in the four decades before the Civil War. In the occupational distribution of the antebellum labor force, only a small number of black workers participated in the business community as entrepreneurs. (1)

Her work remains so original that few have ever ventured into the field of Black entrepreneurship in such an era of slavery. Even the filmmakers of the *Django Unchained* have completely ignored this possibility. The major characters Schulz, a white redeemer of the black slave Django, and the freed negro himself are the only rebellious characters exercising their free will in the movie. All other black characters depicted are the slaves owned by the plantation owners. None of them has been depicted running any small enterprise. The blacks are depicted getting shocked when they saw a nigger (Django) riding on a horse like a white man. This facet of the antebellum era has been completely ignored by the filmmakers. Walker acknowledges but further emphasizes the difficulty the Blacks had for entrepreneurship during the era. She elaborates,

Doubtless, when viewed strictly within the context of traditional interpretations of the antebellum black experience, Afro-American business participation beyond the emphasis on small mar enterprises presents an historical anomaly. The legal constrain slavery emphatically denied the economic freedom requisite for business activity among the bondsmen, while institutional racism, buttressed by proscriptive legislation, severely limited the potential development of any enterprise undertaken by free blacks. (2)

The harm done by the institutionalization of slavery particularly in the south was not just only on the African-Americans but also to the entire population of southerners. Their dependence on slave labor, lack of innovation and conservative mentality pushed the south further down in terms of development. The very difference in the attitudes of two white men namely, Mr. Schulz who came from free north and Mr. Candie, the atrocious plantation owner of the south clearly represents two conflicting ideologies of the era. This has been further supported by Aaron W. Marrs in his article “The Iron Horse Turns South: A History of Antebellum Southern Railroads.” He claims that the conservative mentality of southerners on perpetuating slavery was mainly responsible for the fall of south. He remarks,

As a result, the South has been partly excluded from the story of the economic and technological transformations taking place in antebellum America: southerners rejected "innovation and reform," while their northern counterparts pursued these goals enthusiastically. Slavery was not only damaging to the millions of African-Americans who toiled under the slave regime, but it also prevented white southerners from enjoying the full fruits of technological develop blossoming in the north. (4)

This fact has been beautifully presented in the movie when Schultz and the freed Negro Django foil the plans of the owner of the Candyland and revolt against the system of slavery. The southern plantation owners were killed mercilessly because of the atrocity they inflicted upon the slaves. Thus, they brought the destruction upon themselves. Slavery plunged the United States into a bloody Civil War, left legacies of nasty and sometimes terribly violent racial oppression, and mired the South in a regional underdevelopment and poverty that lasted until emerged as the "sunbelt" in the 1970s. Yet, in this telling, slavery was all but irrelevant to the main story of American development, which was about commerce, finance, cities, industry, and the political and legal institutions that fostered them—particularly, if not solely, in the North. The complex relationship between slavery and its economic impact on the agriculture based Southern states has been explained in detail by Campbell and Lowe in their article “Economic Aspects of Antebellum Texas Agriculture” as follows:

Antebellum Texas was an overwhelmingly agricultural society. Three-quarters of its free (and even more of its slave population were directly engaged in farming of some type, whether it be small-scale self-sufficient food production on the northern plains, stock raising in southern Texas, or cotton culture in the eastern uplands. Conversations in taverns and hotels and on the front porches of country houses sooner or later turned to the fluctuating price of cotton, land values, slave labor, or the unpredictable weather's effect on crops, agriculture dominated the Lone Star State's economy and society. (2)

The booming cotton trade was one of the main reasons for the expansion of slavery in the south. The transatlantic take-off of the cotton textile industry also helped

to drive slavery's expansion in the southern United States. American planters and farmers grew little cotton for sale in the eighteenth century, but they increasingly devoted land and slaves to cotton production from the 1790s onward. When cotton prices were high the slave demand soared high. As Adam Rothman in his article "Slavery and National Expansion in the United States" writes,

By 1840, southern planters and farmers were producing more than six hundred million pounds of cotton per year - a majority of the world's crop - and most of it was exported to Great Britain, the world's largest manufacturer of cotton textiles. Cotton alone accounted for more than half the value of all U.S. exports in the decades before the Civil War. Although cotton planters were prone to a boom-and-bust economic cycle, vulnerable to weather and worms, and often tangled in debt, many nevertheless believed that they enjoyed an unassailable position in the world economy. (25)

Overall, *Django Unchained* has been partially able to depict the real situation of slavery in the antebellum America. Depicting the system of slavery in America is a difficult venture. Doing so requires filmmakers to balance addressing the violence, brutality, and oppression surrounding slavery, but also keeping in mind the sensitivities of the audience. When *Django Unchained* premiered in 2012, it was clear that this film was not like slavery films of the past. The film, set in the late 1850s in the Southern U.S., shows a slave who is rescued and trained by a bounty hunter to work for his and his wife's freedom. *Django Unchained* has the characteristics of a traditional Tarantino film, and it explores the spaghetti western style with elements of drama and comedy during the protagonist's journey. As is typical of a Tarantino production, the movie was met with controversy: critics and audiences lined up on two sides of the film, with some

deriding what they considered a flippant depiction of slavery and with others praising a bold portrayal of a violent system. *Django Unchained* follows Django, a slave, after he meets Dr. King Schultz, a German bounty hunter who needs Django's help identifying the wanted men Schultz is after. The duo strike a deal in which Django will aid Schultz in his search, and in which Schultz promises to liberate Django from his slavery after the bounty has been collected. Schultz begins training Django to be a bounty hunter, and this begins the pair's journey. Django tells Schultz that he wants freedom for his wife Broomhilda as well, from whom he was separated after they attempted to run away. This leads the partners on a journey that ends when they find her at Calvin Candie's plantation. Critics have focused considerably on the fact that Tarantino is white.

