

From Reality to Screen: The
Representation of the Civil Rights
Movement in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*

Tamara Mariño Díaz

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Directora e titora da tese: Dra. María Frías Rudolphi

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A mi madre y a mi padre, por ser mi mayor apoyo y motivación. A mi hermana, por su infinita ayuda y comprensión. A mi abuela, por ser el mayor ejemplo de superación. A mi familia, por siempre estar ahí. A mis amigos y amigas, por creer más en mí que yo misma. Además, a todas esas personas que ya no están pero que estarán celebrando este logro con mucho orgullo dondequiera que estén. Sin vuestra ayuda y cariño esto no habría sido posible. Muchas gracias.

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Abstract

From Reality to Screen: The Representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' The Butler

The aim of this Ph. Dissertation is to look at one of the most traumatic events in the history of the United States, the Civil Rights Movement, and focus on one of the best Oscar winning movies of the last decade, Lee Daniels' *The Butler* (2013).

I will try to prove the unmistakable relationship that exists between real live events in the North-American history and those explicitly tackled in Lee Daniels' movie, to later focus on the impact that the figure of the African-American major-domo who works in the White House makes on the African-American community. I will use as my primary sources the movie *The Butler* (2013) and the documentary series *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987). In spite of existing controversy between fiction and cinematic discourse and to what extent a movie can or cannot offer a fair representation of a historical time, *The Butler* does depict the Civil Rights fight and some of their most important figures and events. With this work, I attempt to show that movies can be a source of truthful knowledge and representation when coming to study and understand the history of the United States.

Resumen

De la realidad a la pantalla: la representación del movimiento por los derechos civiles en El mayordomo de Lee Daniels

El objetivo de estos estudios de Doctorado es profundizar en uno de los momentos más traumáticos de la historia de los Estados Unidos, el movimiento por los derechos civiles, usando una de las más aclamadas películas ganadoras de un Oscar de la última década, *El mayordomo* (2013).

Intentaré probar la indiscutible relación que existe entre los hechos reales de la historia de América del Norte y su representación en la película de Lee Daniels, para después poder centrarme en el impacto que tiene en la comunidad afroamericana la figura del mayordomo afroamericano que trabaja en la Casa Blanca. Mis fuentes primarias para todo esto serán la película *El mayordomo* (2013) y el documental *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987). Aunque existe controversia entre el discurso ficticio y el de las películas, y de hasta qué punto una producción cinematográfica puede ofrecer una buena representación de una época histórica, *El mayordomo* representa la lucha por los derechos civiles y a algunas de las figuras y acontecimientos más importantes. Con este trabajo, intentaré demostrar que las películas pueden ser una fuente de información verídica para estudiar y entender la historia de Estados Unidos.

Resumo

Da realidade á pantalla: a presentación da loita polos dereitos civís en *The Butler* de Lee Daniels

O obxectivo destes estudos de doutoramento é afondar nun dos momentos máis traumáticos da historia de Estados Unidos, o movemento polos dereitos civís, empregando unha das mellores películas gañadoras dun premio Oscar da última década, *The Butler* (2013).

Intentarei probar a indiscutíbel relación que existe entre os feitos reais da historia de América e a súa representación na película de Lee Daniels para despois poder centrarme no impacto que ten na comunidade afroamericana a figura do mordomo afroamericano que traballa na Casa Branca. As miñas fontes primarias para todo isto serán a película *The Butler* (2013) e o documental *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987). Porén, existe controversia entre o discurso ficticio e o das películas e de até que punto unha produción cinematográfica pode ofrecer unha correcta representación dunha época histórica, *The Butler* representa a loita polos dereitos civís e algunhas das súas figuras e acontecementos máis importantes. Con este traballo intentarei mostrar que as películas poden ser unha fonte de información verídica para estudar a historia de Estados Unidos.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	12
1. Methodology on Cinema as a Historical Source and an Approach to the History of the Study of Movies	20
2. Movie Concepts in Lee Daniels' <i>The Butler</i>	47
3. An Approach to the Representation of African-Americans in Cinema ..	60
3.1 What Is Considered Black Cinema?	80
4. Movies as a Social Practice	87
4.1 The Power of Stories	90
5. The Eyes on the Prize: A Social-Historical Contextualization	102
5.1 1926 – Awakenings	102
5.2 1957 – Fighting Back	111
5.3 1960 – Ain't Scared of Your Jails	117
5.4 1961– No Easy Walk	124
5.5 1964 – Bridge to Freedom	143
5.6 1968 – Power	152
5.7 1969 – A Nation of Law	161
5.8 1974 – The Keys to the Kingdom	166
5.9 1986 – Back to the Movement	171
6. Lee Daniels' <i>The Butler</i>	175
6.1 The Real Story Behind the Movie	175
6.1.1. Being a Butler in the White House	180
6.1.2 Eugene Allen versus Cecil Gaines	184
6.2 The Story in the Movie	186
6.2.1 Summary of the Movie	186
6.2.2 The Making of the Movie	190
6.2.3 The Award Season: Success, Reviews and Controversies	203
7. A Study of the Representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' <i>The Butler</i>	208
7.1 1926 – Macon, Georgia	208
7.2 1957 – The Eisenhower Administration	210
7.3 1960 – Fisk University	215
7.4 1961 – The Kennedy Administration	219

7.5 1964 – The Johnson Administration	229
7.6 1968 – Memphis, Tennessee	235
7.7 1969 – The Nixon Administration	248
7.8 1974 – Nixon’s Second Term	255
7.9 1986 – The Reagan Administration.....	262
7.10 2008 – The Obama Administration.....	269
8. From the Civil Rights Movement to Barack Obama	276
9. Conclusion.....	297
Works Cited	305
Appendix:.....	332
The Black Lives Matter Movement and Trump’s Administration	332
USA Presidential Elections of 2020.....	345
2021’s USA - A Work in Progress	349
Lee Daniels’ <i>The Butler</i> through Pictures.....	359
Eugene Allen’s Life through Pictures	385
Resumen.....	395
Resumo.....	403

Introduction

Throughout history, there have been numerous representations and fiction dealing with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States on the big screen. Relevant events from that period and the most important figures from that historical movement appear in films such as *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Crazy in Alabama* (1999), *Hairspray* (2007), *Selma* (2015) or *The Help* (2011), among others. All of these different adaptations, that range from a traumatic drama movie like *Mississippi Burning* to a teenager musical movie like *Hairspray*, have made their contribution to create a more or less accurate representation of the black American community in cinema.

The aim of this Ph. Dissertation is to analyze to what extent the representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' movie *The Butler* (2013) is accurate by comparing it to the documentary series *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987), as well as other archival footage of that period, and evaluate to what extent it gives a fair representation of the history of the United States. The representation of the African-American struggle to put an end to discrimination and segregation varies from other movies that have been made in the past about this topic but they are all equally worth of studying. Actually, Lee Daniels offers a reinterpretation of the Civil Rights Movement events by creating a fictional story based on a real-life experience. In addition, Daniels uses real footage of the period which adds authenticity to the movie. By doing so, the director attracts all types of public whether it is someone who likes watching fictional movies or someone who loves watching movies that deal with historical

data. Overall, Daniels makes them all feel that they are learning about or revisiting black Americans' history by watching his movie.

In the last few years, *The Butler* (which covers historical events from 1926 to 2008) has become a social phenomenon because it has brought back the narrative of the Civil Rights Era during the presidency of the first African-American president in the United States, Barack Obama. The fact that an African-American citizen became the President of the US, coinciding with the premiere of a movie based on a real life African-American servant in the White House, has made people around the world connect deeply with the movie. What can be highlighted is that the plot is truthful to the Civil Rights time, the historical facts and the inspirational life story of one of the major-domos in the White House, Eugene Allen.

The basis of this Ph. Dissertation is made of two different approaches that work together throughout the whole investigation: a social history movie approach and a social educational approach. The use of these methodologies will help not only to analyze the accuracy of the Civil Rights Movement events depicted in Lee Daniels' *The Butler* but also its influence within society—particularly, within black American communities. Therefore, approaches dealing with technological, social and sociological ideas will be used throughout this work. Some of the most important authors regarding the study of the relationship between cinema, history and education such as Charles F. Altman, James Chapman, Robert A. Rosenstone or Gladstone Yearwood will be taken into account. Their approaches, as well as their development through time, are very important for the understanding of this Ph. Dissertation because the cinema industry never stops evolving and changing. On the one hand, I look at

specific historical information about that era, using books, documentaries, interviews, articles and relevant magazines on the field. On the other hand, I analyze Daniels' representation of the Civil Rights Movement in *The Butler's* world to prove that, although it is not an exact transposition of reality, cinema is a very valid mean to teach and understand historical events. Through Daniels' movie, the spectators are drawn into the powerful era of the Civil Rights Movement intertwined with the real happenings of an African-American major-domo in the White House.

There are innumerable written sources that deal with the presence of the African-American community in the United States. Since I try to see to what extent history can be properly fictionalized, I have chosen certain sources that I will be using to better understand the lives of the African-American community such as Peniel E. Joseph's *Dark Days Bright Nights*, Manning Marable's *Race Reform and Rebellion* or Aldon D. Morris' *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, among many others, as well as those concerning the analysis of movies such as James Chapman's *Film an History* or Robert A. Rosenstone's *History on Film Film on History*. Another source that it is essential for this study is the manual by Clayborne Carson and other writers *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* which I will be using along with its documentary series *The Eyes on the Prize*. Both the book and the series are and ideal collection of documents, speeches and firsthand accounts about the black freedom struggle, which I have found helpful throughout the writing of this dissertation.

As for the visual representations, even though *The Butler* (2013) is a relatively recent movie, there are a large number of interviews and articles that deal with this Academy Award winning movie and the way it portrays the history

of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the most relevant interviews is Wil Haygood's "A Butler Well Served by this Election" in which the author interviews Eugene Allen and gets to know about the life that will later inspire the director Lee Daniels and which is the basis of the plot of *The Butler*. There are also a variety of critical reviews about the big screen adaptation that will be also useful for the goal of this research work.

The structure of this Ph. Dissertation is divided into nine chapters and the Conclusion. Following this organization in Chapter 1. "Methodology on Cinema as a Historical Source and an Approach to the History of the Study of Movies", I deal with the methodology that exists regarding the study of films as a historical source as well as the history of the study of movies. On Chapter 2. "Movie Concepts in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" some basic cinematic concepts and discourses will be dealt with at the same time that examples extracted from Lee Daniels' *The Butler* are included. Chapter 3. "An Approach to the Representation of African-Americans in Cinema" offers an overview of the different ways that the African-American community has appeared on movies. Trying to understand different opinions on the subject, some contradictory arguments are dealt with to discuss what black cinema is or is not in the sub-section 3.1 "What is considered Black Cinema?"

Bearing in mind that our working thesis statement embraces the idea that movies like *The Butler* can make a tremendous impact on society at large, in Chapter 4. "Movies as a Social Practice", there are some pages dedicated to discuss the important function of cinema as a social practice. Since the oral tradition is part and parcel of people of African descent, the sub-section 4.1. "The Power of Stories" will be devoted to analyze the role and the function of

stories within society, in general, and within the African American community, in particular, given the ever present black oral tradition from slavery to the present. Here, I have considered interesting to include an interview with former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama who firmly believe in the idea that stories influence and shape the world we live in.

On Chapter 5. “Social-Historical Contextualization”, I have introduced the social-historical background where I dig into the past of the African-American community as part of the history of the United States. This chapter starts at the very beginning of the Civil Rights Movement when African-Americans were starting to fight for their rights and concludes with the arrival of Barack Obama to the presidency of the US. Important moments from this era such as the sit-in movement across the United States, the Freedom rides, the riots in Selma or the apparition of the Black Panther Party, among many others, will be addressed and thoroughly tackled in this section. Besides, attention will be paid to the five presidents who are present in *The Butler* because they all play a role in the Civil Rights Movement, namely: Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Reagan. To better understand their respective mandates and the decisions they took during their presidencies concerning the lives of black people, it is key to fully understand their representation in Daniels’ film. Besides, for the sake of clarity, I have decided to follow here the same division that Daniels uses in his film.

