



PROJECT MUSE®

---

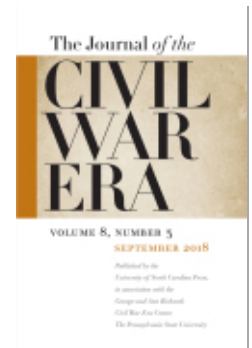
Filming Black Voices and Stories: Slavery on America's  
Screens

Brenda E. Stevenson

The Journal of the Civil War Era, Volume 8, Number 3, September 2018, pp.  
488-520 (Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwe.2018.0051>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/699974>

## Filming Black Voices and Stories

### Slavery on America's Screens

---

BRENDA E. STEVENSON

*This essay underscores that film is a powerful medium that has been used to both solidify popular and scholarly images of history and radically challenge them. Slavery filmography began with all of the ugly, stereotyped characterizations and storylines one would expect of the racial nadir of the early twentieth century. A revolutionary social movement at midcentury and a profound revision in the historiography of slavery beginning in the 1970s prompted changes in the public's reception of more realistic and humanistic images of enslaved black people, their interior lives, personal worth, and strivings. This essay moves forward from the earliest films to present-day cinema and TV series offerings to demonstrate how central slavery has been to Hollywood, its portrayal of American life, and how its screen representations have reflected changes in the historiography and the nation's social realities.*

*Underground*, a two-season television series that premiered in 2016, marked a capstone moment in media production on the subject of slavery.<sup>1</sup> The Anthony Hemingway-directed television saga displays enslaved men, women, and children whose lives do not center on their relationships with their owners, the morality of slavery, or even their day-to-day familial or work commitments in the shadow of that dreaded institution. The twenty riveting episodes draw the audience into the lives of domestic, field, and skilled slaves, all related either through blood or labor to Ernestine, the master's concubine and head house slave, or her daughter Rosalee. What distinguishes *Underground* from other landmark TV series or big-screen films on slavery is its focus on slave resistance. It gives voice to a diverse group of characters who demonstrate how they have come to terms, or not, with their enslavement and how they manage, in both small and large ways, to resist being locked into the largest slave society of the mid-nineteenth century.

Given *Underground* and other recent achievements in the genre, this is a propitious time to examine how film portrayals of slavery and enslaved people have changed over the past century and what those changes tell us about the broader cultural understandings of slavery and race. Beginning with the earliest films, this article moves forward to contemporary works to demonstrate how central slavery has been to the industry and how the industry's representations of slavery have reflected changes in the historiography and social reality. It begins with a discussion of the representation of slavery and slave characters in the developing film industry's inventory during the first decades of the twentieth century then moves to Hollywood's Golden Age to examine the industry's plantation genre and Lost Cause themes during the interwar years. Next, it examines the shift in storylines and slave characterizations that in part reflected the changes of the civil rights movement. Finally, it surveys the profound evolution in the depiction of slavery on film over the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Films and television series produced in this period feature more realistic and nuanced enslaved male and female characters and storylines that focused on slave family, community, and resistance. These latter portrayals demonstrate how mid-century social revolutions and a revisionist historiography of slavery have influenced the entertainment industry.

#### PART I: EARLY HOLLYWOOD DECIPHERS SLAVERY IN THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION

From the film industry's beginnings, the story of slavery has contributed to the evolution of Hollywood as a purveyor of mass entertainment and political culture. So important was black slavery as a theme in early cinema that many of the era's most successful actors, regardless of race, began or solidified their careers in films that engaged slavery—superficially, sentimentally, or even ridiculously, but almost always with extremely racist overtones. Depicting slavery and enslaved people, the early twentieth-century film industry became one of the nation's most available and powerful forums of the enduring and difficult discourse on race in America.

On August 3, 1903, pioneer director Edwin Porter and inventor Thomas Edison combined their talents and ambitions to put Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to film. Made at Edison Studios, the fourteen-minute movie premiered at Huber's Fourteenth Street Museum, a popular New York City nickelodeon. It marked the birth of a new genre of slave narration.<sup>2</sup> Similar works soon followed, including eight more silent film versions of the globally popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1  
Uncle Tom's Cabin, featuring Irving Cummings (Courtesy of  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

Although crude in technology, storyline, and character development, these early movies, like Stowe's melodramatic novel of slave life, provided a significant foundation for later, more realistic characterizations of the slave experience. Most of these early works included the racist images of blacks that were prevalent in popular culture. For example, bug-eyed, idle, mischievous children were overwhelmingly prominent in many of these works, including *Uncle Tom* spinoffs such as Del Lord, D. W. Griffith, and

Lois Weber's 1927 collaboration, *Topsy and Eva*.<sup>4</sup> Dancing slaves always had at least one scene. Likewise, these films also prominently displayed the loyalty of enslaved people. Joseph Golden's 1911 *For Massa's Sake*, for example, tells the story of an emancipated slave named Joe who sold his own family back into slavery just to help his young master settle his gambling debt.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, D. W. Griffith and G. W. Bitzer's *His Trust* (1911) and *His Trust Fulfilled* (1911) present faithful slave George (played by a white actor in blackface) who twice risks his life to save his Confederate-widowed mistress and daughter.<sup>6</sup> Then, when the Yankees burn down their mansion, he gives them his own cabin. In the sequel, George impoverishes himself to support and educate his former young mistress. Faithful Uncle Dan in *Marse Covington* (1915) is willing to make similar sacrifices. One of the most "charming" aspects of this film, reviewer Lynde Denig of *The Moving Picture World* remarked, was the "sympathetic portrayal of the friendship between the proud southern colonel and devoted servant."<sup>7</sup> In most of these early films, white actors played, in brown- or blackface, the most intelligent and culturally assimilated characters. The audience is to presume these are mulattos and, therefore, distinct from "black" enslaved men and women.

Still, a few cinematic versions of Stowe's novel, such as William Robert Daly's 1914 silent film, did not hide the material poverty of the enslaved even when juxtaposed against their labor.<sup>8</sup> There also were instances when the incredible importance of slave marriage and family, and the absolute vulnerability of these relationships in the face of slave masters' financial whims and obligations, appeared on screen. Sigmund Lubin's 1908 silent film *A Southern Romance of Slavery Days*, for example, presents the story of a beautiful mulatto bought away from her true love to be an unwilling concubine of a vicious trader.<sup>9</sup> The expression of love between the enslaved man and woman allows for the future possibility of scenes of slave romance and marital sanctity. Likewise, Harry Pollard's 1927 black-and-white film—one of Hollywood's first commercial talkies—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* included a moving wedding scene and more visual evidence of the importance of slave family unity and communal cohesion and service.<sup>10</sup>

These early films painted vivid pictures of paternalistic masters, but they did not mitigate the coarse brutality of slave traders and some slaveholders. Other brief vignettes in these films—too short to be true storylines—illustrated the grave danger fugitive slaves faced, the reality of force and degradation in the lives of concubines, and the tightly knit black plantation community that crossed color and occupational lines. Together, these films provided audiences with some sense of the nature of the institution of slavery and its impact on black lives.

Despite these screened realities, early film versions of slave life were popular with white audiences because they reproduced racist images of black Americans prevalent during the Jim Crow era. They were shown at the height of the racial nadir, when most southern black men had been disfranchised; public school education for black youth was woefully lacking; African Americans were unequal before most of the nation's courts and in its criminal justice system; and segregation was common practice across the nation, whether or not it was written into law. White audiences were amused by the on-screen images of the unfailing loyalty, submissiveness, and religiosity of an Uncle Tom, on the one hand, and the complete intellectual inferiority and immorality of a Topsy, on the other.

These same white moviegoers also were drawn to the “black horror” films of the era—those projecting a dystopian South under black Reconstruction rule. This was certainly the case with the most important “historical” film of the early cinema era, D. W. Griffith's three-hour *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith's film was based on two of southern-born clergyman and politician Thomas Dixon's novels: *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865–1900* (1902), and *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905). Voted by more than two hundred movie critics as the most important contribution to the first fifty years of cinema, *Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915, the same year white terrorist vigilantes lynched fifty-six black people.<sup>11</sup>

*Birth of a Nation* was the first full-length film viewed in the White House—during Woodrow Wilson's administration. The film valorizes the Ku Klux Klan and its domestic terrorist campaigns, demonizes and infantilizes southern freed blacks, and ridicules Radical Republicans. With the exceptions of a scene showing the arrival of the uncivilized African; the obligatory happy, dancing field workers; and the stock figure of the dotting mammy (in blackface) who is determined to submit to white authority even after emancipation—the film explores little of slave life. Its commentary on emancipation's effects on southern black men validates a negative perception of black life and morality outside of slavery. The film's major storyline suggests that men who were productive and happy workers in slavery became, when left to their “freedom,” an idle, promiscuous, violent threat to civilized white society. The “heroic” Klan had to be rallied to control this menace.