Numerous critics have claimed that the film would have been more accurate had a black director created it. In addition, Reviewing the Critical Conversation about *Django Unchained* people like prominent filmmaker Spike Lee have repeatedly criticized the film for its portrayal of slavery, calling it irresponsible and disrespectful (Zakarin). However, in *Django Unchained*, most of the black characters are portrayed more positively than the white characters. By the end of the movie, almost every central white character dies, leaving the black characters to tell the end of the story. Typical slave movies in Hollywood have a white character in control of narration. But by flipping this traditional Hollywood structure on its head, the film avoids reserving negative portrayals for black characters. Instead, it gives the black characters the platform to complete their story. Thus, so far it can be asserted that though the antebellum era of slavery was quite complicated in itself to historically examine, *Django Unchained* obviously borrows some facts from the period and deliberately mingles some spaghetti twists to the plot in order to commercialize in the market as the facts alone

seem less appealing to the audience. The next chapter focuses on the way the movie depicts the slavery and apartheid and its reflection on the screenplay of the movie.

II. Representation of Slavery and Apartheid Era in *Django Unchained*

Django Unchained takes place in the Antebellum South and follows a freed slave on his vengeful journey to free his wife. This chapter analyzes how accurately slavery and racial segregation are depicted in the contemporary era. *Django Unchained* also makes bold choices in its portrayal of race. In many ways, the film critiques white characters with the portrayal of slave owners as incredibly stupid and/or relentlessly cruel. Many white characters act unintelligently in the film, and others are simply blinded by their racism. Furthermore, Tarantino includes instances such as the comedic proto-Ku Klux Klan scene. The dialogue delivered by Spencer Bennett isn't less funny and ironical. The screenplay of the movie at the forty-first minute reads:

Now unless they start shootin' first, nobody shoot 'em. That's way too simple for these jokers. We're gonna whip that nigger lover to death. And I'm gonna personally, strip and clip that garboon myself. Having said his blood thirsty words, he puts the flour sack over his head. He tussles with the sack for a bit, then from inside the sack. (37)

The picture given below reveals the night outdoor reveals the close up of the backside of the Klan leader Spencer and the members with torches in the background listening to his speech. The members are clad with masks and are depicted as senseless fools talking loudly about trivial matters in southern accent. The scene is of night. The camera angle reveals the aggressive members ready to kill King Schulz and Django. However, the Ku Klux Klan mob ends up getting hurt and killed by the dynamite blast as the surviving ones flee the scene in a headlong flight. Their vulgar conversation on the petty matter of head sacks and the dislocated eyeholes adds true entertainment to the otherwise violent and serious scenes of the movie. A mob of white characters plot to kill Django and Schultz, and these are gestures resembling those of the Ku Klux Klan.



Fig 1: The Ku Klux Klan mob (41:10 - 43:12)

The scene focuses on how their attempt humorously falls apart. This is one of the main instances of comedy in the film, for the Klan members spend most of the time arguing about their masks and how the eyeholes were not cut well enough for them to see. Some have argued that this comedic portrayal comes at a cost, making slave owners look like a punch line and ignoring the violence of their actions. In Ebony's article, "The Price of Django," writer Blair Kelley says, "The men and women who owned slaves were not bizarre cartoon villains or the bumbling proto-Klansmen depicted in *Django Unchained*. They were educated. They attended churches. And, they used their education and religion to try to justify the horror that the majority of their wealth was not in land or livestock, but their ownership of other human beings." According to Kelley, this portrayal of some of these white characters diminishes their cruel role into nearly insignificant comedic caricatures. The film devalues their intelligence and manipulation, instead portraying stupidity as the cause of their cruelty. The white characters and their language are not correctly depicted by the movie. Instead, it degrades them into foul-speaking bunch of fools. The following extract from the screenplay proves it:

Fuck all y'all! I'm going home. I watched my wife work all day gettin' thirty bags ready for you ungrateful sonsabitches! And all I hear is criticize, criticize, criticize. From now on don't ask me or mine for nothin'! Willard rides off. O.B. removes his bag, and yells after Willard. O.B., I tole yo to keep quiet! They're asleep, not dead. (39)

The f-word used in the dialogue gainsays the fact that the white Klan members were well-educated church-goers and never used such vulgar words in public at least for the sake of their dignity and integrity. Besides, the funny scene of the quarrel among the members of the Klan community for dislocated eyeholes doesn't come any near to reality of the era. The film not only tests the waters of racial tension with its depiction of white characters, but also with its characterization of black slaves. The film portrays their characters in significantly various ways, and the different races are portrayed on many different levels. Black characters range from slaves that work the field, to prominent house slaves, to folk heroes. For example, Samuel L. Jackson's character (Stephen) is a slave who holds dominion over other slaves, often violently. The following screenplay extract shapes the personality of Stephen in the movie that adds to the variety of black characters used in the movie rather than stereotypical and monolithic depiction of blacks of the era:

Who's STEPHEN? Stephen is a very old black man, who with his bald pate, and tufts of white curly hair on the sides, looks like a character out of Dickens - if Dickens wrote about House Niggers in the Antebellum South. Stephen has been actually Calvin's slave since he was a little boy. And in (almost) every way is the 2nd most powerful person at Candyland. Like the characters Basil Rathbone would play in swashbucklers, evil,

scheming, intriguing men, always trying to influence and manipulate power for their own self-interest. (90)

The film addresses slave-on-slave violence, not only through Mandingo fighting, but also by the inclusion of discussions surrounding black slavers. One cannot talk about a film like *Django Unchained* and not talk about race, but it is worth noting that the depictions of race vary widely. In analyzing *Django Unchained*, it is important to look for connections to other film genres, as well as to other Tarantino films. Django's namesake is from the 1966 spaghetti western, *Django*.