At the core of this dissertation is Chapter 6. “Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*.” Here, it is my intention to cover the most relevant aspects that have to do with the making of the movie such as: the inspiration behind the movie and the reasons why Lee Daniels started working on this production. I will also deal with

the life story of Eugene Allen, the real-life major-domo who inspired the story that is told in the movie. At the same time, I analyze to what extent his apparent invisible life has turned out to be so meaningful for the history of the black Americans and the representation of the black help. To conclude this chapter, I will examine the critical reception of *The Butler* that has been published up to date and discuss the impact and success of the movie across borders.

Chapter 7. “A Study of the Representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” encompasses a comparative study between *The Butler*’s most important real events and the actual historical moments from documentary *The Eyes on the Prize* and other historical documents. The goal will be to analyze a selection of the most important events and figures pertaining to the Civil Rights Movement era to later contrast the information between the two sources—along with the existing biographies, videos, speeches and documentaries in that regard. To analyze the most significant characters and scenes in *The Butler* that are related to the Civil Rights Movement, to prove the similarities and/or differences that exist between the real events and the cinematographic adaptation will be the main goal of this dissertation. Thus, the storyline of the movie has been divided into the four presidencies that are present in *The Butler* which leads us to analyze the most important events occurring during each presidential term.

In a similar vein, I find it relevant to include Chapter 8. “From the Civil Rights Movement to Barack Obama,” I would refer to the former president Barack Obama as a way of showing the long path that African-Americans had to walk through from slavery times to having an African-American man elected president of the United States. In this chapter, Barack Obama’s successful run

for president, his charismatic personality, and its importance for the whole population of the United States, in particular for the black American communities, will be analyzed.

Finally, given some recent violent and dangerous events (both for blacks and whites) I have decided to conclude this Ph. Dissertation with an appendix where I address the current political situation in the United States. Therefore three different chapters can be found there, namely: The Black Lives Matter Movement and Trump's Administration, USA Presidential Elections of 2020 and 2021's USA – A Work in Progress. These chapters will deal with the Black Lives Movement and the situation of the black community which has been nothing but turbulent during the year 2020. Thus, these final chapters also encapsulate the turbulent socio-political situation during Donald Trump's mandate as well as the unprecedented development of the 2020 Presidential Elections and how the future seems much brighter now that Joe Biden has been elected as the 47th President of the United States.

1. Methodology on Cinema as a Historical Source and an Approach to the History of the Study of Movies

Ever since the invention of cinematography the question has been raised again and again whether and to what extent it would be possible to use film as a way of documenting contemporary history.¹

Cinema can be considered one of the most important mediums for both transmitting stories and providing entertainment. However, when it comes to studying it, historians find it hard to agree because the majority tends to believe that cinema is above all a medium of popular entertainment. What is true, as Chapman writes, is that “film has been claimed as the most realistic of all media” (“Researching Film and History: Sources, Methods, Approaches²” 362). In fact, the first movies ever made by the Lumière brothers³ were “simple films of everyday events such as workers leaving the factory gate or of a train arriving in a station” (Chapman 362). Since movies were initially made as a way of capturing everyday events and as a way to remember history, this Ph. Dissertation aims to demonstrate that movies, such as Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*, can work as historical documents.

¹ Fritz Terveen (qtd. in Chapman, *Film and History* 73).

² From now on, James Chapman’s work will be referenced as “Researching Film and History” as a way to shorten the titled throughout the text but it can be found in the Works Cited section with the complete title “Researching Film and History: Sources, Methods, Approaches”.

³ Auguste Nicolas Lumière (1862 - 1954) and Louis Jean Lumière (1864 - 1948) were makers of photography equipment but they are best known for being the creators of the Cinématographe motion picture system. The brothers also produced short films between 1895 and 1905. It is believed that their screening on March 22, 1895 in Paris for 200 members of the "Society for the Development of the National Industry" was probably the first presentation of a movie on a screen for a big audience in history.

On his part, in 1898, Matuszewski categorized movies as “a new source of history,” and declared that “animated photography could become a singularly efficacious teaching process” (322). However, Chapman does not completely agree with that affirmation when he argues that “no film can ever claim to be an unmediated reproduction of reality” (“Researching Film and History” 364). In actuality, it is understood that films should always be considered as an interpretation of reality but not as a replica. This affirmation is supported by Chapman who clarifies that films “should not be understood as a reproduction of reality but rather as a representation of it” since, at any given time, movies can be modified with no restriction (364). Furthermore, Rosenstone agrees with Chapman when he claims that “films are not mirrors that show some vanished reality but constructions, works whose rules of engagement with the traces of the past are necessarily different from those of written history” (33). Thus, there exist several elements of cinema that should be taken into account when analyzing a movie from a historical perspective.

Related to the above theories we find the Formative Tradition. This consists of a film studies approach whose most relevant exponent was the film theorist Rudolf Arnheim. According to Arnheim, a movie represents the real world with its own rules:

These means obtrude themselves, show themselves able to do more than simply reproduce the required object; they sharpen it, impose a style upon it, point out special features, make it vivid and decorative. Art begins where the conditions of representation serve in some way to mold the object. (55)

Among others, Arnheim asserts that each movie has its own different and unique set of rules that range from the framing of a shot or the music that is used in a scene. As for, Chapman's he sustains that "one of the unique properties of film (. . .) is its ability to create an impression of reality through artifice" (364). That is, following Chapman, one of the most powerful aspects of the cinema is its capacity to make everything that audiences see on the screen look real.

Perhaps that is the reason why since the appearance of the first movie in the 1890s, scholars have been trying to find a way to study films, to come up with many different perspectives and to create debates to try and find the most accurate approaches. Notwithstanding, it was not until the 1960s when the first film courses started to be taught in some American and British universities. As a consequence, the first academic journals that dealt with film studies were the *Journal of the University Film Association* and *Screen Education* which appeared during the sixties.

According to scholars, the most important period for film studies were the 1960s and the 1970s. It is at this time when new approaches and perspectives appeared for those interested in studying movies. One of these methods was the Screen Theory which takes its title form in the journal previously mentioned. As Chapman explains, it emerged from an English literature background and "adopted linguistic methods of semiotics and structuralism and applied them to the textual analysis of film" (360). Essentially, Chapman writes that the Screen Theory tries to analyze films "to understand cinema as an ideological apparatus" and not so much as an aesthetic product (360). Nonetheless, some scholars ended up thinking that the Screen Theory was too restrictive since it

did not take into consideration the role of the spectator as an important element in the process of making a movie. In Chapman words, “it was criticized for its tendency to homogenize films in a way that did not allow for differences between texts to see the cinema spectator as a theoretical construct rather than as groups of historical individuals” (360).

Another approach emerged during that same period but, in this case, the original school takes into account both social and cultural history. Besides, this method considered the context more important than the text itself and was known through *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television Approach*. It also takes the name from the above mentioned academic journal. Chapman highlights that this “historical” method proposes “the meaning of films to arise not from the decoding of films by a theoretical spectator buy rather from the relationship between films and the societies in which they were produced and consumed” (360). Despite its emphasis on the variety of societies, Chapman argues that the approach was also criticized for “reading films as a crude reflection or mirror of society and for not paying due attention to their status as cultural artifacts” (360). In Chapman’s opinion, this “historical” approach was disrespectful to people who considered cinema to be a pure art. While the Screen Theory was a novelty in film studies, *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television Approach* became the method for anyone who wanted to study movies in their social, political and economic contexts a fact that fits in perfectly with the main purpose of this Ph. Dissertation.

Notwithstanding, it had its detractors too. Back in 1974, some skeptical scholars like Petric believed that studying films was something that could not properly be done because “students are forced to rely only on their memory

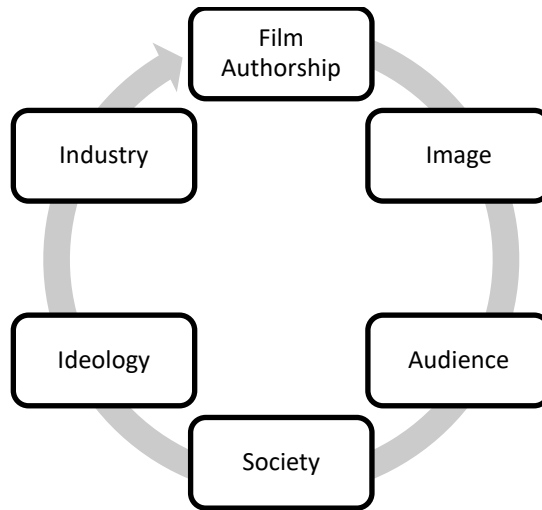
during a few viewings of the film” (22), since they did not have the technology that exists nowadays and that facilitates to watch a movie as many times as needed to analyze it correctly. Besides, Petric adds other obstacles such as the fact that “screenplays are not regularly published and they are not equivalent to a shot-by shot analysis of the completed film” (22). As a consequence, students would not be able to use screenplays to support their studies as they were rarely published for the public use. In view of the surmounting problems, a rather pessimistic Petric concludes that “the appropriate methodology of film history cannot be attained in our time without the full cooperation of the film archives” (23). In the early seventies, this meant that an appropriate study of the movies could not be made due to the lack of specific resources.

Some years later, in 1977, Charles F. Altman started talking about the different approaches that had been used to analyze a movie since its inception while proudly affirming that “during the past decade the literature on the nature and history of the American film has more than doubled” (1). Altman believed that these numbers spoke for themselves and were more than positive for the field. The different approaches that Altman deals with are varied and included: technology, technique, personality, film and other arts, chronicle, social, studio, auteur, genre, ritual, legal, industrial and sociological approaches which covered almost every aspect of any movie. However, Altman proposed that these approaches should be separated into two different categories: production and distribution. Therefore, technology, technique, personality, film and other arts, chronicle, social, studio, auteur, genre and ritual approaches would fit into the production category as those are “dealing with the determinants of the film

image” (3); while the legal, industrial and sociological approaches would be part of the distribution category because they are “dealing with its destiny” (3).

As far as this Ph. Dissertation is concerned, only the technology, social and sociological approaches would be taken into account as they are the ones whose methods deal with the aspects that this dissertation aims to focus on and analyze. While the technological and social approaches deal directly with the production of the movies, the only approach that includes the distribution is the sociological approach. As a matter of fact, the three above mentioned approaches should be examined when working with the representation of history in movies as the relationship between history, society and images is crucial for this field and must not be separated.

First, the Technology Approach deals with the relation between film authorship and society and everything that is in between, but Altman explains that he also understands that movies “have most often been made as commercial products by a studio constantly concerned about audience reaction” and, as a consequence, the main reason why movies are made is to obtain some benefits (4). The critic sustains that the diagram of this association could be drawn as follows: “film authorship -> image -> audience” (4). Besides, Altman claims that a much more complete diagram is needed as the existing links are, at times, much more complex. Therefore, Altman proposes the following circular diagram in which concepts such as ideology or industry are present when analyzing a movie and its audience:



(Altman 4)

Based on this diagram, Altman refers to the complex circular process that goes with the analyzing of a movie and its relationship with society. From his point of view, it contains a “complex network of relationships which involves the audience, society as a whole, the film industry and the ideology that they reflect” (4). Summarizing, when making a movie, it is impossible to separate the film industry from the film authorship since they both work together. By the same token, it is erroneous to omit the way that a certain movie’s ideology might affect a particular audience. In the same thread of thought, Ross emphasizes that “we need to know why filmmakers make the films they do when they do” because some periods of time offer more interesting historical events than others (131). Furthermore, Ross adds that studying “context enables us to understand not simply what we see but what we do not see”—thus helping viewers understand why filmmakers take specific decisions (131). For example, following Ross’ theories, the audience/scholars would try to figure it out the reasons why Lee Daniels’ decided not to include the March on Washington in

The Butler when dealing with the Civil Rights Movement, as it would be shown later in this Dissertation. On his part, Scherer adds that there is not a uniform pattern when making movies and that “sometimes the technology comes first” while “in other cases an effect is desired for aesthetic or practical reasons, and the technology is devised to meet a specific need” (373). All of this would be taken in consideration when analyzing Daniels’ film *The Butler*.