The most dangerous freedpeople, according to Griffith's film, were not the illiterate, easily manipulated former field slaves, but the black Union military veteran and men like Silas Lynch, a power-hungry mulatto who was ready to exploit them to create his own “black empire” with a white queen at his side. Griffith paired this threatening image of emancipated

black manhood with an equally fraught one of the white southern patriarchy, before and after slavery. His audience saw no vicious Simon Legrees, only brave, paternal southern gentlemen and well-meaning, but misguided and hypocritical, white abolitionists. He gives no attention to the inner lives of the enslaved or their struggles against white greed and violence. Griffith's mammy and her counterpart, the black valet, are singularly devoted to the white family they serve in slavery and freedom. The only other female character of African descent in the film is Lydia (also played in blackface), the lascivious, deceitful mulatto "Jezebel" who desires sexual attention from white men as much as the black and mulatto men long for white wives.

The NAACP and other civil rights organizations protested the film's screening, but to little avail.<sup>12</sup> Famed reformer Jane Addams, an NAACP board member, complained in the *New York Evening Post*: the "producer seems to have followed the principle of gathering the most vicious and grotesque individuals he could find among colored people, and showing them as representatives of the truth about the entire race. . . . It is both unjust and untrue." As a response to the claim that *Birth of a Nation* was based on history, Addams answered brilliantly: "History is easy to misuse."<sup>13</sup>

Looking back at the professional southern historians at the time, one certainly would not disagree with Addams's conclusion. The work of U. B. Phillips, southern born and raised, reflected the sentiments of his race, gender, generation, and region. His monographs on slavery were rightfully celebrated for their breadth and use of plantation records—many of them which he collected and archived—but left the slave voiceless and characterized slavery as socially, culturally, and materially beneficial to the enslaved.<sup>14</sup> Some criticized Phillips's conclusions, as they did the arguments of his mentor William Dunning regarding the "horrors" of Reconstruction.<sup>15</sup> Still, Phillips's and Dunning's assertions dominated the early depictions of enslaved life, slavery, and black Reconstruction on the screen and in the national imagination.

## PART 2: HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE: MEMORIALIZING THE PLANTATION AND THE LOST CAUSE ON SCREEN

Black public protests against these early cinematic and scholarly portrayals of slave and freed black life did little to sway early filmmakers. The "plantation" genre became increasingly important to bustling film studios' bottom lines, attracting and making many white and black movie stars.<sup>16</sup> In the mid-1930s, the beginning of Hollywood's Golden Age, studios produced films that characterized slaves as happy, devoted, passive



black simpletons. David Butler's *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), starring Shirley Temple, for example, showcases a dancing, singing, praying, loyal Bill "Bojangles" Robinson as Uncle Billy, who raises money so that he can free his imprisoned Confederate master.<sup>17</sup> The film also includes black actor Willie Best as the mindless, whining James Henry, completely confused by the entire notion of thinking for himself. Robert Bradbury's *Cavalry* (1936) features a mammy lamenting that she can no longer take care of her young "honey chile" mistress.<sup>18</sup> Later, when their former master and mistress leave the plantation to migrate west, a chorus of black plantation workers sadly serenade the couple with "Massa Find a Way to Stay." Another Shirley Temple favorite, William Seiter's 1936 *Dimples*, includes a blackface scene from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>19</sup> Fred Newmeyer's and Gordon Douglas's *General Spanky*, also released in 1936, was an attempt to move the popular *Our Gang* children's comedy to the big screen.<sup>20</sup> Its storyline incorporates popular Lost Cause stereotypes of white nobility sustained by supportive, submissive, hardworking blacks. Even *Slave Ship* (1937), one of the first films to include frightening scenes of flogging, the inhumane travel conditions of the Middle Passage, and murder, presents blacks as calmly accepting their fate.<sup>21</sup> One exception during the decade was a scene from Henry Hathaway's *Souls at Sea* (1937), in which captive blacks attack and kill a cruel captain during the Middle Passage, but still are not able to liberate themselves.<sup>22</sup>

A far more important exception to themes of slave passivity and submission is King Vidor's 1935 *So Red the Rose*, a Civil War-era plantation romance set in Natchez that contains a scene of slaves plotting a rebellion.<sup>23</sup> Based on a 1934 novel by Southern Agrarian writer and literary scholar Stark Young, the enslaved in *So Red the Rose* are mostly, as in the other films of this genre, characterized as obedient and solicitous, including a dedicated mammy and her gardener husband who are willing to follow every order of their paternalistic master.<sup>24</sup> Still, Young, raised on a Mississippi plantation, allows hints of rebellion and historical reality, including the inevitable flight of bondspople (even the trusted mammy) toward advancing Union armies.

*So Red the Rose* was not the box-office success that the novel's popularity had predicted. Many antebellum South or Civil War-era films with stereotypical images of enslaved people, nonetheless, found their way to popular audiences during the 1930s and 1940s. William Wyler's *Jezebel* (1938), set in 1850s New Orleans, for example, is the story of a self-centered belle (played by Bette Davis, who won the best actress Oscar for her role) whose conceit causes her to lose her great love. She eventually redeems herself by caring for him during a devastating yellow fever epidemic. A story of



both the urban and rural South, *Jezebel* includes well-dressed New Orleans slaves—street hawkers, waiters, and carriage attendants—eagerly taking orders. Unlike the popular mammy character in *Birth of a Nation*, the domestic female slaves are young and attractive, but still obedient. The black plantation children are ragged, dancing pickaninnies. Concern for the black family is present, but only as background detail. While *Jezebel* did little to advance the slave narrative voice or experience on screen, it undoubtedly intensified audiences' anticipation of the blockbuster story of the South that would be released the next year.

David O. Selznick's 1939 *Gone with the Wind* captured the public's imagination and appreciation of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras as perhaps no other film did before or has since. Adapted from Margaret Mitchell's bestselling novel that sold 1 million copies during its first month in print, it was one of the first major Hollywood films produced in color.<sup>25</sup> With ten Oscars, including best picture, to its credit and the largest domestic ticket sales gross in cinema history, its importance as a cultural icon and popularizer of southern mythology to a national white audience is obvious.<sup>26</sup> The best actress Oscar went to Vivien Leigh as the vivacious, beautiful, and clever, if not always honest, Scarlett O'Hara. For her portrayal of the buxom, fussy, moral, and loyal Mammy, Hattie McDaniel earned an Oscar, the first black woman to do so, beating out her white costar Olivia de Havilland as Melanie Hamilton. Ironically, McDaniel was the daughter of a slave who fought in Tennessee's Twelfth U.S. Colored Infantry.<sup>27</sup>

Although McDaniel's substantial speaking role, and the Oscar she won for it, elevated the stature of African Americans on Hollywood's big screens, her Mammy character was consistent with stereotypical depictions of black female house slaves. Their roles included no connections to a black family or community and gave no hint of their inner selves or private turmoil. Overtly maternal but with no hint at children of her own, McDaniel's character erases the reality of the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of domestic slaves.

Plantation and Lost Cause memorials from the era were not just for adult audiences, of course. *Gone with the Wind's* black characters were familiarly stereotyped in films produced for children—as lazy and shiftless, terrifically loyal, or dimwitted. One of the most famous examples is Uncle Remus in Walt Disney's 1946 *Song of the South*, based on Joel Chandler Harris's collection of African American folktales. James Baskett, who played Uncle Remus and provided the voice for Br'er Rabbit, won an Honorary Academy Award, a special designation given for achievements not covered by regular awards, making him the first black male actor to be honored by the Academy.<sup>28</sup> The following year, the ever-popular Uncle

Tom was the subject of *Looney Tunes*' cocreator Frederick Bean "Tex" Avery's animated short *Uncle Tom's Cabaña*.<sup>29</sup> Ten years earlier, Avery had directed the animated *Uncle Tom's Bungalow*, filled with stereotypical plantation types, which ended with an obvious critique of elderly blacks' recent receipt of social security benefits.<sup>30</sup> In *Cabaña*, a blackfaced, morally compromised Uncle Tom is a fantastical storyteller, portraying himself to his youthful, blackfaced audience as a slick mélange of superhero, ragtime piano player, and clever dodger. He outwits the greedy, dastardly Simon Legree, but meets his untimely demise because of his propensity for lying—another stereotype.

Two early film versions of another classic American novel, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, also amused juvenile audiences. The first, a silent black and white, appeared in 1920 and was directed by William Desmond Taylor.<sup>31</sup> African American George Reed played fugitive slave Jim, who resists being sold. At the same time, the film contains plenty of jolly, dancing slave scenes to support the popular idea of a benevolent system of slavery. Likewise, Jim's infantile and emasculated state is obvious, given that his fate is in the hands of the boy Huck and that director Taylor—unlike author Twain—dresses Jim as a woman in one of the duo's attempts at deception.