Tarantino borrows more than just a name from the genre, placing the main characters in a typical spaghetti western world that is a place of chaos, devastation, racism, and destructive self-interest. *Django Unchained* also matches Tarantino's typical themes of revenge and redemption, such as in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Kill Bill* (2003), along with the need for violence to act out that revenge. *Django Unchained* also mirrors the excessive use of the n-word in films like *Pulp Fiction*, and debates stand on either side as to whether or not the usage was appropriate. The following screenplay part shows that the n-word has got heavy workout in the movie and is not only used by white slave owners but also by the blacks themselves:

Calvin Candie: Well then we got nothing more to talk about. You wanna buy a beat ass nigger from me, those are the beat ass niggers I wanna sell.

Django: He don't wanna buy the niggers you wanna sell. He wants the nigger you don't wanna sell.

Calvin Candie: I don't sell the niggers I don't wanna sell. (77)

Django Unchained also has elements of Blaxploitation films, such the 1975 film *Mandingo*. As the name implies, the film explores the concept of Mandingo fighting also present in *Django Unchained*. The 1975 film influenced the creation of *Django*

Unchained, with both containing frequent scenes of brutal violence, especially with the focus on Mandingo fighting. While most scholars believe that Mandingo fighting did not historically exist in American slavery, it has a place in critical discussion of slave films due to its appearance in these two widely debated films (Harris). Mandingo fighting was not the only element of *Django Unchained* that is unconfirmed historically. While some claim it was “profoundly ahistorical,” the film was not meant to be a historical document (Kelley). It openly presents the Mandingo fighting scene with much brutality. The following screenshot reveals the brutality and racial exploitation behind the Mandingo fighting.



Fig 2: Mandingo Fighting in Candie's Mansion (1:03:45-1:06:30)

It shows cruel Mr. Candie and his customer enjoying brutal Mandingo fighting where the slaves fight each other until one of them kills the other and Mr. Candie is relishing it with cigar in his hand and his room is depicted as luxurious with elaborate lighting and furnishing. The screenplay of the Cleopatra Club of Mr. Candie reveals the way it has been presented in the movie:

Inside is Calvin Candie, his bodyguard Bartholomew (still dressed in the ill-fitting suit), and the lanky sexy Sheba. Also, at this moment, TWO

MANDINGOS are having a bloody and savage fight to death in this closed room. An older European looking man, who's rooting for the Mandingo that Calvin's not rooting for, is also in the room. His name is AMERIGO. (73)

In addition, it explores fictional characters in familiar situations and does not claim to be completely accurate. Some uses of comedy, such as in the Ku Klux Klan episode, emphasize this point. These instances of comedy give the film a clearly entertainment-based purpose.

The film takes place in a historical setting, but that does not mean it has to adhere to historical accuracy in every way. Since its release in 2012, *Django Unchained* has been rated and reviewed by numerous critics. In his generally scathing review of the film, Harvey Blume, author of “*Django Unchained – History Dumbed Down*,” writes, “History seems to dumb Tarantino down, dull his imagination. The revenge, unfortunately, is on history, which in the process gets painfully dumbed down” (11). Like Blume, Blair L.M. Kelley suggests that the historical inaccuracies make the film painful. Opposing Tarantino’s portrayal of slavery in “The Price of Django”, Kelley argues that: In his review, historian Jelani Cobb wondered if the [n-word] was used more frequently in the film than the words ‘he’ and ‘she.’ Ironically in the effort to defend the language, Tarantino has clung tightly to claims of historical accuracy. [Tarantino] asserted, ‘I don’t think anybody is saying that we used the word more excessively than it was used in 1858 in Mississippi. And if that’s not the case then they can shut up.’ I wished that Tarantino sought the same kind of accuracy in his larger depictions of the institution of chattel slavery. Kelley goes on to mention that slave owners often used their education and religion as a way to justify slave-owning, and he wishes that topics like these would have been as heavily addressed as others in Tarantino’s film. Though

some suggest that Tarantino's film does lack in accuracy, other critics defend the film, which never claimed to be historically accurate. In her article, "Why Tarantino is Better than Spielberg at Portraying Slavery?" Ann Hornaday gives credit to Django for being able to "demonstrate how a history once grievously distorted by cinematic language can be improbably well-served by its most florid, outlandish vernacular" (14). Those siding with Hornaday agree that the lack of accuracy was a small sacrifice to pay to reach the dialogue that was started by Tarantino's decision to portray slavery in such a harsh and violent light. The opening scene described by the screenplay of the movie depicts the slaves in the harshest and cruelest condition possible:

As the Operatic Opening Theme Song plays, we see a MONTAGE of misery and pain, as Django and the Other Men are walked through blistering sun, pounding rain, and moved along by the end of a whip. Bare feet step on hard rock, and slosh through mud puddles. Leg Irons take the skin off ankles. (1)