As far as the Social Approach is concerned, it could be safely argued that it deals with the relationship between a particular society and what is shown on the screen. Perhaps, this is the reason why this approach tends to be the most relevant from the historian’s point of view. According to Scherer, the Social Approach “focuses on the ways that film history was influenced by its social environment (. . .) as well as the ways in which that environment was affected by film” (375). That is, going back to Altman’s studies, the social approach is concerned with “society’s effect on film and it assumes the following relationship: society → image” (11). As a matter of fact, and, as it is easy to prove, a lot of real social problems are used as main plots in movies and quite often films become a reflection of society. As a consequence, Altman emphasizes, “most social historians have treated film as an unmediated transposition of social reality” (12). However, as Altman himself points out, it is also essential to have in mind that every director chooses the parts that she/he wants to include as well as the parts that are dismissed when making a movie. Thus, according to Altman, there always exists a specific perspective—or a gaze—when creating a movie: “if film is a window on the world (. . .) it is also a frame, a highly selective medium with its own rules and traditions” (12). However, there are not negative connotations here since what really matters is

that movies about important and real social problems are made to open conversations within the society. It is also interesting to note that as it has historically happened, Altman writes that “most critics agree that there is a casual connection between periods of great stress like the depression or the war and the production of entertainment movies” because people not only need movies to distract themselves for what is happening in their lives but they also need to see their lives represented on the big screen (12). More than anything, what the Social Approach highlights is the fact that “attention to cultural memory is a permanent feature of American history and cinema” (Altman 12). Thus, apart from being a form of entertainment, cinema is one of the strongest ways of transmitting history, honoring our cultures and denouncing horrendous real episodes. In that thread of thought, Scherer adds that “much remains to be discovered about this relationship, film and history, but we know enough to incorporate this dimension into our film history courses and for that matter into our general history” (375).

Third, and opposite to the Social Approach, the Sociological Approach analyzes “film’s effect on society” (Altman 11). This method perceives movies and the movie industry “as a group of entertainment form [that] changes not only individual lives but also the goals accords to which those lives are lived and the standards according to which they are judged” (21). That is, the Sociological Approach gives movies the credit for being a force of power in the audiences since a movie can change someone’s mind and open new debates in society. According to Altman, this method was indisputably the most welcome at that time because “no other approach so openly proclaims the importance of Hollywood cinema in shaping twentieth-century America” (21).

Halfway down the 1980s, another approach called New Film History appeared. Chapman believes this to be one of the most inclusive methods as it “combines both textual and contextual analysis” (361). Its most well-known writers include David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, among others. Nowadays, the New Film History method can be summarized into three main characteristics which take into account different elements such as: 1) the historical processes; 2) the importance of primary sources; and 3) the narrative and visual style in movies. Firstly, according to Chapman, this method understands movies as “complex cultural artifacts whose content and style is determined by a range of historical processes” (361) and that more than one aspect would need to be taken into account to have a complete analysis.

Besides, Chapman writes that the New Film History “recognizes that the production and reception of films are historically specific and seeks out evidence of actual responses rather than assuming a homogenous audience” (361). That is to say, they recognize audience’s importance in the process. Furthermore, Chapman adds that the second characteristic is related to the first one as it gives importance to “non-filmic sources such as company records, personal papers, scripts, diaries, letter, publicity materials, reviews and box-office receipts” which are a way of detecting whether a movie has been a success or a failure (361). The last characteristic about the New History Film approach is “its cultural competence in reading films through both their narrative content and their visual style” (361). As it is impossible to consider movies just as a narrative element like a book (although it has its own cinematic discourse), Chapman adds that film historians should be “alert to changes in fashion and popular taste in order to understand the history of film style” (361) because the

art of cinema is something that is constantly evolving. Thus, a movie from the fifties cannot be analyzed in the same way than a movie that has been produced in the 2010s.

Moreover, O'Connor's *Teaching History with Film and Television* (1987) suggested more steps to follow before properly analyzing a movie while also focusing on the ways a movie should be studied as a historical document. Broadly, O'Connor divided the study of a movie into two stages, namely: 1) finding information about the document that is going to be analyzed; and 2) finding the deeper meaning in relation to some historical moment (11), such as—in our case—the representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*. Following O'Connor's in the first stage there should be included a close study of the film itself, as well as an investigation about the social, cultural, political and economic conditions under which the film was made. This should be followed by an examination of the ways the film was understood by its original audiences (11). In the second stage, the information previously gathered should be studied and find the relation to some type of historical inquiry that is interesting for the analysis (11). To do so, O'Connor proposes four frameworks which are the following: "moving-image documents as representations of history, movie image documents as evidence for social cultural history, moving-image documents as evidence for historical facts and moving-image documents as evidence for the history of film and television" (12). The framework that could be used to study the relationship between real footage of historical events and their representation in *The Butler* is the moving-image documents as representation of history but, as O'Connor reminds, "many moving-image documents might be analyzed using multiple frameworks"

because the study of a movie is something that includes a variety of aspects (12).

What is clear, though, is that the least interesting framework for the purpose of this dissertation is the moving-image documents as evidence for the history of film and television. This selection responds to one of the most relevant aims this Ph. Dissertation tries to achieve—that is, to show the veracity of the historical events that are told in Daniels' movie, thus, proving that watching a movie could be an accurate way not only to teach/learn history but also to open conversations within society. For that reason, only the first three frameworks would be summarized below.

The first framework is somehow close to the Social Approach that has previously been mentioned since its main intention is to analyze movies as documents that represent historical events too. It should be bear in mind that it is impossible to make a movie without the director's specific perspective. Thus, O'Connor says that "there is no such thing as totally objective or absolutely true representation of the past (. . .) since any film that deals with a historical subject interprets that subject in some way," and the audiences need to understand that each director is making their own interpretation of the past (31). However, this does not mean that movies are not worthy of being studied because they cannot be perfectly objective. On the contrary, it is important to be able to "comprehend that point of view and the ways the visual and aural elements of the film contribute to its representation" (31). Apart from this, directors who work on a movie that deals with historical event do their own research work. Although some scholars deny the utility of movies to teach history, it is also common to believe that those productions should be valued for

“an understanding of a culture’s historical mentality” (O’Connor 35). Consequently, they are an open door for people and historical facts that belong to past decades, even centuries, to have a representation of their past on the screen.

Related to the above mentioned is the second framework, films as evidence for social and cultural history because movies offer an opportunity to study popular culture. Furthermore, as O’Connor adds, “films can be used as a convincing illustration or reinforcement of the social and cultural values current in a period under study” (38). This second framework might be quite useful because culture changes all the time. In my opinion, it is very important to use movies as means to transmit and explain certain moments in time since they increase the viewer’s cultural knowledge. Besides, when studying films as evidence for social and cultural history it is crucial not to forget the study of reception because the audience’s reactions are ultimately a reflection on what has been represented on the screen. Above and beyond, O’Connor reminds that “perhaps the most important area in defining the social and cultural relevance of a moving-image document is reception. Film reviews are a good place to start” (42). It is obvious that positive reviews tend to make the value of movies increase as well as to make audiences feel that they are watching something worthy of their time. In a perfect world, good movies that deal with the representation of certain social and cultural history should open conversations and motivate people into researching about what they are watching on the big screen. However, it goes without saying that not very enthusiastic reviews or spectators’ negative comments are part and parcel of any creative artifact such as a film.

Finally, O'Connor deals with the third framework which that refers to evidence for historical facts. This is related to real footage of historical events as "factual data provided in the image itself can be unexpectedly informative if the viewer undertakes a truly active reading" and, unmistakably, those images are closer to telling the truth than what it is represented on a movie (42). As O'Connor believes, "newsreel images can add a dimension to the study of many subjects" since by using real images of historical events people, in general, and students, in particular, can feel closer to the actual situation and that feeling makes the happening much real than a situation that is described in a history book (43). Examples of these are films such as: Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982), Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994), James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), Joe Wright's *Anna Karenina* (2012), or Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013), just to name a few.

However, it is also important to bear in mind that some footage can be modified or used at the directors' convenience as each of them works in favor of a different perspective and might show a particular ideology. What these directors and producers intend is to reach a large audience and, for this reason, news can at times be distorted. Overall, it is important to bear in mind that not everything that people see on television is the absolute truth—thus, they should be more critical of everything they watch. Despite the controversies, though, it can be affirmed that historical films are tremendously pedagogical tools since they familiarize people with history audio-visually.

Some years later, History professor Robert Brent Toplin writes about how much film studies have evolved and emphasizes that historians tended to be more respectful when analyzing historical movies. In Toplin's words, "gone are

the days when professional historians turned up their noses at suggestions that film sometimes should figure prominently in discussions about the past,” to later acknowledge that movies dealing with some historical facts were being considered in higher esteem. Furthermore, Toplin added that “the analysis of motion pictures and television programs can yield insights into the conscious and subconscious concerns of people in another time and place much as a study of literature can produce insights.” In his opinion, movies dealing with historical events should also have its place in education. In fact, Toplin argues that “film is not simply entertainment” but also “an important cultural product” that should be analyzed and connected to what it is happening in our cultures. Ross agrees with Toplin’s views and adds that what movies do is “reflecting and shaping people’s understanding of the world around them” (130). On his part, Toplin also highlights the importance of paying attention to the reception of a movie and the decisions that were made while making it as “historians must base their observations on careful research into a movie’s production history and audience reception rather than relying on loose speculation based almost exclusively on examinations of the motion picture.” In a similar vein, Ross adds that “understanding audiences and reception is another area of concern to historians and film scholars alike” that should never be forgotten as it is as important as the rest of areas of study (131).

As a matter of fact, Ross believes that to study a movie there needs to be a deconstruction of it which cinema scholars do better than historians because “historians have tended to focus on plot lines and to downplay or ignore the significance of the images and the ways in which they are structured and used to convey ideas” (130). That is to say, historians would probably miss the

decisions that a film director has to make, such as, for example, the duration of the movie or the budget, while historians only pay attention to the accuracy of the historical facts. Chapman agrees with Ross, and states that “most professional historians tend to be highly skeptical about the feature film as a medium of historical communication. They will typically focus on its historical inaccuracies” (“Researching Film and History” 368). From my point of view, the above mentioned scholars’ opinions are right, but some directors of movies might at times take liberties to create big moments of drama which are necessary for the development of the plot and the reaction of the audiences.

More recently, in 2011, in his article “Researching Film and History: Sources, Methods, Approaches,” James Chapman writes about the different ways to analyze movies as a historical source. Over all, Chapman highlights that films can be seen as records of the past, cultural artifacts or social documents—thus, he makes a distinction between non-fiction and fiction films when it comes to represent historic periods on screen (365). On the one hand, Chapman suggests that non-fiction films are those “where the empirical content has value as a historical source (. . .) [which normally are] newsreels, and documentaries, that represent a particular event or subject” (365). On the other hand, fictional films are those “where the film’s value as a historical source is detached from its empirical content” (365). As far as this Ph. Dissertation is concerned, it is clear that Lee Daniels’ movie fits into the *fictional film* category although it does not provide a complete and in-depth representation of the Civil Rights Movement era, but it is a representation of Americans’ different attitudes towards race during that time. Furthermore, Chapman adds that it is a fact that “different types of film will provide different sorts of historical evidence” (365),

therefore, both the perspective and genre should always be considered when analyzing a movie. Ultimately, Chapman makes it clear that a film dealing with historical events cannot be compared to a piece of historical scholarship as “all forms of historical communication are not equal” (369). He also asserts that, in the end, movies are mostly made to entertain the audience although some of them are also made with the intention of transmitting messages about past and/or current social problems. However, Chapman considers it important to add that a historical partly fictionalized movie gives more information about the time in which it was made than when its plot is set and that would be taken into account when analyzing any movie (369).