The second and third film adaptations of *Huckleberry Finn* are those of Norman Taurog (1931) and Richard Thorpe (1939).<sup>32</sup> Thorpe's work distinguishes itself in its characterization of Jim, played by Rex Ingram, one of the first African American "superstar" actors of both the silent and talkie eras. In Ingram's portrayal, Jim's heroic nobility is on full display in his great desire for freedom and his deep commitment to his marriage. Jim has a wife whose black father has worked to emancipate her. She and their son live in a free state, and Jim is saving money to purchase himself so that they can be reunited. Faced with the threat of sale, Jim escapes. Playing opposite Mickey Rooney's Huck, Jim remains a wise, compassionate confidante to the boy, even guiding him through the philosophical question of slavery's moral legitimacy. Not even Michael Curtiz's 1960 film adaptation of Twain's classic did as much to elevate Jim's character to a fully developed person as Richard Thorpe's 1939 movie.<sup>33</sup> Still, one-dimensional, demeaning stereotypes of black slave men, women, and children dominated the screens during Hollywood's Golden Age. One important, albeit limited, exception came through the intervention of an African American author.

Eight years after *Gone with the Wind*'s glory, John M. Stahl's southern romance *Foxes of Harrow* appeared. This film, too, was adapted from a best-selling novel, this one published in 1946 by Frank Yerby. Indeed, Yerby's book has the distinction of being the first best-selling novel by an

African American. It also is the first novel by an African American to be adapted to a Hollywood film *and* the first film adapted from a work by a black author to be nominated for an Oscar. The discussion of his race in relationship to his art however, always annoyed Yerby. "Do not call me black," he was known to insist. "I have more Seminole than Negro blood in me anyway. But when have I ever been referred to as 'that American Indian' author?"<sup>34</sup>

The movie, starring Rex Harrison and Maureen O'Hara, was a box-office success. It also dramatically broadened the spectrum of enslaved voices, if only briefly. The film introduces a rebellious "African" female in the character of Belle (Suzette Harbin). Illegally traded by the Portuguese to a New Orleans planter, she fights the notion that she is a slave. She also refuses to be "given," by her owner Stephen Fox (Rex Harrison), to Achille (Kenny Washington), his favorite male slave, as a wife. Belle is, Fox pronounces, "pure savage." Moviegoers today might label her a black nationalist and feminist or womanist. Still, her master enjoys her spirit, declaring that all women should demand that men pursue them. This is not the only connection the film makes between enslaved black and free white women.

White female protagonist Lili Darceneaux (Maureen O'Hara) complains that Fox, her suitor, looks at her as if she is a slave, as if he owns her. When, on their wedding night, he assumes his rights of "ownership" by forcing Lili to have sex with him, the ties between southern white and black women in the patriarchal South become even more pronounced. Likewise, when, through the system of *plaçage*, Fox acquires a biracial mistress named Angelique (Libby Taylor), the film again challenges the status of southern white womanhood by illustrating the erotic substitution of an African-descended female for a white woman. Later films, particularly those screened from the 1950s forward, continued to pursue this theme of the "tragic mulatto," often conflated with the stereotypical Jezebel image.

Belle and Achille eventually do marry—but on Belle's terms—and the two have a son. The birth of her child, however, causes an additional emotional crisis for the "outlandish" Belle, who will not have her child raised as a slave, even if she has to kill him. "My son no slave. Him prince, warrior prince," she argues in response to her owner's suggestion that the boy be trained to be his son's personal valet. Belle tries to escape with the baby but fails and jumps to her death. *Foxes of Harrow* remains an important contribution to film representations of the slave experience not only because of its black female characterizations but also because, through the display of African drumming, dance, religion, and philosophy, it is one of the first feature films to emphasize the cultural differences and expressions of enslaved people in the American South.

Frank Lloyd's 1937 *Maid of Salem*, about the colonial Massachusetts witch trials, also engages "African" cultural differences, but unlike *Foxes of Harrow*, it indulges popular notions that these differences indicate inferiority and immorality. The film includes the character of Tituba, mistakenly cast not as the Amerindian she was but as an African bondswoman.<sup>35</sup> The trope of the black witch who tempts young, Christian white women to dabble in "the devil's play" is reproduced again in Nicholas Hytner's 1996 *The Crucible* and its 2014 remake by Yael Farber.<sup>36</sup> In Lloyd's *Maid of Salem*, Madame Sul-Te-Wan, the first black actress to be contracted by a major Hollywood studio, plays the black witch.<sup>37</sup> Although some white directors regarded African religions as true belief systems, most of the films from that time period ridicule African spiritual practices as mere superstition, or worse, as evil and anti-Christian.

### PART 3: SLAVERY, FILM, AND THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

The 1950s witnessed an important shift in the ways slaves and slavery were depicted on film. This profound change was linked to contemporary political and social transformations that accompanied multiple popular reform efforts, including black political and social activism across the diaspora, but particularly in the American South. Although some film releases from the 1950s still were much more about slaveholders than their bondspeople, films such as Raoul Walsh's *Band of Angels* (1957) and John Berry's *Tamango* (1958) treat their audiences to diverse male and female slave protagonists who act to free themselves and live with dignity, both as individuals and within their families and communities. These kinds of characterizations are significant changes that become more common as this era in filmmaking advanced.

*Band of Angels* is the story of a young biracial woman, Mantha Starr (Yvonne De Carlo), forced to accept that she is a slave. Raised in Kentucky as a privileged, well-educated "white" belle on her father's plantation and in an elite boarding school, Mantha is unaware that she is the daughter of her father's slave concubine. Her identity as the young mistress, however, disappears completely at the death of her father and the public revelation that she was, indeed, not only Master Starr's daughter but also legally his slave. Taken by a slave trader determined to have her as his sex slave until he can sell her, "tragic mulatto" Mantha rebels verbally, physically, and psychologically against being owned, even trying to hang herself. Former African slave trader and plantation owner Hamish Bond (Clark Gable), purchases Mantha for \$5000. At his home, she encounters his former concubine, another mulatto woman (Carolle Drake), who accepts her status.

There also is Bond's most trusted and indulged slave man, the African Rau-Ru (Sidney Poitier).

Rau-Ru's character is the most complex slave portrayal on film by the late 1950s. Having been captured as a child, Rau-Ru still feels violated by the loss of his African family and his enslavement in Louisiana. He violently rejects his master's "paternal" embrace. "Freedom," he angrily lectures Mantha, "is a white word. He [Hamish Bond] made me believe that I am a person with pride and dignity; for that I will kill him." The film explores the inner struggles of "pet" slaves and the field slaves who resent their higher status. It also exposes the guilt that should be shared by both white and African traders.

R. John Hugh's *Naked in the Sun*, also released in 1957, explores the negotiation of freedom by Seminole Indians in Florida forced to enter a treaty that would reenslave escaped Georgia blacks who had become part of the Seminole community.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, it captures the triangulation between Native peoples, enslaved blacks, and white settlers/slaveholders. The voices of the enslaved, unfortunately, remain muted except that of Checotah (Lita Milan), wife of Chief Osceola (James Craig), who is kidnapped and raped—"shamed," in her words—by white slavecatchers. Disappointing as well is Edward Dmytryk's 1957 pre-Civil War narrative *Raintree County*, about an abolitionist teacher (Montgomery Clift), who falls in love with Susannah, a belle (Elizabeth Taylor).<sup>39</sup> The film very minimally explores a slaveholding woman's emotional ties to slavery. Rumors circulate that Susannah actually is the biracial child of a Cuban slave woman and a white planter, but, unlike Mantha in *Band of Angels*, her past remains mysterious.

John Berry's three-hour *Tamango* is a much more compelling presentation of slave voices and experiences.<sup>40</sup> It extends the discourse of slave resistance from *Band of Angels*, centering its drama on a Dutch slave ship. Its main characters are a trader/owner, his mulatto concubine, and an African male plotting his revenge and escape. The two themes that drive this film, as in Walsh's *Band of Angels*, are the nature of "privilege" as a slave and the legitimacy of affection, sexual attraction or love across color lines and within the context of bondage. Tamango (Alex Cressan) is the African captive who remains defiant. Even when his owner, Captain Reinker (Curd Jergens), appears kind, Tamango declares, "He will never make me a slave." He understands that Reinker only feeds, houses, and provides medical attention to his cargo to enhance his financial investment. He upbraids Reinker's concubine Aiche (Dorothy Dandridge) when she advises him to accept Reinker's paternalism. By the end of the film, however, Aiche has been convinced that she should reject the captain, who clearly will neither



Figure 2  
*Band of Angels* (Image courtesy of Jerry Murbach)

marry her nor set her free. In turn, her repudiation forces Reinker to reexamine his own feelings, not regarding his profession as a slaver, but rather for Aiche.