Whether critics support Tarantino's style or not, the film did get people talking. In Glenda Carpio's piece, "I Like the Way You Die, Boy: Fantasy's Role in *Django Unchained*" the author explains that Django is not meant to be understood as a historically accurate work. Carpio points out that Tarantino is "more concerned about movies than anything else" (7) and that his works of fantasy should not be expected to go hand-in-hand with historical accuracy – after all, Hitler was killed by Nazi hunters in Tarantino's portrayal of World War II. Without prior knowledge of Tarantino's other films, viewers could be shocked by the director's portrayal of slavery, but those familiar with Tarantino's stylistic approach could better understand the cinematic value that Django holds. There is obviously too much violence in spaghetti style in the movie. Every place Django and Schulz visit, there is so much violence that it seems a bit

unrealistic for a freed slave to kill whole lot of white people that would have been utterly impossible in the era which means that the movie gives plenty of space to fantasy and frequently ignores reality of the period. The following screenplay extract corroborates this proposition:

All the CANDIE FAMILY UNIT lies on the grass SHOT. But some are still alive. We HEAR MOANING coming from LARA LEE, CODY, and MOGUY. DJANGO sees this. The Black Man reaches behind him and comes out with a DYNAMITE STICK. He tosses it on the grass among the bodies. He takes aim with his pistol; and FIRES. It EXPLODES. Finishing off what was left of the Candie Family Unit, not to mention, blowing the limbs off of many of them. The LAWN is SILENT. (65)

When it comes to addressing the overdramatic scenes of violence and gore in Django, the audience must remember that this is a style skillfully practiced by Tarantino, and it must be examined with that in mind. Perhaps the climax of the movie with the meeting point of revenge, black heroism and violence in spaghetti fashion is the following screenshot taken towards the end of the movie.



Fig 3: Django encounters Samuel after shooting down Candieland (2:37:02 – 2:38:13)

This is when Django avenges on the Candieland family by shooting down two members and Mr. Candie's widowed sister leaves herself to the mercy of a black man. The setting is Candyland mansion. Like those who dote on the historical inaccuracy of this film, others point out the unrealistic portrayals of slavery, and the overall unnecessary gore and violence that Tarantino flaunts throughout the film. David Denby, the author of "*Django Unchained: Put-On, Revenge, and the Aesthetics of Trash*," feels that Tarantino's film was nothing more than a "big put-on" (5) and claims that an audience should expect nothing else from this director. Denby ends his relentlessly harsh article by saying, "*Django Unchained* isn't a guilty pleasure; it's a squalid pleasure" (5). Though some consider Django to be nothing more than a violent, poorly-made gore-fest, there are critics on the other side of the spectrum. Candace Allen finds humor in Tarantino's references to spaghetti-westerns and calls the whole film "an entertaining hoot" (2). Much conversation also surrounds the arguments about the film's connection to Blaxploitation films and spaghetti-westerns. The very opening scene of the movie with unfolding of credit seems to have been clearly influenced by the spaghetti-western style and the very word has been used in the screenplay:

AS The CREDITS play, DJANGO has a SPAGHETTI WESTERN FLASHBACK. Now Spaghetti Western Flashbacks are never pretty, it's usually the time in the film when the lead character thinks back to the most painful memory inflicted on him or his loved ones from evil characters from his past. In this instance we see Django in a SLAVE PEN at the Greenville Auction. (1)

People have often disagreed on what genre Django more accurately represents. Focusing on this argument, DeWayne Wickham claims that the film is more of a Blaxploitation film than a spaghetti-western. But it sounds less realistic when this

proposition is compared with the extract taken above. However, we can see that Wickham's idea is more of a conceptual and abstract one rather than hardline.



Fig 4: Broomhilda being whipped mercilessly despite Django's plea (33:54-34:21)
The screenshot above is from a flashback scene from Cerucan plantation where

despite Django's earnest plea, his wife Broomhilda is being whipped on accusation of running away. The scene has been heavily color-corrected to give it a flashback appearance. Here, Broomhilda is being whipped mercilessly by the white owner's valet and at the left side in background, we can see Django is earnestly and passionately begging forgiveness for her and is requesting to punish him instead. She is agonizing and screaming out of indescribable pain and the cruelty reaches its height when the sadistic white owner repeatedly whips her. In his article, "*Django Unchained* really about Blaxploitation", Wickham addresses why Django should be seen as a portrayal of Blaxploitation: "The lack of opportunities for black directors to produce films concerning slavery only increases the controversy surrounding Django. It is this dearth for opportunities for black directors to do such a major project, as much as Tarantino's treatment of the slavery subject, that fans the flames of the debate over *Django*

Unchained” (4). While those like Wickham agree that Django deals with subject matter unfit to be tackled by a white director, Chris Vognar praises the work. Vognar, author of “He Can’t Say that, Can He?: Black, White, and Shades of Gray in the Films of Tarantino,” writes: “Tarantino has taken more liberties with racial epithets and black idioms, and written more complicated and fully developed black characters, than any white filmmaker before or since” (24). Vognar’s claim gets solidified by the fact that the word “nigger” has been used for 148 times in the movie. The racial epithet gets heavy workout not just through White slave owners but also among the Black characters. This extract from the screenplay dialogue of the movie delivered by a white plantation owner, Spencer, at the 31st minute shows how liberal Tarantino has been with the use of racial epithets and White people’s attitude on the slaves:

Oh I got my share of, coal blacks, horse faces, and gummy mouth bitches out in the field. But the lion share of my lady niggers are real show pony's. Well that's what I'm looking for, a show pony for young Django. So the only question that remains is, do you have a nigger here worth five thousand dollars? (12)