A couple of years later, Chapman published his own book titled *Film and History* in which he keeps dealing with the role of film as a historical source in which he discusses the difference between actuality and authenticity and its relation to historical movies. According to Chapman’s definition of *actuality*, this occurs when the film provides “a record of real people, events or locations” (78); whereas for authenticity, this can be contemplated when the movie is “understood as being true to life or true story even if they are not actuality” (78). Although Chapman believes that movies can only be categorized in one of the previous concepts, in my opinion, *The Butler* fits into both categories because the actuality part consists in the insertion of real footage in the feature length. At the same time, there is authenticity in *The Butler* since the narration of Eugene Allen’s true-life story appears within the background of the period of the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the most important authors who has studied historical movies is Robert A. Rosenstone, an American writer, teacher and historian, who has

focused on the relationship between history and the visual media throughout his professional life. In his book *History on Film, Film on History* (2018), he states that movies do not “simply provide an image of the past, it wants you to feel strongly about that image, specifically about the characters involved in the historical situations that it depicts” (15). That is, movies aim to create a real and strong bond with its audiences and while historical fictional movies are mostly made for entertainment, film directors who deal with historical periods want the viewer “to experience the hurt (and pleasures) of the past,” almost like if the viewer were part of that period of time, and for the whole duration of the movie (15). Moreover, Rosenstone addresses the on-going conversation about what makes a movie dealing with history events perfect. He believes, though, that there is not a universal truth when depicting history on screen. Instead, Rosenstone says that there are different types of truths: “the factual truth, the narrative truth, the emotional truth, the psychological truth, [and] the symbolic truth” (25). Bearing all this in mind, one of the aims of this dissertation is to try and show that the factual truth is more adequate to the type of movie that it is being analyzed. Thus, the main focus will be to prove that although *The Butler* is a fiction movie where some real footage from real historical events are included, the most important goal for director Lee Daniels is to entertain audiences with the story of the butler, at the same time the viewers gain a closer view of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

In this regard, Rosenstone makes it clear that “dramatic films are not and will never be accurate in the same way as books claim to be, no matter how many academic consultants work on a project, and no matter how seriously their advice is taken” (33). Overall, Rosenstone declares that dramatic movies

will never be a source of information about the past as trustworthy as books, texts or manuscripts might be. Nonetheless, it also needs to be questioned the fact that the only way of learning the truth about some historical events is to read the largest and heaving manuals ever existed—which may seem not very appealing for the majority of the population. Thus, the fact that society insists on the need to learn the truth about historical events through written sources needs to be questioned—it cannot possibly be the only way to learn about historical truth since the way to transmit history has evolved with the passing of time.

While only documentary movies with actual footage were considered for this kind of analysis some decades ago, nowadays the film industry has changed and movies with a historical background are better considered at present. In fact, Rosenstone writes that “the historical film is also a genre (or series of genres) with conventions, but one which has been developing for over a century” (34). Therefore, that is why mainstream drama films produced in Hollywood like *The Butler* “instead of depicting actual historical figures, places fictional figures into actual past events or situations” (41) and dramatizes them in favor of the narratives of the movie. Interestingly enough, Monteith also deals with this issue and claims that “in U.S. film culture there were many ways of containing the politics while entertaining the audience” (130). She later adds that “films that examined civil rights struggles in any guise at all were typically reviewed as ‘melodrama’ or ‘social problem pictures’ (130) and that includes movies like Norman Jewison’s *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and Alan Parker’s *Mississippi Burning* (1988). Films similar to these have become really common nowadays in the industry which has evolved tremendously to the point that fiction movies dealing with real historical events are part and parcel of our lives

and, consequently, we might have found characteristic features that may be included in every drama movie that deals with historical periods.

Firstly, as Rosenstone puts it, this type of mainstream movies normally tells “the past as a story with a beginning, middle and an end. A tale that leaves you with a moral message and usually a feeling of uplift. A tale embedded in a larger view of history that is almost always progressive” which is exactly Daniels’ *modus operandi* (41). Also, Monteith believes that in some way “character led dramas like *The Butler* (. . .) rather than fictions are source texts” (125) as they portray veridical facts about the Civil Rights Movement. For example, in Lee Daniels’ movie, the audience can experience Cecil Gaines and his family’s life with its victories and failures while the Civil Rights Movement runs parallel in the background. The end of Daniels’ movie wants the audience to feel that the whole family has overcome their personal difficulties at the same time that the whole country moves forward towards a better future. The morale of Daniels’ movie is easily reflected in *The Butler*: keep fighting for what it is right as a better future is attainable.

However, this can at times be problematic because, as Monteith asserts, “the overriding message for audiences is that the problem was contained and indeed resolved in the 1960s, at least in the lives of the characters who carry the stories” (125). Far from that, Monteith insists, the public should take into account that a movie tells only one particular story or stories but does not deal with the outgoing of the whole movement. When movies about certain communities or movements are made it is usually to keep conversations going on because there are things that still need to be changed. Thus, audiences must never assume that the “happy ending” of a movie is directly related to a

social problem or movement. In real life that does not occur. Nevertheless, Monteith reminds us that what is true is that “the civil rights movement contained all the elements to inspire creative writers: courage in the face of violence, conflict in the face of social change, a moment in history when an old order fell” (123). According to Monteith, all those aspects put together is what makes drama movies like *The Butler* so powerful, inspirational and instructive.

Secondly, Rosenstone writes that drama movies “insist on history as the story of individuals (. . .) who are already renowned (. . .) and those who are not already famous are common people who have done heroic or admirable things or who have suffered from exploitation or oppression” (41). And this is precisely the case with “common people” as the butler and the way his personal story together with the history of his country are intertwined in Daniels’ *The Butler*. Monteith, nevertheless, makes it clear that it is quite complex to make a movie about certain political and social issues and that is the reason why “fiction writers have been cautious about how best to explore the African American freedom struggle and the politics of segregation in the civil rights” (123). Given the intrinsic difficulties, to shed light on characters who are not well known but who might have an inspiring story is the best choice to make. In fact, Daniels’ protagonist, Cecil Gaines is a regular African American man, raised on a plantation, and who has suffered from oppression since the day he was born, but who has also managed to succeed despite the odds. The audiences connect with Cecil because he is portrayed as a hero who has seen the worst in life because of the color of his skin but who nevertheless works hard to make a better life for himself and his family. In essence, Cecil Gaines reminds every one of their father’s or their grandfathers who did everything they could to make

their families happy. Besides, audiences love to have a strong connection with leading roles in movies, especially in dramas—and, in Daniel's movie, Gaines is not the only empathetic character.

Thirdly, these films present history to the audiences, Rosenstone writes, “as the story of a unitary, closed and completed past (. . .) which provides no alternative possibilities to what is happening on the screen, admits of no doubts, and promotes each historical assertion with confidence” (42). Thus, their directors try to represent historical events with complete conviction for the audiences to believe them. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the directors of drama movies do not accept critics about their representation of the past. What most directors try to give is a closed and easy representation of historical events so they do not outshine the central plot of the movie. Monteith agrees and follows this path when he states that “filmmakers find other means to ensure than audiences leave the theater with a light didactic dusting of civil rights history usually contrived as a series of flashpoints in a montage of television news footage” (125). And, once again, this is exactly the technique used by Lee Daniels in his movie. To emphasize his confidence on the historical period that it is dealt with, *The Butler* shows real footage from the period instead of recreating it. By doing so, the director adds veracity to the movie at the same it shows how relevant it was for the creative team to give a fair idea of the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties.

Fourth, movies like *The Butler* always “personalize, dramatize, and emotionalize the past. It gives its history as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering, and heroism” (Rosenstone 42). Once again this is another way of allowing audiences connect with the characters. Every emotion in the

plot is taken to the extreme and exaggerated with the help of cinema elements such as the soundtrack or the special effects. By doing so, the filmmakers attempt to achieve a reaction from the audiences because they want people to feel that they “are not watching events but experiencing them” (Rosenstone 42). Daniels’ *The Butler* does allow the audience to have a first-hand “experience” of the events.

The fifth characteristic, following Rosenstone, is that movies try to make a fair recreation of that moment in the past and give the audiences a “look of the past, of buildings, landscapes, costumes and artifacts. It provides a sense of how common objects appeared when they were part of people’s lives and in daily use” (42) so that people might have a complete understanding of the time and place. By seeing daily objects, clothes or food belonging to a certain period of time, audiences feel closer at the same time that it helps to build a round movie in which nothing is out of place to the extent that sometimes people might be able to identify the year in which the movie is set by only looking at the clothing and the buildings in a movie. For example, in Lee Daniels’ movie, the costume department is very important because the movie’s story is set through different decades and the clothing in each decade has to be changed appropriately for a better representation of each single year. Some costumes, like the *Black Panther Party* clothes, are vital for the movie and the costume department made sure that they were using the right design to represent black power, as well as those wore by what Martin Luther King Jr. or President Kennedy. Taking care of these elements is indispensable in movies and more so in movies that deal with a specific historical period. The fifth characteristic, following Rosenstone, is that movies try to offer a fair recreation of that moment

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Finally, the last characteristic, and one of the most important ones, is the fact that movies dealing with any type of history event or period try to show history as a process. In this vein, Rosenstone writes that “the world on the screen brings together a thing that, for analytic purposes, written history often splits apart,” but concepts like “economics, politics, race, class and gender come together in the lives of individuals and groups” (42). In contrast, history books tend to separate them in order to provide a better explanation of them. However, Rosenstone seems to say, it is also important to see all these themes

together because life is not compartmentalized. Thus, by mixing different topics in movies, they are providing the spectator with a much more realistic representation of the real world. Rosenstone agrees with this unification and emphasizes that “this makes history like life itself, a process of changing relationships where political and social questions are interwoven” (42), just because life is not as static as some history books might tend to narrate. All the above mentioned characteristics are crucial for the making of a movie because altogether they shape the background as well as they make the movie as fair and respectful as possible to the historical time that it is being dealt with.

To summarize, Rosenstone aims to highlight the importance of the fact that “film can provide a complicated and important vision of the past, one that renders history in a way that demands our careful attention, especially because so much of what we learn about the past is conveyed to us today in precisely this medium and this genre, on screens large and small” (43). Therefore, movies should be considered as the most outstanding medium to tell our history nowadays. What Rosenstone proposes is to see movies as a vision of the past and to focus on the fact that “their overall portrait of vision has something meaningful and important to say about our past” (43)—instead of wasting our time debating whether they are the most accurate form of transmitting history or not. Furthermore, Rosenstone adds that he likes calling a historian to anyone “who devotes a significant part of her or his working career to making meaning (in whatever medium) out of the past” (105) which, therefore, makes movie directors like Lee Daniels also historians.

To have movie directors, and other artists or regular people, paying attention to and working with history to get informed make a great change in our

society. When movie directors use their platforms to show us certain moments back in time they are giving the audiences the power “to put flesh and blood on the past, to show us individuals in lifelike situations, to dramatize events, give us people identify with, make us feel to some extent as if we have lived moments and issues long gone” (Rosenstone 105), at the same audiences relive the past both in a magical and real way. Consequently, Rosenstone reminds us that our “society in which reading, particularly serious reading about the past, is increasingly an elitist endeavor, it is possible that such history on the screen is the history of the future” (117). That is, thanks to the cinema our past might be told through images in the future. Due to all the above, even for the most purist historians, cinema should be taken seriously when it comes to narrate our past to new generations as the audiovisual communication experiments a growing influence on young and not so young people’s minds. Though it is clear that it cannot be claimed as a universal truth that cinema is the best form of transmitting accurate history, the fact remains that “living in an increasingly visual age, we must be prepared to at least entertain such a notion” (Rosenstone 141), and give movies a chance to be part of this world by telling our history. Maybe in the near future manuals about history might appear as something antique and obsolete but for now, as Rosenstone highlights, “if dramatic films can successfully meditate upon, interrogate and analyze the past or explore that which has been repressed by official stories” (142), our mind should be open enough to admit their vision and analysis of the past to later allow the audiences to come up with the viewers’ ideas.

To conclude, it is relevant to emphasize that people’s minds should not be closed to the fact of having a future in which cinema is a strong and accurate

way of narrating historical facts. Furthermore, scholars, historians, movie directors or even regular people might be able to keep opening new debates about the past, share their opinions about historical events, and support the creation of new ways of analyzing and transmitting our history. History makes sense to today's world as long as we do not forget it, but pass it to the coming generations in all forms of history telling—and that includes the cinema.