Unlike Mantha and Rau-Ru in *Band of Angels*, Tamango and Aiche prefer death to slavery of any description. One of the most important scenes, because it introduces female suffering in greater detail, is Aiche's revelation of her cruel treatment at the hands of those who have owned her—including branding, whipping, and rape. Not even Reinker, she concludes, treated her with respect. He always made certain she knew that he owned her, even during their intimate moments. Her dismissal of the captain's "favors" demolishes the Jezebel myth. "I hate you," she screams at him. "Hate your hands on me. Hate that bed. There is nothing that I like about you. I am telling the truth for the first time to a white man." *Tamango* also depicts women as carriers of vital information and as fighters willing to die for freedom. As such, the film enhances the audience's understanding of why and how slave revolts were launched and sustained by communities acting collectively.



Movies like *Band of Angels* and particularly *Tamango* made it possible for writers, producers, and directors to abandon stock stereotypical characters such as Jezebel, Mammy, and Uncle Tom or at least to reimagine their voices and roles within slave society. This shift benefitted not just from the day's political movements and revisionist historiography, but also, and relatedly, from documentaries on slavery that began to emerge in the 1960s. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman were subjects of historical dramas in 1964 and 1965, respectively. A 1971 documentary captured the life of Benjamin Banneker; another about William and Ellen Craft appeared in 1972; and, in 1976, the first of a few films on slave-born Booker T. Washington was released.<sup>41</sup> Several other documentaries that more broadly discussed slavery and voiced the experiences of nineteenth-century slaves in the American South were made over the next few decades, none more important than PBS's four-part *Slavery and the Making of America*, which first appeared in 2004.<sup>42</sup>

Several fictionalized film accounts of slavery made during the second half of the twentieth century also voiced more honest, and somewhat diverse, accounts of the experiences of the enslaved, particularly their communal and familial relationships. Herbert Biberman's 1969 *Slaves*, a post-civil rights era *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of sorts, explores a variety of topics, including the connection between intimacy and abuse in concubinage and breeding schemes; the hypocrisy slaves witnessed in the behavior of their "paternal" Christian masters; and the intellectual and artistic potential of the enslaved suggested by the master's display of African art.<sup>43</sup> The film also portrays how protagonist Luke (Ossie Davis) is transformed from a trusted, and trusting, enslaved man to one who embraces rebellion. After he is betrayed, Luke, a religious leader in the slave community, instructs his wife not to let their sons depend on the word of any master but rather to encourage them to escape. After being sold, Luke meets Cassie, a bejeweled African concubine (Dionne Warwick) who, like many enslaved people, drinks to mitigate her rage—an important disclosure in the storyline.

Biberman's *Slaves* also displays internal social dynamics among bondpeople, including deep marital love, responsible parental care and infanticide, a widespread desire for freedom, and an array of interior conflicts—including feelings of betrayal, rage, depression, and humiliation. *Slaves* also links, as does *Foxes of Harrow*, patriarchal authority over white plantation women and daughters to the control planters exerted over enslaved people. One neighboring mistress, for example, exclaims to those slaves whom she is helping to escape: "Our God is a freedom God.



I am chattel too.” This kind of empathic rendering of white plantation women is later undermined in films that indicate the cruelty of mistresses, such as Richard Fleischer’s *Mandingo* (1975), Carlos Diegues’s *Quilombo* (1984), Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and the 2016 TV series *Underground*.<sup>44</sup>

Although early cinema depicted miscegenation and sexual abuse through portrayals of eroticized, tragic mulatto concubines and lustful black men, only late in the twentieth century did filmmakers take on the controversial topics of slave breeding, forced incest, and medical or scientific myths about the black body and psyche. Richard Fleischer’s *Mandingo*, based on a novel by Kyle Onscott, both exploits and challenges stereotypes of black and white sexual behavior in the antebellum South. The film, rated R for full frontal nudity and sexual intercourse scenes, is set largely on the rural Louisiana plantation of a wealthy father and son, Warren (James Mason) and Hammond Maxwell (Perry King). The Maxwells not only raise sugar, but also breed slaves for sale, preferably Mandingo slaves and Hammond’s biracial offspring. Indeed, Hammond has the right, as their young master, to be the first to have sex with his family’s enslaved virgins. The Maxwells also invest in a slave fighter, Mede (heavyweight boxing champion Ken Norton) whom they breed with his Mandingo sister, with the siblings unaware of their familial ties.

Warren Maxwell’s physician supports his perverse ideas about black sexuality and black health in general. Doc Redfield (Roy Poole) believes Warren can relieve his arthritic feet by resting them on a slave child’s abdomen. He thinks, as did many in the slave societies of the Atlantic world, that blacks have a higher tolerance for pain. He also is convinced that black virgins will become ill if they do not have sex; and that incest has no impact on black offspring. *Mandingo* paints a bold picture, therefore, of some of the sexual, physical, and emotional abuse southern whites and physicians inflicted on bondspeople—including sadomasochism—and the frequent pronouncement that black people have no souls. *Mandingo* also profoundly challenges the image of the Christian, or at least morally passive, dignified slave mistress. Hammond’s wife, Blanche (Susan George) is a cruel, promiscuous, violent racist who savagely beats her husband’s concubine and causes the barbaric death of the prized Mede.

Even though *Mandingo* illustrates some of the institution’s most awful depravities, it offers little in the way of the slave’s voice or interiority. There are two exceptions. The rebellious slave Cicero (Ji-Tu Cumbuka) leads a failed slave revolt and pronounces at his lynching that he would rather die than be a slave. Agamemnon (Richard Ward), the Maxwells’ valet, however, struggles to be obedient, but he eventually feels compelled to kill his

owner, in an attempt to save Mede's life. The female slave characterizations are completely without credibility. Mammy (Lillian Hayman), for example, is drawn from older portrayals of the head female slave, but with a sinister twist. Named Lucrezia Borgia, she is complicit in the Maxwells' breeding schemes and sexual assault of slave virgins. "Don't forget to say thank you whether he give you nothing or not," she advises one crying girl forced to have sex with Maxwell.

PART 4: *ROOTS* AND REVOLUTIONIZING  
THE FILMED SLAVE EXPERIENCE IN THE LATE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

The revolution in enslaved characters and experiences on screen benefited not only from the civil rights activism of the 1950s and 1960s, but also from the growing popularity of social history that identified personal and group power among the politically, economically, and socially marginalized. Using primary source documents produced by the enslaved, this shift in slavery studies uncovered the gendered social and inner lives of black captives and underscored the significance of their resistance efforts. These seminal works include, among others, those of George Rawick, John Blassingame, Peter Wood, Eugene Genovese, and Herbert Gutman.<sup>45</sup> This revolution certainly was no clearer on either big or small screens than in *Roots*, the 1977 television miniseries that riveted a nation, made author Alex Haley a household name, and forcefully rebutted U.S. myths of equality, democracy, and progress. The show purportedly chronicles the multi-generational history of the maternal slave ancestors of Haley, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the novel on which the series was based.

*Roots* remains tremendously noteworthy in the history of slavery-themed, screened portrayals for several reasons. It was, after all, the first of such docudramas on the subject, or any topic regarding black life and history, shown in primetime on a major television network—ABC—and it ran for eight consecutive nights. As such, it drew a tremendous national audience—140 million viewers—that followed the saga of Kunta Kinte (LeVar Burton), a Gambian youth stolen for the slave trade, and his resulting slave family in North America.<sup>46</sup> It chronicles the black slave experience across time and space—from West Africa to the eighteenth-century United States, through the Civil War and beyond. An ambitious project by any standard, *Roots* was the first TV program to offer a more complete portrait of the slave experience than had been previously available, spoken through the voices of black men, women, and children who grew up, lived, and died as slaves.

*Roots* reflected contemporary revisionist slavery historiography and methodology. Haley also drew some of his material from folklorist and author Harold Courlander, famously plagiarizing the scholar's 1967 novel *The African*.<sup>47</sup> African American viewers especially appreciated that Haley's characters—whether truly his ancestors or not—exhibited humanity, cultural pride, talent, intelligence, and a desire for freedom. Haley's search for his family, moreover, struck deep chords of empathy and legitimacy in his broader viewing audience. Indeed, some credit the *Roots* phenomenon of the late 1970s with kindling widespread public interest in genealogy.<sup>48</sup>

The inner lives and voices of enslaved women, “their culture of dissemblance” as Darlene Clark Hine has termed it, especially their experiences as mothers, wives, and concubines, is uniquely and sympathetically illustrated in *Roots*.<sup>49</sup> The heartbreak Kunta Kinte's wife, Bell (Madge Sinclair) displays at the sale of their daughter Kizzy (Leslie Uggams) for the “crime” of writing a pass for a runaway, along with the horror of Kizzy's rape by her new master (Chuck Connors), brought women's emotional torment to a vast audience. It demonstrates how enslaved women bore bonded children who were used gratuitously, and violently, as sexual outlets for white men and how these agonies endured across the generations. Indeed, the story is made even more heartbreaking with Bell's disclosure that before meeting Kunta, she had lost her first husband and two children for the same offense as Kizzy's.