Vognar concludes his piece stating that Tarantino is being an artist, provoking the audience, and making us ask ourselves tough questions about issues that often get sidelined. Similar to Vognar, Glenda Carpio points out that “pop culture” works like those of Tarantino are able to more easily access sensitive topics than other cultural forms (3). *Django Unchained* was wrought with criticism and controversy since it first was announced. Some labeled Django as a glorified story of wish-fulfillment and revenge with clear distinctions between good and evil. However, these descriptions used to criticize Django are ones that are the hallmark of stories of heroes. *Django Unchained* is not, nor does it pretend to be, historically accurate. Instead, Django represents a

modern-day folk story of a hero that America wishes could have existed. The concept of hero in the movie has been linked with the hero of the German legend who appears finally in the tale to be the savior of Broomhilda, the lady. The following screenplay extract supports this argument put forward by Carpio:

It's a German legend, there's always going to be a mountain in there somewhere. So, he puts her on top of the mountain and he puts a fire breathing dragon there to guard the mountain. And, then he surrounds her in circle of hellfire. And there Broomhilda shall remain, unless a hero arises brave enough to save her. (39)

Almost all depictions of American slavery show African-Americans being denigrated and subjugated. These stories are ones that should be told, as they have their place in modern cinema. *Django Unchained* takes a new approach to this topic and sacrifices historical accuracy for empowerment. For *Django Unchained* to be understood, it must be seen as a hero's journey. This classic trope has existed long before the advent of cinema, let alone Django. The film has almost all tropes associated with this motif. The hero begins in the ordinary world – a victim of slavery's oppression. He meets his mentor who trains him (in this case, with a pistol). As stated by Kerry Washington, a star in the film, the villains Django faced in the film are “some really ugly demons. . . . We had to be willing to show the ugly stuff so that the hero's journey meant something” (12). Tarantino pulled no punches depicting the villains (slave owners) as violent, racist, and cruel. The following long screenplay dialogue delivered white plantation owner Mr. Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio) has been widely quoted as to how racist, cruel and misguided the white owners were about the slaves:

I spent my whole life here right here in Candyland, surrounded by black faces. And seeing them every day, day in day out, I only had one

question. Why don't they kill us? Now right out there on that porch three times a week for fifty years, old Ben here would shave my daddy with a straight razor. Now if I was old Ben, I would have cut my daddy's goddamn throat, and it wouldn't have taken me no fifty years to do it neither. But he never did. Why not? (124)

Mr. Candie in the extract above is trying to prove that the Blacks are by nature servile and weak in their heart and that they were made to serve the whites obediently. The Old Ben mentioned by Candie was a negro servant who served the plantation owners for several generations back to back but never dared to attack any white owner and remained compliant and servile to the whites.



Fig 5: Candie explain phrenology & black servility to Schultz and Django (1:58:06-2:00:36)

The screenshot above shows Mr. Candie phrenologically explaining the cause behind black servility to Dr. Schultz and Django taking a skull of one of the deceased black slaves in the past who served the white family across generations yet never dared to harm them against their oppression. He attributes the servility to the presence of three dimples in the cut out skull piece he is holding.

Mr. Candie further associated the servile attitude of the blacks with the three dimples in their skull which he thinks is never to be found in the skull of any white person. The following extract from his elaborate speech on phrenology reveals his dark and deep seated prejudice against the blacks:

See, the science of phrenology is crucial to understandin' the separation of our two species. [Picking up a hacksaw] And the skull of the African here? The area associated with submissiveness is larger than any human or any other sub-human species on planet Earth. [Saws a piece off the back of the skull, brushes it off, and holds it up] If you examine this piece of skull here you'll notice three distinct dimples. Here, here and here. Now, if I was holdin' the skull of an Issac Newton or a Gallileo, these three dimples would be found in the area of the skull most associated with creativity. But this is the skull of old Ben. And in the skull of old Ben, unburdened by genius, these three dimples exist in the area of the skull most associated with servility. (125)

This incident moved the story and made the rise of Django that more powerful. Just as the hero's journey is not a story unique to the works of Tarantino, neither are folk leg-ends of slaves avenging their plight at the hands of their masters. In his article about how *Django Unchained* is a continuation of the "bad black man" folk hero, Scott Reynolds Nelson writes: Such stories go back to immediately after the Civil War and are partly meditations about slavery and slavery's end. In many of these chants and stories, the bad man was insulted, then cursed at, until he finally shot down white men in saloons and back alleys for failing to treat him with respect. The bad man invariably died at the end of the story. Immediately after the Civil War, African-American men built these powerful, folkloric characters in a world where slavery had ended but attacks against

black men and women had intensified. The stories of quiet, unpredictable, and violent men who were fearless and died at the end could be simultaneously cautionary tales about the dangers of challenging white authority and covert stories about the thrill of resistance. These symbols of black power manifested themselves in legends and songs, later appearing in Blaxploitation films. These folk heroes were an inspiration to those who had suffered at the hands of the institution of slavery. Instead of proliferating the narrative of the oppressed slave – which is one that is accurate and worthy of telling – Tarantino takes a page from these folk stories that served to inspire those who were victims of slavery. In the movie, an ordinary seeming freed slave, fueled by the passion to free his wife Broomhilda from slavery at the Candyland plantation, ultimately turns into a hero who completes this extraordinary feat of decimating all the members of the Candyland owners. This is the hero constructed by Tarantino in the movie. The following screenplay depicts the ending scene of the movie when all of the white Candylanders get killed by a black hero:

All the CANDIE FAMILY UNIT lies on the grass SHOT. But some are still alive. We HEAR MOANING coming from LARA LEE, CODY, and MOGUY. DJANGO sees this. The Black Man reaches behind him and comes out with a DYNAMITE STICK. He tosses it on the grass among the bodies. He takes aim with his pistol; and FIRES. It EXPLODES. Finishing off what was left of the Candie Family Unit, not to mention, blowing the limbs off of many of them. The LAWN is SILENT. DJANGO'S PISTOL goes back in its holster. Django walks down the front steps of The Big House, feeling tremendous satisfaction in the wrath he just wrought on Candie and Co. He removes Dr.Schultz's tiny Derringer

from Stephen's dead hand, putting it in his pocket. Then heads over to where Broomhilda and Timmy wait for him with Fritz and Tony. (65)

The love interest of Django is his wife, Broomhilda. As the viewer comes to learn, her name comes from a German folk tale of a hero who rescues the damsel in distress. This is a not-so-subtle way of showing the heroic nature of Django. On his quest to rescue Broomhilda, Django takes the path of altruism, one frequently treaded by the hero. Django wasn't without flaws, turning a blind eye to travesties around him, but only doing so to maintain his disguise and save his wife. True to the nature of the hero, Django inspired those around him. His mentor, Schultz, was a cynical man who, although he claimed to despise slavery, did nothing to end it until his first encounter with Django. However, by the end Schultz discovered in himself desires that were greater than material reward. Django's burning desire to rescue his wife [Broomhilda] from slavery, at all costs, gave Schultz hope in something greater than himself. Tarantino here depicts such a black hero who can even convince his white owner Dr. Schultz about finding and rescuing his wife. Schultz agrees to help Django in emancipate his wife from the hellish life of slavery:

Well frankly, I've never given anybody their freedom before. And now that I have, I feel vaguely responsible for you. You're just not ready to go off on your own, it's that simple. You're too green, you'll get hurt. Plus when a German meets a real life Sigfried, it's kind of a big deal. As a German, I'm obliged to help you on your quest to rescue your beloved Broomhilda. Django accepts that response. What follows is a MONTAGE covering the five months that Django and Schultz partner up as bounty hunters. Schultz wears his normal ensemble. Django wears his cool looking Green Jacket, unless it's really cold, which a lot of this Montage

is. Then he still wears Ace Specks rawhide winter coat over his cool clothes. (7)

This is “what unchained Schultz from a survival of the fittest mentality and allowed him to start living by his deeper principles” (Khoshaba). Heroes inspire us to be greater than who we are, and on his quest, Django spurred that change in his mentor. In most stories of heroes, their villain measures the hero. Their contrast displays a hero’s true nature. This is no different in Django. Villains in Django are depicted on the evil side of a clearly-defined division of right and wrong. The scene depicting the proto-Klan mob attempts to “counter the racist polemic of D. W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation. Hence the scene of buffoonish Ku Klux Klansmen complaining their hoods don’t fit right; they can’t see through the eyeholes. Tarantino wants to mock its portrayal in the hugely influential D. W. Griffith movie, which treated Klansmen as heroic, the only force between the South and black savagery” (Blume). Instead of applauding their machismo and bravado, they are instead depicted as stupid and ignorant. Additionally, the main villain in the film, Calvin Candie, is a vicious slave owner who pits slaves against one another to fight for his amusement. The savage and brutal Mandingo fight witnessed by both Django and Schulz depicted in the Calvin Candie’s plantation is heart rending as the screenplay reads:

Especially the four other mandingos standing next to him. Sidney James rolls in the dirt, screaming and holding his bleeding gut. Till Cody puts a bullet in his head, putting him out of his misery. Moguy, shakes his head, "Typical," he thinks. Django and Schultz, on their horses next to Candid, watch. Ace looks up at his boss. (77)

Not only is Mr. Candie depicted as cruel, but there is a strong implication of an incestuous nature in his relationship to his sister. Once again, the villains are painted as a

stark contrast to Django's altruistic nature. The elements listed previously are commonplace in the movies of heroes, but are new to films depicting slavery. In telling the story of the hero, not only is *Django unchained*, but so is the display of violence. The film graphically depicts scenes of whipping, slaves being eaten by dogs, slaves fighting to the death, and explosive gunshot wounds. The violence is so extreme in the movie that it rightly earned *Django Unchained* a R (restricted) Rating. Some have claimed that these depictions of violence cheapen the reality of slavery and that Tarantino is capitalizing on the harsh lives of slaves to make an action movie. These critics are right in a way as the movie takes help of too much unrealistic violence to add spice to an action movie. The following screenplay extract exemplifies the use of excess violence in the movie when, towards the end of the movie, Django shoots to pieces all the Aussies dead and frees the three negro slaves to their astonishment:

Without taking the pistol out of the gunbelt, DJANGO SHOOTS FLOYD TWICE in the chest, Roy turns around, Django takes the gun out of the holster, BAM, ROY is HIT in the UPPER BRAIN AREA and falls to the grass dead. Jano goes for the gun on his hip. Django SHOOTS ONE OF THE SADDLE BAGS over. Jano's shoulder, Jano is BLOWN TO SMITHEREENS. (147)

However, others have claimed that the use of comedy in the story is an insult to slaves and those who have ancestors who were enslaved. However, the use of comedy, action, and blood all serve a larger purpose. *Django Unchained* doesn't fit into the existing genres of films depicting slavery. By extension, it reaches audiences that would otherwise not be reached by films such as *12 Years a Slave*. According to Bob Cesca,

Tarantino has duped a lot of movie-goers into seeing a film about the monstrous, cancerous true nature of American slavery, and I'd wager that

a considerable number of people who saw *Django Unchained* probably didn't see Spielberg's *Amistad* or *The Color Purple* or any other historical drama about slavery, many of which were sanitized for mass appeal. (4)