2. Movie Concepts in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*

*The movies we see shape the way we view the world around us
and our place in that world.⁴*

Movies, apart from being a popular way of entertainment that we have nowadays, help to open people's minds and to make audiences travel without moving a single muscle. Movies help us to put ourselves in other people's shoes and be a positive influence to the rest of the human beings. It is not a secret that *The Butler* has shaped many hearts and minds across the globe. That is, apart from obtaining great benefits, it has also helped to change people's lives. To have a better understanding of the cinematography it is important to deal with some basic cinematic concepts that would frequently appear throughout this dissertation. For this reason, I find extremely helpful the book *Looking at Movies* by Richard Barsam and Dave Monaham⁵ because they not only include all the basic concepts but they also deal with the relationship between the cinema and its audience which is one of the aspects this dissertation is interested on.

One of the first concepts that it is related to this dissertation is the difference between the words film and movie. Barsam and Monaham affirm that a "film is often applied to a motion picture that it is considered by critics and scholars to be more serious of challenging" (3) while a movie is something that

⁴ Richard Barsam and Dave Monaham, 2013 (qtd. in Barsam and Monaham 2).

⁵ From now on I will only refer to this source throughout this chapter, unless otherwise specified.

it is made to “entertain the masses at the multiplex” (3). After reading these two different definitions, I have come to the conclusion that *The Butler* can be either one because it deals with a serious topic such as the Civil Rights Movement and includes real footage but, at the same time, it wants to entertain as well as educate the audiences. Lee Daniels’ feature film teaches an authentic part of African-American history while it captivates the audiences by telling a partly-fictionalized story of an African American suburban family. Therefore, both words movie and film will be used at every stage of this dissertation.

When I first started working on this project, I firmly believed that *The Butler* was in some way a documentary movie but after reading about the subject I have learnt that it is not that easy to categorize a movie. In their first chapter, Barsam and Monaham deal with the concepts of narrative movie and documentary movies and it was at this stage that I started to consider that Daniels’ movie could be something more complex than I previously thought.

On the one hand, Barsam and Monaham state that all “feature-length movies share another basic characteristic: narrative” (3) which is present in all of them regardless of their genre. Besides both scholars argue that “the narrative designation simply means that these movies tell fictional (or at least fictionalized) stories” (3), to later add that “narrative is a way of structuring fictional or fictionalized stories presented in narrative films” (66) which instantly made me realize that Lee Daniels’ movie is a fictionalized story which is based on a real life-story. Eugene Allen’s life as major-domo has been fictionalized but most of the events in his life that appear on the screen are completely real. Therefore, *The Butler* has a narrative. They also say that a narrative “must travel a straight line” (3) which can be directly related to *The Butler* whose story

is told chronologically. Furthermore, “this linear quality makes movies perfectly suited to develop subject matter in a sequential progression” (4). Thanks to this technique the audience can follow the development of the characters as well as the Civil Rights Movement struggle.

In addition, Barsam and Monaham declare that a “narrative is often used to describe the way that movie stories are constructed and presented in order to engage, involve and orient an audience” (67). All these elements are present in Lee Daniels movie. *The Butler* engages viewers by introducing a real family made of appealing characters as the center of the movie. It also has a recognizable story of survival which connects rapidly with the audiences. To involve the spectators, the director presents a story about the butler’s family which allows the audience to feel their pain at the same time we grow closer to them throughout the movie. Moreover, it triggers curiosity in the public which can lead to open its audience’s opinions or changing them.

On the other hand, the authors refer to documentary movies which “strive for objective observed veracity, of course, but that doesn’t mean they don’t tell stories. These movies often arrange and present factual information and images in the form of narrative” (4). In other words, the main goal of these movies is to tell a real story based on true information. For this reason, including real images and documents is indispensable. Up to this point, I was still thinking that *The Butler* was a mixture of a narrative and a documentary movie because I thought that it was a perfect combination of all the elements we find in both narratives but nevertheless there was a lot that needed to be clarified.

Thus, Barsam and Monaham enumerate the different types of movies that exist based on the “filmmaker’s intent and the final product’s relationship with the viewer” (70) which is the type of approach we are interested in this dissertation. There are three types: “narrative, documentary and experimental” (70), all quite different from each another. The experimental movies will not be dealt with in this dissertation because they do not have any characteristic that can be applied to the movie that it is being analyzed. Notwithstanding, what is really important for this investigation is the definition of narrative movies which can be applied to *The Butler*.

Narrative movies are directed towards fiction. Even those narrative movies that purport to tell a true story (. . .) adjust their stories they convey so as to better serve those principles of narrative structure that filmmakers use to engage and entertain audiences. Events are added or removed or rearranged; characters are composited: actors (who are usually more attractive than the actual participants they play) add elements of their own persona to the role. (70)

Narrative movies are the compound of a true story with some changes which makes it more interesting and offers its fictional side such as it is the case of *The Butler’s* as it has been mentioned before when talking about the narrative of a movie. Audiences love “based on a true story [movies] perhaps because of the perception of immediacy or relevance that such a label imparts” (70). In Lee Daniels’ movie, Eugene Allen’s name is changed to Cecil Gaines among other important changes within the plot but this is an example of how the director will always try to find a way to make the movie more attractive to the public. In the end, “the primary purpose of most narrative films is entertainment,

a stance motivated by commercial intent” (70) so the final goal of narrative movies is to amuse audiences and obtain a good sum of benefits. In my opinion, this type of movies that use a real historical background are in some way educating their audiences in an extraordinary way because the public is learning while having fun.

Barsam and Monaham also refer to the characteristic and form of documentary movies which are “more concerned with the recording of reality, the education of viewers, the representation of political or social analysis” (71) than narrative movies that have “a commitment to dramatic storytelling” (70). They add that “the best way to understand documentary film is as nonfiction” (71) while the narrative movies are based on a fictionalized story. That is, although “documentary filmmakers employ storytelling and dramatization to some degree in shaping their material” (71) the premise of the whole documentary is to narrate the real history. As a consequence, *The Butler* is more suitable to fit into the category of narrative movies because its story is partly fictionalized.

Additionally, it is important to talk about the function of characters and how they influence the story and its development. As Barsam and Monaham argue the most important aspect of a film narrative is that it “depends upon two essential elements: a character [who is] pursuing a goal” (127), and “the primary character who pursues the goal is known as the protagonist” (129). Without these two components, the movie would not exist. It could be stated that each character in Lee Daniels’ film has his/her own goals but the feature film mostly focuses on the protagonist’s story, although there are also some sub plots about other characters in the movie. Moreover, there exist different types of

characters which can be complex or simple. Just as Barsam and Monaham mention the “complex characters are known as round characters [and] (. . .) they display the complexity we associate with our own personalities, we tend to see round characters as more life-like” (127). In contrast, “flat characters exhibit few distinct traits and do not change significantly as the story progresses” (128). In *The Butler*, Cecil Gaines fits in the category of a complex character while other characters such as some of his friends’ wives belong into the simple category since they do not change at all during the development of the story.

When talking about the story that a complex character has to go through, it is essential for him/her to have a goal because the “goal does not just give the character something to do (. . .) but it also gives the audience a chance to participate in the story” (129). All the above makes viewers feel closer to the protagonist, thus creating a connection between them. A protagonist’s journey can be represented as a line or succession of events that the protagonist has to face. Sometimes obstacles which are “another essential building block of the storytelling” (129) may appear at the end and the protagonist has to confront them. In *The Butler* some of these obstacles can be represented by the pressure of working at the White House, the feeling of being lost, the lack of understanding with his son or even the uncertainty about not knowing whether what he is doing is right for his family or not. All of these circumstances can represent the antagonist of the story because “the antagonist need not even be human” (133) but it can be “a force responsible for obstructing our protagonist” (133). As a consequence, as it is the case with Daniels’ protagonist Cecil’s and his son Louis’ relationship, “the stakes are rising because the obstacles are becoming increasingly difficult for our protagonist to navigate” (134).

Right into the middle of the movie, *The Butler's* circumstances start getting more and more difficult so “the rising action appears and the tension it provokes enhances our engagement with the ongoing narrative” (135). It is at this moment when the audience really feels that they are part of the story that they are watching on the screen. This is also the case when Cecil invites his son Louis and his girlfriend to have dinner at home and the evening event ends catastrophically. After this occurrence the concept of crisis appears in the protagonist’s life who will have to “face a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, and our story must reach a turning point and work its way toward respect resolution and the third and final act” (135). This takes place the moment when Cecil Gaines decides to stop working at the White House after twenty-nine long years. Hence, the climax is what comes afterwards “when the protagonist faces this major obstacle” (135). In *The Butler*, the climax occurs when Cecil forgives his son. Regardless of his intention of making things better, “once the goal is gained or lost, it’s time for the resolution (. . .) in which the narrative wraps up loose ends and moves toward a conclusion” (136). One of the most relevant resolutions in Lee Daniels’ movie are the getting together of the family despite the loss of their youngest son. They are a happy family again, despite the odds. Apart from this ending, the fact that Barack Obama won the presidential elections in 2008 is a fact that is very present at the end of the movie which adds to the happy ending of the film at the same time it gives the mixed audiences a feeling of victory.

One more notion that is essential to understand a movie is the difference between story and plot and all the inner elements that concur to make a movie a complete experience. The story “consists of all the narrative elements that are

explicitly presented on-screen plus all the events that are implicit or that we infer to have happened but are not explicitly presented” (140) while the plot “consists of the specific actions and events that filmmakers select and the order in which they arrange those events so as to effectively convey the narrative to the viewer” (140). Therefore, in Daniels’ film, the story is everything that we see on the screen which can be, for example, when the family is having dinner but also being aware that someone has entered the house when we hear a door open and close. On its part, the plot is the specific events or happenings that the director chooses to tell in the movie to create a specific reaction in the public.

Likewise something that has to be taken into consideration are the non-diegetic elements which are “those things that we see and hear on the screen that come from outside the world of the story such as score music (. . .) titles and credits (. . .) and voice-over comments” (141). In *The Butler* there are many instances where the voice-over resource is used to give the movie’s protagonist the opportunity to express himself and reflect back on his life and share with the audience his most intimate thoughts. A specific example of this in *The Butler* is at the very beginning of the movie when Cecil is reminiscing his childhood at the cotton plantation: “The only thing I ever knew was cotton. It was hard work but I didn’t mind because I got to spend all day with my daddy” (00:01:26-00:01:58). Audiences can see Cecil sat in the hall of the White House and then some images at the cotton farm back in 1926 while hearing the previous words as a voice over resource. Although this resource is mostly used at the beginning of the feature film to tell the audiences Cecil Gaines’ past, it is also used in the rest of the movie such as after President Kennedy’s assassination when Cecil is accompanying Mrs. Kennedy. The scene shows us

Cecil being in the same room as Mrs. Kennedy who is still wearing her blood stained dress and a Cecil's voice over who says "Mrs. Kennedy refused to change her clothes so that everybody could see what they did to her husband. The last time I saw that much blood was the day my daddy was killed" (01:01:35-00:01:01:56). By using the voice over resource, it is much easier for audiences to empathize with Cecil and understand his feelings at the most important moments in the movie. Besides, the use of the voice over is very useful in Daniels' movie because it helps viewers to feel like they are reading Cecil's life diary. In actuality, Cecil is the only character whom audiences get to know their deepest feelings and worries; he is the only one who is given the chance to share his most profound emotions.

The Butler's soundtrack is an essential part of the movie because all the tracks have been carefully chosen to have songs in the movie that represent the respective decades that the story covers. As an example, there are songs from famous African-American artists such as Gladys Knight, Quincy Jones and James Brown. As Barsam and Monaham claim "music can be intrinsic, helping to tell the story, whether it pertains to plot, action, character, or mood: indeed, music plays an indispensable role in many movies" (404). The critics later add that "movie music can be equally effective when it creates or supports ideas in a film" (404). Therefore the use of music in this particular movie is very important as it helps to represent each era in a more realistic way. Barsam and Monaham also maintain that "many directors use music to provide overall structure unity or coherence to a story" (406) and Lee Daniels has been very careful when choosing a soundtrack that would support the period that the movie is representing.