Several other films followed *Roots*' attention to the female slave. These works, like others of the period, had as scholarly reference a growing historiography centered on slave women. Books by Angela Davis, Deborah Gray White, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Catherine Clinton from the 1980s forward paved this rich path.<sup>50</sup> Some of the success of the inclusion of these diverse voices also can be credited to the availability of published factual accounts and autobiographies such as Louisa Picquet's *Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.<sup>51</sup> These primary sources, and the monographs derived from them, encouraged the inclusion of themes of violence and resistance as an integral part of the institution. No film more brilliantly showcases the depth of loss endured and resistance manifested among enslaved women than *Beloved* (1998).

Jonathan Demme's *Beloved*, a dramatization of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same title, dedicates most of its screen time to the physical, sexual, and psychological pain of female slaves.<sup>52</sup> The film, like the novel, is loosely based on the story of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner, who killed one of her children rather than have her returned to

slavery. It explores a slave woman's anguished maternal insanity, a kind of "soul murder," as Nell Painter terms it, that inspired infanticide.<sup>53</sup> Her soul murder evolves into an uncontrollable guilt that appears in the living ghost of *Beloved*, the murdered child. Slavery is such a horror to women, the film suggests, that it follows them out of bondage, causing them to recoil and rebel even in death. Turning on its head the stereotype of the familyless mammy in movies like *Gone with the Wind*, *Birth of a Nation*, and *Cavalry*, Morrison's and Demme's Sethe (Oprah Winfrey) is a wounded warrior, but a warrior nonetheless. She remarkably claws her way back to sanity, acceptance, and self-love. *Beloved* fiercely captures the story of an evolution that many enslaved persons dared to attempt in the face of the nihilistic circumstances in which they worked and lived.

Other compelling big-screen films, television movies, and series from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that exposed slave women's lives tell stories of the "tragic" mulatto. This certainly was the central theme in the 1992 TV miniseries *Queen*.<sup>54</sup> Written primarily by Alex Haley, *Queen* is a docudrama about Haley's father's family. John Erman's film, like Haley's novel, chronicles the life of Queen, a biracial child. The dramatization stars Raven-Symoné as the child Queen and Halle Berry as the adult. Daughter of the young master and his concubine, Queen cannot find a place—racially, culturally, or socially—in the black/white racial binary of the nineteenth-century South. The film demonstrates both the privilege and pain on which these biracial children's lives pivoted. It also reveals the burdensome cycles of eroticization that, as teens and young women, they as well as their female offspring, had to endure. This cycle describes, for example, the experiences of the generations of enslaved biracial women associated with founding father Thomas Jefferson.

Certainly the most iconic American slave woman caught in the confines of concubinage was Sally Hemings, the quadroon slave of Thomas Jefferson, and the daughter of Jefferson's father-in-law's concubine Elizabeth. Hemings's story appears in James Ivory's 1995 big-screen *Jefferson in Paris*; and Charles Haid's 2000 TV miniseries *Sally Hemings: An American Scandal*.<sup>55</sup> In Ivory film, a "coquettish" Sally (Thandie Newton) becomes the "paternal" Jefferson's concubine. Skirting the unsettled issues of consent and romance, the movie contains no real scenes of sexual intimacy.<sup>56</sup> Unlike *Roots*, *Queen*, *Beloved*, *Slaves*, and *Tamango*, this film includes precious little of the concubine's voice. Instead, Ivory utilizes Sally's older brother James (Seth Gilliam)—her blood "patriarch"—to lay bare her predicament as Jefferson's slave concubine with no rights once she returns to Virginia from France.

Charles Haid's *Sally Hemings: An American Scandal* is more explicit, and misleading, in its treatment of the relationship between Jefferson (Sam Neill) and Hemings (Carmen Ejogo). Its storyline flatly declares that there was a true romance between Hemings and Jefferson. It also strongly intimates that the young teen initiated their sexual relationship and that theirs was a companionate coupling that both parties honored over the decades when Hemings served as Jefferson's sex partner, personal maid, seamstress, and caregiver to their children. The film deceives even when it portrays Betty (Diahann Carroll), Sally's mother, chiding her for returning from Paris pregnant, noting that she had sent her to France so that she could gain her freedom. Betty, of course, would have had no say as to whether or not her youngest daughter would travel to Paris or be taken (or dragged) to Jefferson's bed.

Sally Hemings, however, does serve as narrator in Haid's cinematic project. While the voices of the vast majority of enslaved women caught in her predicament still are obscured by the film's elevation of the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings, Hemings's role as narrator allows the character of Sally to openly question Jefferson's true sentiments, particularly his beliefs about black "inferiority," his acts as a slaveholder, and his unwillingness to protect her from physical assault and threatened rape by one of his male relations. As in Ivory's film, it is the men, particularly Sally's brother James (Mario Van Peebles) and her former beau Henry (Lawrence Gilliard Jr.), who categorically protest white men's sexual access to enslaved women. It is as if the filmmakers could only conceive of a black patriarchy challenging the privileges of the white one, not the women who actually were most affected. Henry's role, however, sheds some light on the emotional pain suffered by those enslaved men excluded from pursuing women because their masters have claimed them. Henry's solution is to revolt against his enslavement, a plan that ends in his death.

Other motion pictures with similar themes followed. Kari Skogland's *The Courage to Love* (2000) is based on the true story of Henriette Delille (Vanessa Williams), founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans and the first U.S. woman of African descent that the Catholic Church has advanced towards canonization.<sup>57</sup> Henriette roundly rejected her destined life as a placée who could never marry or have her children recognized as legitimate. The film also denounces these relations. For example, a young slave girl is "convinced" to have sex with her master on the false promise of freedom and to the immense distress of her loving and protective father. Delille, the girl's teacher and religious mentor, actually is relieved that the girl's child is stillborn and even dares to scold the girl's master for his lechery. She also speaks against the legal system that

undergirds white patriarchal control of these women and the churches that support slavery's abuses through their silence. Still, *The Courage to Love* avoids a very important issue in Delille's life: she wishes to establish an order of nuns—in conflict with a racist Catholic Church that initially rejects her efforts to do so.

Another popular portrayal of the “tragic mulatto” theme is British-Ghanaian director Amma Asante's 2013 *Belle*.<sup>58</sup> The film is loosely based on the early life of Dido Elizabeth Belle (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), the mulatto great niece and ward of Lord William Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson), and inspired, in part, by a portrait of Dido and her cousin Lady Elizabeth Murray (Sarah Gadon) that hung in the Mansfield home. *Belle* explores the question of identity—racial and social—for a mulatto heiress under the protection of one of England's most celebrated eighteenth-century legal minds. Belle's voice, along with those of Henriette Delille in *The Courage To Love*, Queen in the Alex Haley miniseries, Sethe in *Beloved*, Aiche in *Tamango*, Belle in *Foxes of Harrow*, Belle also in *Roots*, and even Sally Hemings in Haid's TV film help audiences understand multiple and overlapping terrains of the female slave experience.

Just as the revolution in slavery's portrayal in the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first brought enhanced storylines regarding female slaves and slave domestic and communal relations, it also inspired new films about slave resistance and revolts, both real and imagined. Stan Lathan's TV movies, *A House Divided: Denmark Vesey's Rebellion* (1982) and his 1987 iteration of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are among this tradition.<sup>59</sup> So too is Stephen Spielberg's 1997 *Amistad*.<sup>60</sup>

This last film is based on the true story of an 1839 shipboard slave revolt. Slaves bound for Cuba took command and attempted to return home but were captured, taken to the United States, and forced to fight for their freedom in U.S. courtrooms. Abolitionist forces intercede to try to free Cinque (Djimon Hounsou), the rebel leader, and his shipmates on the grounds that the African slave trade was made illegal in 1808. With an acclaimed cast that includes Morgan Freeman, Anthony Hopkins, Anna Paquin, and Matthew McConaughey, Spielberg brings to his viewers, as did John Berry in *Tamango*, a rich sense of African slaves' determination to rebel against the dehumanizing separation from their families, communities, and cultures. *Amistad's* Middle Passage scenes, drawn in part from the horrors of the slave ship *Zong* and those of the actual revolt, portray like no other on film, the legal, physical, medical, sensory, and psychological violence of the Atlantic slave trade.