Instead of sanitizing the movie to reach a larger audience, Tarantino took the risk on making a film that pushes the envelope and reaches audiences that wouldn't typically find themselves in a theater for a movie about slavery. The graphic nature of the film is one that attracts some of the most criticism. The horrible and violent scenes of people being killed brutally especially by Django with their parts flying here and there is truly gruesome and seems obviously and deliberately exaggerated in the movie. The very opening scene illustrates this when King Schultz kills one of the Specks Brothers and shoots the other's horse on its head:

The doctor, throws his lantern to the ground, enveloping him in darkness. The next FLASH OF LIGHT we see is the good doctors PISTOL out of his holster, and FIRING point blank into Ace Specks face....BLOWING the dumber dumb brother off his horse, dead in the dirt. Before Dicky can maneuver either his rifle or his horse in the Germans direction... Dr.SCHULTZ SHOOTS his HORSE in the head...The Steed goes down taking Dicky with him...When the dead weight horse lands on Dicky's slightly twisted leg, we hear TWO DISTINCT CRACKING SOUNDS:... Dicky lets out a bitch like scream. The Slaves watch all this. They've never seen a white man kill another white man before. (3)

However, this violence serves a larger purpose: to display the horrific past that America tends to ignore or water-down. As Cesca said, Even if Tarantino exaggerated the horror of slavery and even if it were only half as awful as he portrayed it, shame on the United States and shame on the framers for not eradicating it from the very start

when they had the chance. Maintaining the institution only pandered to a mentally ill demographic of lazy, cheap, sadistic white aristocrats [who] were mentally deranged serial killers hiding under the threat of secession. And they were allowed to get away with it because no one dared undermine the southern economy. Antebellum south was united under the common belief that slavery was essential for the sustenance of the mainly labor plantation based economy. Tarantino shone a light on a part of American history that isn't talked about. The film is bloody, violent, and cruel, but so was slavery. African Americans were violently dehumanized and exploited for generations, and a movie that brazenly depicts violence is necessary in telling that story. For all the criticism facing Django, no one can say that it didn't start a dialogue. By reaching audiences that don't typically watch slavery movies and by depicting the violence in such a graphic nature, it has spurred discussion amongst critics, academics, and viewers alike. The movie not just depicts slavery and suffering as the classics but it focuses more on bravery and overcoming the white domination. James A. Cosby at Popmatters critiques:

So why did these two filmmakers decide to revisit slavery at this time and in the manner they did? Perhaps the better question is how well has America actually dealt with slavery to begin with? There has long been a gulf in understanding not that slavery happened, but in understanding its true impact on a more personal and even more visceral level. Tarantino has noted that slavery has usually only been dealt with in TV movies and otherwise presented in films as historical with a capital H, meaning these personal stories are shown at arms-length and feel more like history under glass. What has been lost is a deeper and more accurate appreciation for the real depth of not only suffering, but also of the

bravery in these stories, as well. Presumably this would just be too heavy and too enraging for audiences to sit through. (1)

Furthermore, in an interview, Tarantino explained how he wanted to depart from the cut-and-dry slavery movies he had seen in order to make a film that grabbed the audience's attention: There hasn't been that many slave narratives in the last, you know, 40 years of cinema. And for the most part, most of these TV movies or specials that come out are kind of what I call - they're historical movies; like, history with a capital H. Basically, this happened, then this happened, then that happened, then this happened. And that can be fine, well enough, but for the most part I think they keep you at arm's length dramatically because also there is this kind of level of good taste that they're trying to deal with about the history of the subject. And frankly oftentimes they just feel like dusty textbooks just barely dramatized, "I wanted to tell the story as a genre movie, as an exciting adventure" (Tarantino). Many critics see the value in this approach, as we can see in Hornaday's argument that, in order to "capture the perversity of a system of kidnapped human beings who were routinely bought, sold, raped, maimed and murdered, it takes genre filmmaking at its most graphic and hyperbolic. How else can movies make proper symbolic sense of America's bloodiest, most shameful chapter?" (11). The flashback scene of Carrucan Plantation when Django begs with everything he has to stop Little Raj, a white plantation owner, from beating his beloved Broomhilda squeezes every moviegoer's heart. The screenplay of the scene reads:

A memory from The Carrucan Plantation; The Brittle Brothers giving his wife Broomhilda, a peelin'. PEELIN' : A punishment by bullwhip, across the back. LITTLE RAJ makes a line in the dirt with the heel of his boot. Making Django stand behind it, as he watches his wife being whipped. BIG JOHN BRITTLE SLASHES the beauty of Broomhilda's back with

his BULLWHIP. DJANGO, keeping behind the line, begs Big John for mercy. Please Big John, she won't do it no more! She's real sorry! The WHIP RIPS her back. Goddamit, Big John! Whoa nigger, calm down, keep it funny. Django gets on his knees, and on behalf of Broomhilda, begs Big John Brittle with everything he has. (3)

Django Unchained may not be a shining example of tastefulness in cinema, but it departs from this for good reason. By showing imagery that is violent and grotesque, it works to accurately depict a time in American history that was also violent and grotesque. *Django Unchained* is certainly one of the boldest, distinct movies about American slavery that has ever been produced. A lot of the points raised against *Django Unchained* have some validity to them, but it is important to remember this movie was made with entirely different aims than most movies depicting slavery. The choices that Tarantino made in regards to this film were not ones any other filmmaker would have likely ever made. There's been plenty of comparison made between *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained*, mostly for how they're different. There's much similarity in terms of how they're made or what kind of effect they have. But like McQueen's film, Quentin Tarantino's latest is about a man who wants to reunite with his wife. Here, though, he's the free one and she's the slave in need of rescue. In any event, *Django Unchained* is worth watching after *12 Years a Slave* so you can fantasize that it's sort of a sequel in which Northrup goes back and takes revenge on the evil plantation owners. Because even though there's a happy ending in McQueen's film, there's a lot of injustice remaining when the credits roll unlike *Django Unchained*. James A. Cosby at Popmatters valorizes Tarantino's attempts to depict slavery in his movie and also compares it with another movie by Steve McQueen and dubs the two movies as unprecedented in the history of slave narration. He expounds,