Furthermore, a representative song from each period is used to create a realistic experience of the year that they are representing on screen. For example, on the scene that represents the first day Cecil starts working at the White House in 1957, Dean Martin's⁶ song "Ain't that a Kick in the Head" (1960) is playing in the background. Although the song was released three years after the year that the movie is recreating, it accurately represents the music that is representative of the late fifties. In the same vein, Shorty Long's⁷ "Function at the Junction" (1966) is used for the sit-in movement and state dinner scene which is set in 1960 which helps to contrasting the two different moments that Cecil and his son Louis are living. In addition, the well-known song "Party Is a Groovy Thing" (1975) by The People's Choice⁸ is played during Cecil's birthday scene in 1973. It is interesting to note that although the majority of the songs did not exist in the same exact year that they are used in Daniels' movie all the songs chosen fit perfectly with the emotions that the movie wants to transmit. Without any trace of doubt, some of those scenes would not be as powerful or emotional without Daniels' selection of songs which are also part of the American history.

It is also true that in *The Butler* music tends to be present all the time, incorporating sounds coming from televisions or radios thus, following Barsam and Monaham when they note that "film music may emanate from sources within the story – a television, a radio or stereo set, a person singing or playing

⁶ Dean Martin (1917-1995) was an American singer, comedian and actor. Martin was also a member of the group "Rat Pack" among other artists such as Frank Sinatra.

⁷ Shorty Long (1940-1969) was a black American singer, musician and producer who was awarded into the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame in 1980.

⁸ The People's Choice (1971- 1985) was an American funk music group created by Frank Brunson and David Thompson in 1971.

a guitar, an orchestra playing at a dance” (408). This is exactly what happens in Daniels’ movie since music permeates every single scene.

It is obvious that a movie without music would never be a complete experience but it is also true that silence plays a very important role too when the scene requires it. For the audience, though, silence might be accompanied by contradictory feelings since as Barsam and Monaham sustain “when so used, silence frustrates our normal perceptions. It can make a scene seem profound or even prophetic” (409). Thus, depending on the scene and what it is addressing, silence may be necessary so that the audience might experience a more profound understanding of the action at hand.

Moving to another cinematic aspect, chronology, the majority of movies have a plot “which necessarily flows chronologically (as does life)” (146) and that is intensified in *The Butler* due to the fact that director Daniels is dealing with Cecil’s life that runs parallel to an epic time in the lives of the USA, the African-American history of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore that is the reason why the director chooses to tell it in chronological order. In so doing, the “events have a logical order” (148). These events can be subdivided into two different categories. The first one “includes those major events or branching points in the plot structure that force characters to choose between or among alternate paths” (148) which can be represented by the different paths that Cecil and his son take regarding the socio-political situation of the country they live in. The second category includes “those minor plot events that add texture and complexity (. . .) but are not essential elements within the narrative” (148). This might be the case with Gloria’s drinking habit and her extramarital affair as well as the relationship between Cecil’s family and his son Louis’ girlfriend.

Connected to this and equally relevant is the setting of the movie that is “the time and place in which the story occurs” (155), aspects that are crucial for this dissertation. In Daniels’ *The Butler* there is not only one time and place but a succession of decades and places around Cecil Gaines’ life. In the film we are analyzing, the place rarely changes since most of the movie tells the story of the butler while he was working at the White House and him and his family were living in the suburbs of Washington D.C. As far as the time is concerned it changes constantly throughout the film but moves chronologically as it has been said before. The setting “establishes the date, city, or country, but also provides the characters’ social, educational, and cultural backgrounds and other identifying factors” (155) that are essential for the course of the movie. Knowing that the Gaines’ family are African-Americans who live in an African-American community suburb and where the only working person in the family is the father gives us a lot of information about them. Besides, we are told about Cecil Gaines’ past which increases our knowledge to better understand the decisions that the butler takes along the movie at the same time helps us understand his feeling about the ongoing Civil Rights Movement.

The duration of the movie is also something that should be mentioned in this dissertation. For movies like Daniels’ *The Butler*, Barsam and Monaham identify three specific kinds of duration: “story duration (. . .) plot duration (. . .) and screen duration” (149). The story duration is “the amount of time that the implied story takes to occur” (149) which in the case of Daniels’ movie covers eighty-one years of the life of our protagonist Cecil Gaines. The plot duration is “the elapsed time of those events within the story that the film explicitly presents” (149). In *The Butler*, the plot duration covers the different

administrations that the White House goes through during the period of The Civil Rights Movements. Finally, the screen duration is “the movie’s running time on-screen” (149) which is two hours and fifteen minutes long in this case.

To conclude this chapter it is worth mentioning that all the concepts above mentioned are essential when working with a movie and trying to understand it better. When making a movie, directors take care of all of these elements and make sure that each of them work for the development of the story. It goes without saying that things are not chosen arbitrary when making a movie, everything has a reason to be and that is to produce the best movie possible. Thus, in preparation for the analysis of Daniels’ film *The Butler*, we have looked closely to some of the most relevant elements that mold a movie and its story. We have also taken into account the decisions that the director and the producers might have made along the creative process of the making of *The Butler*. Besides, it has been made clear that to make a movie, to make its story work and to create a reaction in the audience, a proper use of the previously mentioned elements is vital. And, as I will try to show, this is the basis of Daniels’ movie *The Butler*.

3. An Approach to the Representation of African-Americans in Cinema

*The civil rights movement contained all the elements to inspire creative writers: courage in the face of violence, conflict in the face of social change, a moment in history when an old order fell.*⁹

The representation of the African American community in cinema has been a topic of discussion for several decades now. The cultural and social changes that it has been through has affected how the community is represented in movies. There have been a lot of different perspectives when it comes to talk about the African-American people and culture in cinema as well as constant fights about who should and should not be allowed to tell their stories. Some people argue that movies dealing with African-American stories should only be told by African-American directors. Others have long and hot discussions about whether some movies are fair and respectful to the community or only aim to please the audience and make money.

In a nutshell, the representation of African-Americans in cinema has been a wild ride that starts in the thirties when black people only played servant roles; in the fifties when they were represented as “white” people wanted them to be; and the sixties when the Black Power Movement started until nowadays when we even have African-American superheroes. For the purpose of this dissertation, it is essential to trace the history of the representation of the African-American community in the cinema, albeit briefly, to better understand how much it has evolved and how popular and respected it has become thanks

⁹ Sharon Monteith, 2015 (qtd. in Monteith 123).

to the fact that black directors, both women and men, have finally crossed the line.

As Yearwood argues, black films are made to tell stories about the African-American people and share them with other communities who can empathize with the stories. Thus, for Yearwood, “black film is properly understood as a cultural expression that reflects the survival impulse of African-Americans” (2). Culture is one of the most important aspects of a society because it shapes people’s lives and helps them become their own best selves while they sense a strong feeling of belonging. Given blacks tragic history of repression in the United States, Yearwood affirms that “black film are shaped in a fundamental way by the black experience because culture functions as a point of power” (3). Thus, black directors’ main purposes are to share aspects of their culture and history with other communities.

Historically, there has been a confrontation between African-Americans and Hollywood industry because all movies had to follow “the standards and aesthetic principles of the Hollywood cinema” (5) and this was not the case with black films. Actually it would be problematic if, as Yearwood states, we had to “understand the culture and traditions of African diasporic people by using the dominant white culture as its principal frame of reference” (5). What is black cinema? Following Yearwood’s own definition, black cinema is “a specific body of films produced in the African diaspora which shares a common problematic” (5). However, it is not always easy for some audiences to understand these so-called black movies because, as Powell writes:

For many people...blackness is less a color than a metaphor for a political circumstance prescribed by struggles against economic exploitation and cultural domination: a state of consciousness that peoples of various pigmentations have experienced, empathized with, and responded to. (qtd. in Yearwood 5)

Following Powell's argument, black movies have more often than not inspired people to overcome the difficulties in their lives; they have lighted up their deepest wishes; and they have also showed how evil but also how wonderful human beings can be. More than anything black movies are "a cultural expression that reflects the survival of African American culture" (7) which has to fight to find its way into the movie industry. Yearwood adds that it had "to struggle against the marginalization that results from institutionalized racism and its popular cultural expression in the Classical Hollywood cinema" (7). Furthermore, following Yearwood, it has to fight against the fact that "black film has predominantly been viewed through the lens of the dominant white American experience and its cultural limitations" (7) for decades to come.

We can also add that since its inception, the Hollywood cinema industry has had a very clear structure for their movies and characters which clashed with African-American movies. As we can see, traditional white cinema movies has had a "valiant heroism (that) was reserved for the white male; beauty, dependence and containment characterized the woman; while a definite inferiority and comic emasculation were attributed to other ethnic groups" (8). On the contrary, in Yearwood's words, "a foundational premise of black film theory (was) that black people need to produce images of themselves and heroes of their own making, or signifying mechanisms that speak to the black

community's social needs and articulate its cultural traditions" (8). It is also relevant to highlight that the African-American communities found good reasons to reject the way they were inaccurately represented in the movies produced by the white mainstream film industry. Therefore, one of the big challenges that African-Americans in cinema had to fight for was to be able to represent their culture and people in an accurate way. The African-American filmmakers wanted blacks to stop being "represented principally as objects and rarely as subjects (. . .) [and] explore an alternative terrain, which has resulted from their interest in forging different representations of race" (9). Consequently, "instead of viewing black film as a poor imitation of Hollywood (. . .) [their goal was for] black cinema [to be seen] as a legitimate cultural expression of the black experience" (10). Accordingly, since its inception, to stop being compared to the white Hollywood movies and to have their own stories told has been the main goal for the African-American cinema.

Moreover, African and African Americans have been fed with the oral tradition, most are wonderful story tellers. Thus, it is no wonder that Yearwood would argue that the "task is to let the film speak from the formal structures of the black cultural tradition and to appropriate the tools of the cinema as an expressive form within the black experience" (11). Only then, he adds, African American cinema will have the opportunity to speak their truth. As with any kind of cinema industry, there is always a necessity of telling a story. This also applies to the African-American cinema, with a particular tinge, since as Massood puts it "African American texts (film, literature, music, painting) explore themes of hope, mobility, and escape" (8). Massood also considers that African-American art has been:

An immense force in shaping American life and culture during the twentieth century. It also has been a crucial influence on African American life and culture and, as such, an analysis of the changing roles and presence of urban space in black city cinema can only expand and make even more complex the questions we ask about the power of cinematic representation. (9)

Summarizing Massood's discourse, we could say that African American arts in general, and cinema in particular, have helped shaping the African-American self-consciousness. It has also made a great impact on the community as a whole, at the same time that it has started to analyze the roles of the black citizens that appear on the screen. For these reasons, among others, the black narration is essential because it offers a different perspective from the "promulgation and reproduction of dominant ideologies" (Yearwood 11). We should not forget that at times, movies help to shape society's mind thanks to their stories. Yearwood states that films "can play a role in the formation of social perceptions and in the articulation of a culture's worldview and experience" (12) which runs parallel Massood's words when he states that films are "often engaged in a dialogue with its immediate socioeconomic, political, and industrial contexts" (1). Cinema is both related to the representation of the society that it is premiered in and the influence it exerts on the audience who watches the movie.

More specifically, cinema opens a debate about the African-American community and its representation in cinema since, as Massood maintains, "what is put on screen is a dialogue and a refraction of the actual material world" (7). To later add that "no matter how accurate or realistic the films are in visualizing

black urban life, they are always (. . .) self-conscious, highly-mediated acts” (7). Therefore disregarding its accuracy in comparison with the real world, black films are most likely to open a debate in society about the African-American culture. In other words, as Yearwood emphasizes, Afro-American movies should always be a way to “come to a deeper understanding about the soul of black culture” (17).