Spielberg's *Amistad* is a marked improvement over some other slave rebellion films made before and after it. It certainly is a more accurate and

effective rendering than Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo's 1969 *Burn!* in which slave revolutionaries have to be duped into revolting by a "clever" Englishman, Sir William Walker (Marlon Brando).<sup>61</sup> Likewise, it is superior to Quentin Tarantino's 2012 blaxploitation mockery of slave resistance/revolt, *Django Unchained* and Timur Bekmambetov's action-packed horror film from the same year, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, in which slaves are, literally, passive victims of their vampire masters.<sup>62</sup> Spielberg still misses the opportunity, however, to expose the important communal, cultural, and gendered aspects of slave resistance and revolt. Most misleading is his decision to emphasize white heroism instead of the efforts and agency of the African women and men who risked their lives, not just their reputations and monetary fees, to strike for freedom. Unfortunately, Gary Ross similarly fails in his depiction of white "heroism" in his 2016 *Free State of Jones*.<sup>63</sup>

Carlos Diegues, however, does not, in his 1984 romanticized story of marronage, *Quilombo*, miss the opportunity, nor does Haile Gerima in his brilliant 1993 *Sankofa*.<sup>64</sup> Diegues plays homage to the reality and legend of Palmares, the largest maroon society in seventeenth-century Brazil, noted for its confederate government, military might, and African-derived cultural traditions.<sup>65</sup> The film's critical significance is that it captures slave communalism and an ethos of resistance and agency that is not just male-centered. With characters such as the military strategist Dandara (Zeze Motta) and the quilombo ruler Acotirene (Alaide Santos), *Quilombo* asserts women's roles in slave resistance and revolutionary movements, even while still demonstrating their work as providers of subsistence goods, material objects, and domestic care.<sup>66</sup>

Haile Gerima's powerful *Sankofa*, about life and resistance on an antebellum Louisiana sugar plantation, provides a similar, but more expansive and complex, discourse on resistance. Within its ensemble of characters with various occupations, cultural backgrounds, genders, and generations are bondspeople who either do not typically have central roles in slavery films or are not usually in conversation with one another. There is Mona (Oyafunmike Ogunlano), for example, the assimilated domestic routinely raped by her master. Unlike many other film concubines, Mona is not mixed-race, and there is no question of romance; she is a victim of serial rape. She is in love with Shango (Mutabaruka), a rebellious slave from the Caribbean. Shango wants the slave community, and Mona in particular, to commit to a slave revolt. Mona refuses to do so; she neither wants to kill all of the whites nor harm those house slaves who are friends and kin. She also longs for the maternal attention of NuNu (Alexandra Duah), the



Akan woman who serves as a kind, nurturing leader and cultural mentor. Thanks to NuNu, a neighboring maroon society has pledged to help her compatriots. She is loved and cherished by most, especially Noble Ali (Afemo Omilami), the driver and a brute to the field slaves. NuNu convinces Noble to be a caring person and a rebel. It is her biracial son Joe (Nick Medley), however, whom she cannot change. Joe's character is a rarity in slave filmography—a male tragic mulatto. NuNu has refused to tell her son that he is the product of rape, and he grows up caught between the worlds of his mother and the resident Catholic priest (Reggie Carter), who teaches Joe that his mother is a savage who will destroy him. It is only after Joe commits matricide and learns of his conception that he realizes that Father Raphael perpetrated the ultimate violence against him—destroying his connection to his black kin, culture, and community. Last, but not least, is Lucy (Mzuri), the dark-skinned house woman obsessed with Joe's white skin and blue eyes.

Through *Sankofa's* powerful and intertwined storylines and unique characterizations, Gerima produces the most consequential full-length film on southern slavery. He successfully engages profoundly important questions on slave relationships with the plantation's white power structure and among the enslaved themselves. On its surface, *Sankofa* is a story about reconnecting the present with the past. But what the film really offers is a multidimensional view of the daily lives of a diverse slave community on the brink of revolt and the conditions that lead them to, individually and collectively, rebel. *Sankofa* set a high standard for later films that engage resistance, including the most celebrated Hollywood film on black slavery to date.

The ordeal of Solomon Northup, a free man of color from New York state is the focus of the 2013 film *12 Years a Slave*, winning Oscar awards for best picture, writer (John Ridley), director (Steve McQueen), and supporting actress (Lupita Nyong'o).<sup>67</sup> Northup's 1853 autobiography, the basis for the film, was one of the most popular of the firsthand accounts of southern slavery of its time.<sup>68</sup>

One of the things that convinced McQueen to take on Northup's autobiography was Northup's numerous images of slave women in his account of enslavement in Louisiana. The plight of enslaved women was an important abolitionist literary device of the author's era. These stories often were employed to gain sympathy by emphasizing the women's inability to maintain such gender conventions as domesticity, sexual purity, and maternal care because of their status as physical and sexual laborers who could not be married legally or have control over their children.<sup>69</sup> Northup's publication

certainly made it possible for a vast audience to witness the details of rampant sexual abuse and forced concubinage, not only as described in accounts of other male slaves, but also as penned by female survivors.

When he was kidnapped from Saratoga Springs, New York, in 1841, Solomon Northup was about thirty-three, a free, literate, Christian family man; skilled craftsman; inventor; and musician—not the typical protagonist of a slave saga film. From the first day Solomon is held captive in a Washington, D.C., slave pen, he takes note of the women around him, providing his reader with many details of their personal histories. Unlike Northup's narrative, however, the film loses much of the diversity of the slave female's experience.

McQueen focuses slave women's stories, almost exclusively, on the sexual relations between them and their white masters. Inexplicably—given Northup's book—McQueen cast all of his major female characters as concubines: the discarded Eliza (Adepero Oduye), pitifully heartbroken after the sale of her children; the sadistically brutalized Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o), longing for death; and the exalted survivor "Mistress" Shaw (Alfre Woodard). Northup's narrative provides much fuller descriptions of slave women's lives. He never loses sight, for example, of their economic value to their owners, particularly as laborers on the sugar and cotton frontier of Louisiana. He was most impressed by the "large and stout" lumberwomen who could fell trees in the forest as efficiently as their male peers; Patsey, who could pick five hundred pounds of cotton daily; and the women on a neighboring plantation who produced fine harvests without male assistance. Besides Patsey's work, however, *12 Years a Slave* ignores this aspect of women's lives, substituting lumbermen for the females Solomon Northup described. The movie version also excludes Northup's female acquaintances, such as Celeste, who passionately resisted their enslavement.

One aspect McQueen captures extremely well, however, is the torture women experienced when they became the obsessions of masters and mistresses. Patsey is the forced concubine of Edwin Epps (Michael Fassbender), an alcoholic sadomasochist. His obsession with the young woman fuels his wife's (Sarah Paulson) hatred. Patsey magnificently represents the hundreds of thousands of enslaved girls and women sexually harassed and abused by their owners and overseers and, as a result, relentlessly tormented by jealous plantation mistresses.

Still, there was much more to be learned from Northup's Patsey than McQueen offers. Why, for example, is she in this position? What we learn from Northup, and what is completely obscured in the film, is that Patsey is exceptional not only because she is the most brutalized slave on Epps's

plantation but also because she is culturally distinct as a direct descendant of “Guinea” people, a position that imbues her with an unusual pride. Despite the constant brutality she endures, Northrup describes her as having an “air of loftiness in her movement, that neither labor, nor weariness, nor punishment could destroy,” with a kind of delight in life that was, surprisingly, surpassed by her capacity for physical labor.<sup>70</sup> It is, of course, Patsey’s inability to be defeated and owned—spiritually and psychologically—that so unnerves the Epps family. Mr. Epps wants to own her body unconditionally. Mrs. Epps wants to control her husband’s dalliances and maintain her privilege as a dignified slaveholding woman. Both desperately want to destroy Patsey—Mr. Epps through his work demands, his brutal skin-cutting whippings, and his constant rapes and Mrs. Epps through her physical and verbal abuse.

The film also does not provide much information about enslaved men other than Northrup, or slave community activities. Early on, male characters advise Solomon to hide himself—his free status, literacy, and desire to escape—from his masters if he is to survive. The audience understands that slave life often is not what it appears to those on the “outside.” Despite all of the abuse he experiences and witnesses, however, Solomon also records scenes of happiness the slave community crafts for itself. Dances, Christmas celebrations, courtship rituals, music, marriage celebrations, and camaraderie colored the lives of the enslaved whom Solomon came to know. McQueen’s portrayal, however, is disappointingly flat. One either experiences the joys of freedom as indicated in the romanticized scenes from Solomon’s life in Saratoga Springs, or the hell of slavery that is devoid of family, friend, or community. Despite these flaws, however, *12 Years a Slave* still is an impressive cinematic accomplishment in its own right, with stunning cinematography, a brilliant cast, and a gut-wrenching story that is moving, suspenseful, enraging, and ultimately uplifting.

While the presence of the slave community largely is lacking in McQueen’s film, its importance is perhaps exaggerated in Nate Parker’s 2016 controversial *Birth of a Nation*, about Nat Turner and his apocalyptic revolt in Southampton County, Virginia in August 1831.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Parker elevates Turner’s community to a “black nation”—reclaiming and repurposing that noun in obvious opposition to D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a [White] Nation*. Parker’s film, which he wrote, directed, and starred in, is important partially because it humanizes Turner and his followers (much as did Charles Burnett’s 2003 documentary *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*).<sup>72</sup> It does so in part by including the spiritual and cultural revelations and slavery-related traumas that may have inspired the precocious, literate, Christian Turner to plot and carry out an event that ended

the lives of dozens of whites and hundreds of blacks. As Gerima does in *Sankofa*, Parker attempts to explain Turner's slave community's movement toward rebellion. He includes torturous scenes, for example, of teeth being knocked out to force-feed those trying to starve themselves, the gang rape of Turner's wife and the abuse of other men's wives as part of the context for the revolt.