The films *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained* made big waves in recent years. These two works mark a rare Hollywood foray into the dark heart of American history and slavery. It is surprising—and totally unsurprising—that so few films have tackled this topic, let alone as directly as these two. Slavery just hasn't exactly attracted droves of movie investors or ticket buyers over the years. Yet, and while these films have drastically different approaches and goals, both have enjoyed significant critical and commercial success. (2)

He doesn't make historical accuracy and political correctness the primary focus on the film claiming that it should defeat the true purpose of the movie, to tell a story and to start a dialogue. By making a slave movie so different than the ones before it, Tarantino crafted a film that hits audiences differently, opens new avenues of discussion, brazenly depicts the violence of American slavery, and allows for moviegoers to see a film about an empowered slave character that retakes what is rightfully his. Not every film about slavery should be like *Django Unchained*, and there certainly will never be another film quite like it. This movie not only treats the subject matter of slavery in monolithic and old fashioned way that just depicts the suffering and evil of slavery like the works of Stowe and Morris, but it adds the dramatic twist to them and welcomes in the elements of Black heroism and bravery in which a black freed slave, Django, decimates white plantation owners and gains freedom for his wife, himself and his fellow slaves.

III. Depiction of Slavery in the Antebellum Era

While *Django* is a highly entertaining experience in which an audience is brought much laughter and joy in many scenes, the film is actually the first film in which Tarantino treats very serious subject matter with a sort of delicacy and respect deserved. The treatment of slavery in *Django Unchained* is the reason for this being the director's most important film. It is a breakthrough for the filmmaker in which he has not only achieved the initial goal of bringing captivating entertainment to an audience, but also has put together a film with much more meaningful content that does not take itself too lightly. The slave narration flows through unexpected twists and turns and sometimes even unrealistic scenes as mentioned earlier like the Klan scene and the extreme gunshots at the whites by a mere freed slave Django.

In contrast to most, if not all, Tarantino films, in which the director uses his stories in order to blend genres and use his unique style of filmmaking in different ways, *Django* is a film that utilizes the director's filmmaking ability and genre-mixing to tell the story as effectively and with as much meaning as possible. There are multiple scenes in the film that display the evils of slavery, including a brutally violent fight, a scene involving dog attacks, and a scene involving a "hot box". Without giving anything away, all of the aforementioned scenes depict slavery in a very real, very gritty, manner.

It's not only the scenes involving slavery that are made with care, but also the characters in the film that come to represent many of the themes brought forward throughout the film. The character that particularly comes to mind is Stephen, played by Samuel L. Jackson, in what is his best performance in a very, very long time. Stephen is a servant on the plantation owned by Leonardo DiCaprio's Calvin Candie another absolutely astounding performance who has become a participant in the poor treatment of his fellow slaves. Stephen may quite honestly be the most important character in

Django Unchained in that his acceptance of slavery and his cooperation and apparent enjoyment of being the “favorite slave” of Candy Land collaborates in strict contrast with the attitudes and morality of the Django character and provides a villain, or even an extension of DiCaprio’s villain, who is not simply the evil slave owner. He is a symbol of what can come from accepting and embracing something as disillusioned and dreadful as slavery.

Since a majority of Tarantino’s filmography is generally thought of as somewhat empty films that have creative dialogue, unique music choices, and are extremely entertaining romps, the depth added in *Django* strays from the Tarantino norm. While it remains to be seen what this means for the future efforts of the director, the potential is absolutely colossal.

So, while *Django Unchained* may not be Quentin Tarantino’s masterpiece, it’s his first film that displays something that is not a complete fantasy and not too cartoonish. Yes, there is plenty of signature Tarantino violence in the film, and yes there is plenty of humor. The Ku Klux Klan scene is where one can laugh at more than maybe any single scene of a film this year. Despite the unrealistic treatment of the scene, in deeper level the scene conveys the foolishness of the whites to phenomenologically understand the so called subservient nature of the blacks. Yes, there is much enjoyment that can be had from experiencing *Django Unchained* and the high quality performances, the last one that absolutely needs to be mentioned is Christoph Waltz’ Dr. King Schultz. Yes, there will continue to be people who call this film fun and a simple wild thrill ride.

But, there is so much more to this film than fun and games and Tarantino playing with film genre. This is truly a film that can be discussed as a legitimate observation of slavery, albeit not necessarily anything awe-inspiringly eye-opening or poignant, but a film which brings Tarantino closer to becoming thought of as more than a strange guy

who creates great unique films. It suggests there is something more in Tarantino, and that his love of film has the potential to tell important stories with important messages in his wonderfully offbeat style.

Thus, there are many ways to describe Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*; exuberant, wonderful, dark, unique, colorful, vibrant, tragic, uplifting. But more than that, the inaccuracies involved in the depiction of slave narration in the movie is most certainly the deliberate ones in order to escape the monolithic and too realistic depiction and to blend the art of moviemaking which serves not only to show the bare reality but also to thrill and entertain the aesthetes.

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