As a matter of fact, African-American movies should be seen as the “product of a specific historical and cultural tradition as opposed to a view of black cinema that conceives of it within the framework of a white cultural point of view” (Yearwood 15). To achieve such goal, as Yearwood continues, it is important to compare movies to other textual manifestations that exist within the community. In his opinion:

The exploration of how a black film text relates to other texts within the African American tradition, from the vantage point of their signifying practices, signals a critical advance for the study of black independent films. A vibrant black film theory and criticism will benefit enormously from this necessary excavation and foundation-building activity. (16)

For all these reasons, the comparison between Lee Daniels’ movie *The Butler* and the documentary *The Eyes on the Prize* is essential to demonstrate the accuracy of the real events the director choose to include in his movie and the veracity of their depiction in the feature length. To the author of this dissertation it seems crucial to ignore the characteristics that area common to a “stereotypical white Hollywood movie” and analyze Daniels’ movie bearing in mind the film history for and by African-American citizens which also implies to

look at them with a certain regard. When making a comparison it is necessary to place both elements at the same level, the different texts should deal with similar topics and share some characteristics that are fair for both texts.

As mentioned above, the representation of the African Americans on screen has always presented a challenge. However, the sheer will to change all of this and get over with the negative stereotypes started in the 1940s, during the integration era, when the “NAACP [National Association for the Advanced of Colored People] led a protest movement which helped reduce the most flagrant low-comic images of blacks on screen” (Yearwood 27). Despite the protest, “blacks remained marginalized on the fringes of the film industry” (27) for some time. That is the reason why a literary and filmic genre known as “social realism” became an option and the source for African American stories to be told in all its crudity at the same time they portrayed their people’s everyday lives, dreams and failures. In so doing directors found a way to use and be able to share their culture within the appropriate background. In praise of this genre, Yearwood maintains that “African American social realism is interested in evoking the emotional vitality of the black experience, which is considered to be so powerful” (28). And this is precisely the approach that the director Lee Daniels chooses to provoke in his audience a mixing of melancholy and brutality.

Again, and following Yearwood, these African-American social realism movies “depicted certain ideal views of black life through characters and situations that would serve as models for black aspirations, despite de social circumstances of racial discrimination” (28). That is, despite the sheer violence and the sexual exploitation of young women (almost children) and women,

director Daniels portrays characters who notwithstanding the horror of slavery behave as impeccable citizens. In fact, it should be mentioned that even though *The Butler* premiered seven decades later, in 2013, this was still Daniels' main goal too.

Yet this change on the part of the audiences as well as on the part of directors and producers was not easily taken for granted. Instead, "it required that blacks shed their culture and, in turn, accept the full set of values of the dominant society even though racial inequality persisted" (Yearwood 29). The act of sharing their culture with a country which has historically been unfair to them, discriminate them and treated the African American community as second-class citizens increased their fears and, consequently, they doubted that mainstream America would respect them through their visual histories.

To properly deal with the evolution of black representation of the African-Americans in cinema, it is necessary to mention the first black movie that was made in the United States. According to Sampson, a short movie called *The Railroad Porter* (1910) by Bill Foster is cited "as the first black film produced in the United States" (qtd. in Yearwood 32). It was the African-American Oscar Micheaux¹⁰ (1884-1951) "who is one of the first African-American independent filmmakers" (Rocchio 22) and who is notable for his way of dealing with "controversial subjects and themes [and his movies dealt with] social problems that included the clash of rural and urban values, the issue of color caste among blacks (. . .) as well as black-white social relations" (Yearwood 33). All these

¹⁰ Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951) was an African-American author and the first major black film director in history. His movies deal with the topic of race and he also produced more than forty-four films. Some of his most famous ones are *Within our Gates* (1920), *The Exile* (1931) or *Body and Soul* (1925).

topics, the mere existence of interracial couples, in particular, were considered both taboo and forbidden by law. However, Micheaux was brave enough to deal with them and present them to both white and black audiences. In this sense, we could say that Micheaux, borrowing from Rocchio's words, was a "pioneer, and his ability to produce and distribute commercially viable films featuring African Americans as early as 1919 warrants significant historical investigation" (22). According to Rocchio, Micheaux's works show three characteristic parameters: 1) "using films as a means of uplifting the race; 2) boldly challenging Hollywood's representations of African Americans, and; 3) experiencing with the structure of film style itself as an important part of contesting Hollywood (23). Micheaux's movies, Rocchio adds, helped the African-American community tremendously because black audiences could "see representations of the social issues confronting them unencumbered by the denigrating and exaggerated stereotypes Hollywood insisted on for African-American characters" (23).

Perhaps one of Micheaux most controversial movies is the silent *Body and Soul* (1924) which narrates a race story in which an escaped prisoner impersonates a reverend who ends up raping and blackmailing a young woman. This sexually explicit topic was and still is tremendously controversial, particularly by the time the film was produced, because it deals with the theme of a black predator priest and the topic of objectifying black women's bodies and sexualities (a crime that has taken place since slavery times until nowadays, both by black and/or white men alike). And, indeed, it was a very controversial topic to deal with in the early era of the twenties. Oscar Micheaux really wanted to change the way his community had been represented in cinema, but he also

tried to erase stereotypical characters. Furthermore, Micheaux's main goal was to stop racism both within and outside the cinema world. Referring to *Body and Soul*, Rocchio summarizes Micheaux cinematic discourse as follows: "Micheaux's film not only confronts the racism iconography and ideology of Hollywood film, but also the racism within broader society that allowed such devastating injustices against African Americans" (23). Besides, he was the first black director to make a sound movie titled *The Exile*¹¹ in 1931 but sadly his career ended in 1948 with the premiere of his last movie *The Betrayal*.

According to Rocchio, because of Micheaux's innovative ideas and his vigor in helping change things, his work has become "a legacy discernible in the works of such filmmakers as Spike Lee¹², Julie Dash, Robert Townsend and John Singleton" (24). However, Rocchio complains, "forty years would pass before a vibrant African-American independent film industry would be revived and capture the attention of both audiences and the Hollywood establishment" (24) thus, the history of the African American film had begun.

To address the distinct phases of the black film movement, albeit briefly, it is relevant to fully understand how the representation of African-Americans

¹¹ There were very different reviews of Micheaux's *The Exile*. For example Mark said in 1931 that "Schiffman [the producer] may get his money in this one in the Negro houses but it's doubtful" because he believed that movies about the African-American community were not what the general audiences wanted while in 2016 Lorber wrote that "*The Exile* does not shy away from depicting disrepair amongst the black population – it is as bold in its depiction of blacks murdering other blacks as it is unafraid of showing an empowered upper class of African-Americans partaking freely of the opportunities innate to our country. Also, it's fascinating to imagine how audiences must have reacted to what must be among the first depictions of interracial kissing".

¹² Spike Lee (1957-), director of *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Malcolm X* (1992) or *BlacKkKlansman* (2018); Julie Dash (1952-), director of *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), *Funny Valentines* (1999) or *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002), Robert Townsend (1957-), director *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987), *The Five Heartbeats* (1991) and *The Meteor-Man* (1993); and John Singleton (1968-2019), director of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), *Poetic Justice* (1993) or *Shaft* (2000).

and their stories have evolved with time. As Yearwood states “the black film movement can be considered in four phases: 1919-1949; 1950s to the late 1960s; the 1970s; and 1980s to the current time” (36). All of the stages have contributed in different ways when it comes to the representation of African Americans in movies. Furthermore, we can observe how each stage provides more opportunities for African American producers to tell their own stories. During the first phase (1919-1949), there were “several objectives that included promoting the contribution of blacks in film and proving to the world that blacks were capable of making films” (Yearwood 36). However during this first phase “the practice of black filmmaking existed on the margins of Hollywood and black filmmakers did not attract the levels of finance necessary to mount adequate competition with Hollywood filmmakers” (Yearwood 36). As a matter of fact, for a certain period of time black people were not allowed to act on stage and therefore white actors who were mostly Irish used to paint their faces in black to play black characters which was detrimental for the black community as they were caricaturized in the process.

The second phase (1950s to the late 1960s) of the black film movement was the most challenging one because it had to face racism, segregation and the Civil Rights Movement which was the most representative era for the African-American citizens. Truthfully, as Monaco denounces:

One of them most telling social criticism provided by the black power movement of the 1960s was its historical analysis of the inherently racist characterizations to which Blacks had been subjected as a matter of course throughout the history of film and television. In this respected, too, the media faithfully the values of society. (298)

The cinema of that time becomes a fair representation of the society that was all about racism and segregation throughout the majority of the country. Curiously enough, the population liked to see their daily lives represented in the movies but, as Monaco argues, some of them “also exaggerated the real situation” (298) to the point that, in general, movies “pictured Blacks in servile roles. More important, Blacks were used only to play Blacks” (Monaco 298). Black actors and actresses were only offered roles that were considered “black” such as servants or comic reliefs. Moreover, Monteith recounts the variety of existing stereotyped black characters:

Stock characters types proliferate, especially in cinema: the segregationist sheriff and his deputies; Klansmen and violent ‘rednecks’; corrupt politicians and planet style patriarchs. On their part, civil rights organizers were conceived solely and erroneously as northern ‘outside agitators’ fighting against white conservators of ‘our way of life’—meaning the American Way of Life. Its typology is most familiar in fiction films, although it was a staple of 1950s pulp fictions and still finds its way into contemporary fiction. (123)

Let alone the cinema world changed when a black actor named Sidney Poitier (1927-) appeared and revolutionized the audiences who started to feel that there were more options for the African-American actors and actresses in movies. Poitier was really popular during the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, he still is venerated nowadays although his last work dates back to 2004 with *Mackenzie*. Poitier has starred in a large quantity of movies although the most

popular ones are *In the Heat of the Night*¹³ (1967) and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*¹⁴ (1967). He has gained several different awards throughout his long and productive career including: a Golden Globe Award in 1963 for *Lilies of the Field*, a NAACP Image Award in 2001, a Honorary Oscar in 2002 and even the Presidential Medal of Freedom was awarded to him in 2009 by the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Despite the fact that his characters do not convey the same meaning for the white and black audience, "Poitier meant a lot to blacks and whites alike" (Yearwood 39). In many different ways, Sidney Poitier has been contrary to the black stereotyped characters that African-Americans had to watch for years in the cinema. As Bogle highlights:

In this integrationist age Poitier was the model integrationist hero. In his films, he was educated and intelligent. He spoke proper English, dressed conservatively, and had the best of table manners. For the mass white audiences, Sidney Poitier was a black man who met their standards. His characters were tame; never did they act impulsively, nor were they threats to the system. (qtd. in Yearwood 39)

The problem was that not everyone saw Sidney Poitier as a hero but as a stereotyped African-American created by the dominant white culture. To prove that, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) is seen "as the product of changing times and a new awareness that how African Americans are treated by the dominant culture is based on how they are imagined" (Gerster 201). Therefore, to a certain extent Poitier "continues to subordinate the issue of racism to the

¹³ Norman Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) with Sidney Poitier, Rod Steiger, Warren Oates and Larry Gates.

¹⁴ Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) with Spencer Tracy, Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn, Katharine Houghton, Cecil Kellaway, Beah Richards and Roy E. Glenn.

effect it has on main white characters” (Rocchio 28). Although Sidney Poitier has had more opportunities to star in movies than his previous black colleagues, we cannot say that his characters accurately represent the African-American community at large. On the contrary, the characters played by Poitier tend to personify the type of black person the dominant culture might find acceptable.

Despite the criticism, it cannot be denied that Sidney Poitier was a positive influence on America’s society and culture. This was the case when Poitier starred in Daniel Petrie’s¹⁵ *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), a movie adaptation of Lorraine Hansberry’s¹⁶ Broadway play from 1959. The story of a working class black family who lives in 1950s Chicago and who are trying to find a new life in a new house situated in an all-white community, captivated audiences both black and white, and opened the path for more movies telling African-American stories.

This type of whitened characters can be seen in Lee Daniels’ movie when Cecil’s son, Louis, comes to have dinner at home and they start talking about Poitier’s *In the Heat of the Night* because the husband and wife have watched it the previous night. The couple is delighted with the movie and the fact that they are watching a movie with an African-American man as the lead

¹⁵ Daniel Petrie (1920-2004) was a Canadian film and television director who used rooted human dramas and social inequalities in the majority of his movies. Petrie won the Gary Cooper Award at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as winning several awards including three Primetime Emmy Awards. He directed more than ninety movies and television shows until his retirement in 2001.