The film also is important because it successfully reveals the significance of African and Christian religious/philosophical ideals and practices in the antebellum South. To a certain extent, *Quilombo*, *Sankofa*, and *Burn!* expose audiences to the power of enslaved people's persistent African cultures. Parker extends the critique of Christianity's use to oppress blacks that had been expressed in films like *Sankofa* to his study of Nat Turner, a Christian also influenced by African beliefs that persist in his family and community. *Birth of a Nation* competently demonstrates the perverted manner in which masters hoped to inspire passivity through Christianity, even hiring out Nat to preach obedience. Turner, of course, comes to realize that the teachings of his Bible (now held at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.) held not just the promise of freedom, but also the command for him, and fellow black Christians, to actively seize it, and to do so violently if necessary.<sup>73</sup> The problems with *Birth of a Nation* are not different from those of others in which writers and directors try to embellish a well-documented historical event with Hollywood action scenes, melodrama, and even romance.<sup>74</sup> Most offensive, perhaps, is the confrontational battle between Nat's forces and the white militia: it completely obscures the reality of the isolated attacks and guerilla-style fighting characteristic of this revolt.

The same year that *Birth of a Nation* appeared on the big screen, two excellent miniseries on slavery, *Roots* (the remake) and *Underground*, came to television. These programs explore different themes—family and resistance—but have overlapping storylines and draw richly on methodologies that use oral histories and cultural competencies. Both also succeed admirably where some other films have failed because of their attention to details of material culture; the interior discourse in slave families and communities; and the influence of African and European American cultural expressions, knowledge, and ideals.

*Roots'* representations of social life among the Mandinka in Gambia, the horrors of the Middle Passage, fugitive slaves' difficulties in reaching their destinations, and the cultural conflict between "outlandish" Africans and creole blacks seem quite authentic. The storylines are somewhat less convincing when they emphasize the father or husband's role in the family. This is not surprising, given that the revised *Roots* is centered on the males



Figure 3  
*Underground* (Courtesy of Sony Pictures Television)

in this family, although Kizzy's story of serial rape is as moving, disturbing, and realistic as Patsey's in *12 Years a Slave*.

*Underground's* stories and action scenes are more focused on females, which underscores its importance to the filmography on slavery. That these females, regardless of age and status, all actively resist their enslavement and are the equals, if not superiors, to men in liberation work renders this series not only unique, but essential to the viewing audience's understanding of slave life. *Underground* explains that women, like men, used all of their resources—medicinal knowledge, literacy, sexual appeal, verbal persuasion, and athletic prowess—to succeed. Moreover, the women in *Underground* are not afraid to murder, fight, burn, escape, lie, cheat, steal, starve, hide, or collude with indigenous peoples to gain their freedom or that of their children. Freedom and family are the only things sacred to them. Religion is a source of strength, but also a ruse that can be used to gain freedom or retaliate against abuse. Concubinage is not about love, but the struggle for power and/or a source of betrayal and revenge. The series also illustrates that concubines often were driven to addiction for psychological survival and includes, finally, an important corrective to the lingering image of happy, dancing pickaninnies so prevalent in the first half-century of slavery filmography. It aptly demonstrates how brutal

slavery was to children who were put to work before they were physically or psychologically prepared for field discipline.

This rather brief survey makes it clear, therefore, that film is a powerful medium that has been used both to solidify popular and scholarly images of history and to radically challenge them. Slavery filmography began with all of the ugly, stereotypical characterizations and storylines one would expect of the racial nadir of the early twentieth century. A revolutionary social movement at mid-century and a profound revision in the historiography of slavery beginning in the 1970s prompted changes in the public's reception of more realistic and humanistic images of enslaved black people, their interior lives, personal worth, and strivings. Much about the slave experience still can be engaged in film, and cinema retains the possibility of pushing society toward greater inclusion and understanding of the place of race in our nation's past and its framing of the future. Still, after only two seasons, the WGN network canceled the bold and innovative series *Underground*. The abrupt ending, which WGN chalked up to the series' high costs and the network's shifting priorities, prompted a multitude of online protests. Fans suspected that the show's demise was due to its predominantly black cast and heroic storylines derived from the perspectives of enslaved people rather than slave owners or white abolitionists.<sup>75</sup> Were Americans—or perhaps WGN's corporate owners—not ready for a punch-in-the gut primetime show about slavery every week?

The long cinematic road from the first *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Underground* provides no clear answer to this question. It does suggest, however, that national racial politics often did, and still do, shape Hollywood's depictions of slavery on both big and small screens. The recent uptick in racial tension nationally may influence the kinds of films audiences will see about slavery in the near future. *Underground's* critical and artistic triumphs, however, and those of other works, such as *Sankofa*, *Beloved*, *Roots*, *12 Years a Slave*, and *Belle*, provide rich narratives and diverse voices of the enslaved. Together, these productions provide a promising foundation for the portrayal of the slave experience in American history on film. These remarkable artistic works and the growing influence of African American directors, writers, actors, and producers bode well for the future. It will be difficult to turn back.

#### NOTES

1. *Underground*, directed by Anthony Hemingway et al. (2016; Culver City, Calif.: Sony Pictures Television, 2016), DVD.

2. Stephen Railton, dir. "The First Uncle Tom's Cabin: Edison-Porter's Slavery Days (1903)," *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, University of Virginia, 2012, <http://>



utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/films/mv03hp.html; Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001); Jesse Rhines, *Black Film, White Money* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Valerie Smith, ed., *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000); Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

3. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1852). The novel first was serialized in the abolitionist *National Era* newspaper, beginning in June 1851.

4. *Topsy and Eva*, directed by Del Lord (N.p.: Feature Productions, Inc., 1927).

5. *For Massa's Sake*, directed by Joseph Golden (N.p.: n.p. 1911).

6. *His Trust*, directed by D.W. Griffith (New York: Kino Lorber, 1911); *His Trust Fulfilled*, directed by D. W. Griffith (New York: Kino Lorber, 1911).

7. Lynde Denig, "Marse Covington," July 31, 1915, *The Moving Picture World*, 107 vols. (New York: Chalmers Publishing Company, 1915), 25:832.

8. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, directed by William Robert Daly (1914; Burbank, Calif.: Hollywood's Attic, 1996), VHS.

9. Sigmund Lubin, *A Southern Romance of Slavery Days*, available online at Rutgers University Community Repository, Rutgers University Library, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/25434/>.

10. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, directed by Harry A. Pollard (1927; New York: Kino International, 1999), DVD.

11. Michael Rogin, "'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision': D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*," *Representations* 1, no. 9 (1985): 156; Douglas O. Linder, "Lynchings by Year and Race," *Famous Trials*, 1995–2018, <http://www.famous-trials.com/sheriffshipp/1084-lynchingsyear>.

12. Mary Childs Nerney to Mr. George Packard, April 15, 1915, NAACP Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, available online at *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4966>.

13. "Jane Addams Condemns Race Prejudice Film: Calls It 'Pernicious Caricature of Negro Race,'" *New York Evening Post*, March 13, 1915, available online at *History Matters*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4994>.

14. U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton, 1929), 291.

15. Eric Foner, "Why Reconstruction Matters," *New York Times*, March 28, 2015.

16. Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 19.

17. The Hollywood Golden Age is dated both from the late 1920s and the 1930s to the end of the 1950s. Carl DiNello, "Remembering the Golden Age of Hollywood," *Hollywood Movie Memories*, May 4, 2010, <http://www.hollywoodmoviememories.com/>



articles/hollywood-history/remembering-golden-age-hollywood.php; Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (1986; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13–20; *The Littlest Rebel*, directed by David Butler (1935; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

18. *Cavalry*, directed by Robert Bradbury (N.p.: Supreme Pictures Corp., 1936).

19. *Dimples*, directed by William Seiters (1936; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

20. *General Spanky*, directed by Fred Newmeyer and Gordon Douglas (Hollywood, Calif.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp./ Hal Roach Studios, Inc., 1936).

21. *Slave Ship*, directed by Tay Garnett (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp., 1937).

22. *Souls at Sea*, directed by Henry Hathaway (Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, Inc., 1937).

23. *So Red the Rose*, directed by King Vidor (Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Productions, Inc., 1935); Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 10.

24. Stark Young, *So Red the Rose* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1934).

25. Leonard J. Leff, “*Gone with the Wind* and Hollywood’s Racial Politics (Part Two),” *Atlantic*, December 1999, 106–14.

26. “All Time Box Office: Domestic Grosses Adjusted for Ticket Price Inflation,” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed March 20, 2018, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm>.

27. Dana Stevens, “Caricature Acting,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2005; Jill Watts, *Hattie McDaniel: Black Ambition, White Hollywood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 1–3.

28. *Song of the South*, directed by Wilfred Jackson and Harve Foster (Burbank, Calif.: Walt Disney Productions, 1946).

29. *Uncle Tom’s Cabaña*, directed by Frederick Bean “Tex” Avery (Hollywood, Calif.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1947).

30. *Uncle Tom’s Bungalow*, directed by Frederick Bean “Tex” Avery (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Brothers Cartoons, 1937).

31. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer’s Comrade)* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884); *Huckleberry Finn*, directed by William Desmond Taylor (N.p.: Famous Players-Lasky Corp./ Mark Twain Co., 1920).

32. *Huckleberry Finn*, directed by Norman Taurog (Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Publix Corp., 1931); *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, directed by Richard Thorpe (Hollywood, Calif.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., 1939).

33. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, directed by Michael Curtiz (1960; Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 2003), DVD.

34. Burt A. Folkart, “Frank Yerby; Novelist Felt Rejected by His Native South,” *Los Angeles Times* January 9, 1992.

35. Regarding Tituba’s racial or ethnic identity, see, for example, Elaine G. Breslaw, *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); and Bernard Rosenthal, “Author Notes: Tituba,” *OAH Magazine of History* 17 (July 2003): 48–50.

36. *The Crucible*, directed by Nicholas Hytner (1996; Beverly Hills, Calif.: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004) DVD; *The Crucible*, directed by Yaël Farber (London: Digital Theatre, 2014).

37. *Maid of Salem*, directed by Frank Lloyd (Hollywood, Calif.: Paramount Pictures, Inc., 1937).

38. *Naked in the Sun*, directed by R. John Hugh (Orlando, Fla.: Empire Studios, Inc., 1957).

39. *Raintree County*, directed by Edward Dmytryk (Hollywood, Calif.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., 1957).

40. *Tamango*, directed by John Berry (1958; Charlotte, N.C.: Ivy Classics Video, 1993), VHS.

41. See, for example, *Frederick Douglass* (1972); "The Life of Frederick Douglass," YouTube video, 42:30, posted by Nuwla, July 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngjE3IkMDXw>; "Booker T. Washington," YouTube video, 3:30, posted by Biography, December 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07cispYOhWQ>; "Booker T. Washington: The Life and the Legacy," YouTube video, 31:40, posted by U.S. National Archives, February 1, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew05QCsYcGA>; "Booker T. Washington," YouTube video, 5:00, posted by joroarkenglish, October 28, 2008, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Hsd55AK53U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Hsd55AK53U); "Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad {Part 1}," YouTube Video, 49:49, posted by Judah's Back, September 27, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F54jtNaBK2E>; "Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad {Part 2}," YouTube Video, 44:27, posted by Judah's Back, September 27, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaBKXsygMv8>.

42. *Slavery and the Making of America*, directed by Danté J. James et al. (2004; New York: Ambrose Video Publishing, 2004), DVD.

43. *Slaves*, directed by Herbert Bieberman (N.p.: Slaves Co./Theatre Guild Films/Walter Reade Organization, 1969).

44. *Mandingo*, directed by Richard Fleischer (1975; San Diego, Calif.: Legend Films, 2008), DVD; *Quilombo* (1984; New York: New Yorker Video, 2005), DVD; *12 Years a Slave*, directed by Steve McQueen (2013; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.

45. See, for example, George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Biography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972); George P. Rawick, ed., *Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Account of Negro Ex-Slaves* (1945; repr., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1974); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).

46. Don Kaplan, "Amazing 'Roots' Returns after 40 Years, Dredging up Alex Haley Plagiarism Scandal," *New York Daily News*, May 19, 2016.

47. Arnold H. Lubasch, "Roots Plagiarism Suit Is Settled," *New York Times* December 15, 1978, A1; Kaplan, "Amazing 'Roots' Returns after 40 Years."

48. Gregory Rodriguez, "The 'Roots' of America's Genealogy Obsession," *San Diego Chronicle* May 14, 2014.
49. Darlene Clark Hine, "The Rape and Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (Summer 1989): 912–20.
50. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); Deborah White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Random House, 1984).
51. Louisa Picquet, *Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life*, ed. Rev. H. Mattison (New York: Published by the Author, 1861); Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*, ed. Lydia Maria Child (Boston, Mass.: Published for the Author, 1861).
52. *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme (1998; Burbank, Calif.: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
53. Nell Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 1995).
54. *Queen*, directed by John Erman (1992; Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 1997), VHS.
55. *Jefferson in Paris*, directed by James Ivory (1995; Burbank, Calif.: Touchstone Home Entertainment/Buena Vista Home Video, 2004), DVD; *Sally Hemings: An American Scandal*, directed by Charles Haid (2000; La Crosse, WI: Platinum Disc Corp./ Echo Bridge Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD.
56. Fawn Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: Norton, 1974); Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: Norton, 2009); Joseph Ellis, *The American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage, 1996). See also Brenda E. Stevenson, "Review Essay of Annette Gordon Reed's *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*," *Journal of African American History* 96 (Summer 2011): 1–15.
57. *The Courage to Love*, directed by Kari Skogland (New York: Screen Media, 2000).
58. *Belle*, directed by Amma Asante (2013; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014), DVD.
59. *A House Divided*, directed by Stan Lathan (Miami, Fla.: WPBT Community Television Foundation of South Florida Inc., 1982); *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, directed by Stan Lathan (1987; Los Angeles: Republic Pictures, 1996), VHS.
60. *Amistad*, directed by Steven Spielberg (1997; Universal City, Calif.: DreamWorks, 2004), DVD.
61. *Burn!* directed by Gillo Pontecorvo (1969; Culver City, Calif.: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

62. *Django Unchained*, directed by Quentin Tarantino (2012; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Weinstein Company Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD; *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, directed by Timur Bekmambetov (2012; Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2012), DVD.

63. *Free State of Jones*, directed by Gary Ross (2016; Universal City, Calif.: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2016), DVD; Peter Travers, "Free State of Jones Movie Review," *Rolling Stone Magazine* June 23, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/free-state-of-jones-20160623>.

64. *Sankofa*, directed by Haile Gerima (1993; Washington, D.C.: Mypheduh Films, 2003), DVD.

65. See, for example, R. K. Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil," *Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965): 161–75.

66. See, for example, Jane Landers, "Founding Mothers: Female Rebels in Colonial New Granada and Spanish Florida," *Journal of African American History* 98 (Winter 2013): 7–23. Another important film regarding slave resistance that took place outside of the United States is Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Last Supper* (1976; New York: New Yorker Films/New Yorker Films Artwork, 2008), DVD; Vincent Canby, "Movie Review: 'The Last Supper,' A Parable from Cuba Politics and Religion," *New York Times*, May 5, 1976.

67. *12 Years a Slave* (2013).

68. Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, available online at *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>.

69. David Fiske, "Authenticity and Authorship: Solomon Northup's 12 Years A Slave," *The New York History Blog: Historical News and Views from the Empire State*, November 13, 2013, <http://newyorkhistoryblog.org/2013/11/13/authenticity-and-authorship-of-solomon-northups-12-years-a-slave/>; David Wilson, "Editor's Preface" in Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, xv–vi; Eric Herschthal, "The Passion of Solomon Northup," *Opinionator* (blog), *New York Times*, November 6, 2013, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/06/the-passion-of-solomon-northup/>; Mollie Lieblich, "The Cultural Significance of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*," *US History Scene*, August 15, 2013, <http://www.ushistoryscene.com/uncategorized/12yearsaslave/>; and Sam Worley, "Solomon Northup and the Sly Philosophy of the Slave Pen," *Callaloo* 20, no. 1 (1997): 243–59.

70. Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 186–89.

71. Britni Danielle, "Nate Parker on Campus Incident: Consent and Toxic Male Culture," *Ebony*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/nate-parker-rape-charges-consent#axzz4xgBHYt00>.

72. *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, directed by Charles Burnett (2002; San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2002), DVD.

73. "Nat Turner's Bible Donated to National Museum of African American History and Culture," *WAVY-TV*, February 16, 2017, <http://wavy.com/2017/02/16/nat-turners-bible-donated-to-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/>; "Nat

Turner's Bible at the National Museum of African American History and Culture," *CBS News*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/11/>.

74. Thomas R. Gray, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton County, VA* (Baltimore, MD: Author, 1831); Patrick H. Breen, *The Land Shall Be Deluged in Blood: A New History of the Nat Turner Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

75. Bethonie Butler, "'Underground,' Was a Hit for WGN America. Here's Why It Got Canceled," *Washington Post*, May 31, 2017; Cory Baker, "'Underground' Is in Trouble as WGN America Pivots away from Scripted TV," *TV Guide*, May 17, 2017, <http://www.tvguide.com/news/underground-wgn-america-sinclair-buys-tribune/>; Tim Surette, "'Underground' Cancelled as WGN America Ditches Prestige Dramas," *TV Guide*, May 30, 2017, <http://www.tvguide.com/news/underground-cancelled-wgn-america/>.