¹⁶ Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) was the first African-American female author to have one of her plays performed on Broadway with *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). In her works she discussed the themes of African liberation, lesbianism and homosexuality’s oppression. Although she passed away at a young age, Hansberry wrote more than ten plays, she won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award in 1959 and she also had the opportunity to work with intellectuals such as Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois.

protagonist makes them believe that he is changing things for their community. On the contrary, Louis thinks that he is to a degree an “Uncle Tom” and that he is not portraying a fair representation of an African-American man. But, in Monteith’s words, “neither of them recognizes the important role Poitier played by even having the kind of profile that could cause such debate in the 1960s” (139). This scene will be thoroughly analyzed further in this dissertation as it perfectly represents the different ways Sidney Poitier was perceived by the black community.

Moving to a different landscape, what it is true is that, according to Monaco, “one of the greatest accomplishments of the Black Power movement of the 1960s was to begin to crack that barrier. Black lawyers, doctors, and businessmen – even heroes – are now validated by the media” (298) and the existence of less stereotyped characters diminish even though they still had a long way to come. On his part, Yearwood affirms during the 1960s it was present the “notion that American society could be enriched by African American culture. The third phase of black independent cinema, which paralleled the period of the Civil Rights Movement, consciously explored concerns outside the traditional perimeters of Hollywood” (61). As Yearwood points out “the impact of Sidney Poitier’s screen presence and his box-office success (. . .) demonstrated the existence of an untapped movie-going market among blacks” (42). Thus, during the Civil Rights Movement an “increasing attention was given to bringing blacks into mainstream film industry, the black independent film movement underwent a hiatus” (41).

The third phase takes place throughout the 1970s and Yearwood writes that “critics usually distinguish between black films and ‘blaxploitation’ films

[during that time] (43). Besides, according to Yearwood, Blaxploitation films compromised black cultural signification because they were contemporary white productions in blackface” (43). Movies in the 1970s were “produced by whites (and some blacks), featured a black cast and were set in black communities” (Yearwood 43). Unfortunately, Blaxploitation movies did not give enough room for trying new things. As Yearwood suggests, “the rush to capitalize on the popularity of black film often resulted in the marginal rewriting of plots and the overuse of stock characters” (43). The plot of the movies seems all to be the same and the cinema industry’s only objective was concerned about the benefits but they could not care less about the repetitive stories that they were showing on the screen all over the country. Due to the lack of quality of some of the Blaxploitation films “new critical approaches to black film also emerged, which coincided with the coming of age of black film and the production of a significant body of highly acclaimed films” (Yearwood 50). It is no wonder that this new black cinema both attracted and “influenced a new generation of blacks who were attending film school” (Yearwood 49).

The last phase happened during the 1980s and its main goals were the “organization to promote black film, film screenings, festivals and the emergence of scholarship committed to a black independent film culture” (Yearwood 51). The black independent film movement was focused on exploring “issues in black film theory – such as the question of defining black film, the use of music in film, and how the influence of jazz and an African heritage shaped the look and sound of black films” (51). It is also relevant to highlight that for the first time in the history of black cinema, “black filmmakers were free to pursue work in Hollywood, while developing their own independent

projects” (51). This era made a profound change in the creation of stories that were fair for the African-American community and for the rest of the country to get to know their stories and culture in the best way possible.

In actuality, the phases of the black cinema movement mentioned above helped universities to “develop Black Studies courses and departments in American universities” (Yearwood 53) and the representation of African-Americans in cinema along with its difficulty became a topic to study in universities. Yearwood mentions that there was an important symposium at Ohio University in 1980 on Black Cinema Aesthetics which “conceptualized the issue of black cinema in broad terms as a phenomenon in and of itself” (53). It was stated that the “purposes of a black cinema were acknowledged to be different from those of Hollywood, especially in the representation of blacks” (54). Besides, the inequitable representation of African-Americans should be properly studied and explained. Further on time, some other influences appeared in cinema as a result of the variations that directors and actors had to deal with throughout the years.

However, it is not possible to talk about movies during the beginning of the nineties without mentioning one of the most celebrated African-American movie directors, Spike Lee (1957-). His first movie *She’s Gotta Have It* (1986) would be followed by a long list of controversial movies such as *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Jungle Fever* (1991) or *25th Hour*¹⁷ (2002). Through his movies Spike Lee addressed debatable themes to start a conversation within the black

¹⁷ *25th Hour* was Spike Lee’s first movie with a white leading actor and the director was highly criticized for that reason. However what’s interesting is that Lee frequently chooses white actors and actresses to play the lead character which is not very habitual among African-American directors.

society in order to raise awareness and shed light on some questions pertaining to the African-American community. Spike Lee paid attention to one of the influences from the nineties, subject matter, and as Yearwood emphasizes “this work favored the traditional film narrative model as exemplified in the work of Spike Lee (. . .) [particularly in his movie] *Malcolm-X* 1992” (62). In contrast with other directors, “Spike Lee’s films present black characters who are allowed to speak for themselves and who are far from idealized” (Price 281). Price adds that the characters in his movies have their own voice and they are able to make their own choices for good or bad. That is the reason why Spike Lee has set an example for other African-American directors because his movies “remain examples of positive cinematic project” (281). *Malcolm X*¹⁸ was a very significant movie for the whole nation as it gave an inside view of the figure of Malcolm X while it dramatized the most important events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement.

Lee’s movie clashes somewhat with other movies such as Alan Parker’s *Mississippi Burning* (1988) who was criticized for having African-American idealized characters who were just “representations of black people as loyal simpletons” (Price 281). Although Lee’s and Parker’s belong to the same time, their characteristics and representation of the African-Americans are completely

¹⁸ Lee’s *Malcolm X* got an important amount of reviews and although the majority of them were positive. Clark wrote in 2015 that “Lee’s film was also a powerful statement against an entertainment culture which routinely prioritized the experience of white saviors in civil rights narratives (see: *Cry Freedom*, *Mississippi Burning*), or sweetened the bitter pill with soothing depictions of interracial friendships (*The Long Walk Home*). Although pernicious white savior narratives persist today (*The Blind Side*, *The Help*, *Django Unchained*), *Malcolm X*’s influence does finally appear to be taking hold” while Canby highlights that Malcolm’s story is incomplete but it was not his or Lee’s fault: “Though the autobiography is full of characters and incidents, they are only peripheral to the larger story of Malcolm’s awkward journey toward intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. Then too, Malcolm’s life ended before the journey could be said to have been completed. This is not the sort of thing movies accommodate with ease”.

different. Parker's movie, Price complains, "was notable for its return to muted representations of black characters (. . .) the black experience is mediated through white authority figures" (281). As for Lee's movies, Price suggests that they tend to "avoid some of the restrictive practices of realism, thus opening up some kind of critical distance between the narrative and their audience, they also raise controversial questions with a serious intention" (Price 281). Alan Parker's characters were only made to entertain the audiences while the intention of Spike Lee's movies was to open a debate within the society about important topics. As Price concludes, "despite its flaws, Lee's *Malcolm X* is also notable for its powerful representation of the black American community" (281). Therefore, the director's movies have left a legacy not only for the future directors but also for the new generations who want to learn history through cinema. Spike Lee is still making controversial movies nowadays such as *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), a biographical movie about the first African-American detective in a city's police department who accepts to infiltrate into the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s and unmask them. Despite his recognition by black and some white audiences, it was not until 2019 that Spike Lee received his first Oscar nominations for Best Picture and Best Director. Lee won his first Academy Award for the category of Best Adapted Screenplay which shows, to some extent, Hollywood's current discrimination.

Therefore as Yearwood maintains "while the Blaxploitation wave featured movies made by whites for blacks, the 1990s wave finds black directors producing films for black audiences, but these filmmakers maintain a keen eye on the possibility of attracting a large white crossover audiences" (62). Although it was not the ideal setting, "black film, very much like black life, was

defined as revolving around the concerns of the dominant society” (Yearwood 64), besides “black film as artistic and cultural expression suffered because it was not valued as an entity in its own right” (Yearwood 64). The big goal to achieve for the African-American movies throughout all these years has been to achieve “inclusivity, which moves marginalized groups from the periphery to the center (. . .) [but] to transform the center so that it also encompasses the margins” (Yearwood 68). The world in which black movies are only made for black audiences is not where black directors want to live in, but a world in which other communities are always welcome to join the majority of the white cinema industry. By doing this so, they hope to have a much more educated society in the African-American history, as well as for white people stop being only observers to become allies to the cause.

3.1 What Is Considered Black Cinema?

One of the concepts that are harder to define with total precision is black cinema. What is black cinema? Can a movie only be a black movie if it is directed by an African-American director, starred in by African-American actors who are telling an African-American story? Do all those conditions needed to be present to have a black movie? Are some of them more important than others? These are some of the questions that we can pose ourselves when thinking what black cinema is and trying to find an answer. As Yearwood claims “it is assumed that a black film is one made by a black filmmaker” (82) but there are a lot of movies that deal with African-American issues and they are directed by a white filmmaker such as Adam Shankman’s *Hairspray* or Taylor Crossword’s *The Help* to name a few. *The Butler* is directed by an African-American, but Yearwood hesitates whether that condition makes *The Butler* a black film when he wonders: “since when can a work of art be evaluated principally on the basis of the artist’s identity or the artist’s identification with a particular ethnic group? (83), does the fact of an African-American directing a movie dealing with these issues make it better already? Should we take more seriously a Civil Rights Movement movie directed by an African-American person than from any other background?

To these questions, Yearwood insists that “the sociocultural background of the filmmaker functions as the matrix from which creativity springs” (83) but, he adds that “the presence of black filmmakers by themselves are not sufficient to guarantee the production of a black film” (83). Furthermore, there is another aspect to define what a black movie is and it depends on “the filmmaker’s

intention in that there is some sort of plan to make a black film” (83). Regardless of the characters of the themes that appear in the movie, “how is it that a work qualifies to be a black film; or, how is it that a black film is made?” (Yearwood 84). Those are the questions that need a proper answer to understand the importance of black cinema in society,

First of all, for Yearwood, “black genre film is a useful concept that can be applied to a wide range of films whose subject matter deals with the black experience” (87). Here we can include social drama, musical, horror, documentary or comedy movies that deal with the black experience therefore they should be considered black movies. That is, Yearwood explains, while making a black movie filmmakers “incorporate elements of African American culture in their work” (88) which are very stereotypical most of the time so they are easily recognized. As it happens in Daniels’ *The Butler*, most black movies “use established themes such as history of oppression and the knowledge that African American society exists in a disadvantageous social and economic structure imposed by the dominant white society” (Yearwood 88). In the majority of movies, as it can be seen in the character of Louis in *The Butler*:

The black hero is often represented as seeking to free blacks. As a result, the black hero confronts the white society, which is responsible for the marginalization of black life. The conflict of black good over white-inspired evil is played out significantly in black genre film. (Yearwood 88)

The fight between good and bad represented by the African-Americans and the dominant society respectively is an overly used resource for movies in

which audiences always feel connected to the good ones, but sometimes it does not represent entirely the entity of the matters.

There are many different perspectives that can be used to explain whether a movie is a black movie or not, despite the fact that what it is competent for this dissertation is to have our center of attention on the audience's reactions. As Yearwood puts it, movies are like a "social institution, we consider its impact on socialization and its influences on culture" (119). Also, movies are one of the most outstanding acts of socialization for any given society. Movies carry a social meaning that helps to create relationships and debates among people who feel engaged by a story or by a particular sort of movies. As Monaco emphasizes:

Film is such a popular phenomenon. it plays a very important part in modern culture, socio-politically. Because it provides such a powerful and convincing representation of reality, film also has a profound effect on members of its audience, psycho-politically. (289)

In some way, more often than not, movies are a fair representation of reality; but, on another level, they create such a powerful effect on viewers that the audience feel connected to them. It is important to confront the two effects that movies cause on audiences and highlight the "difference between the general effect of film and its specific personal effect" (Monaco 289). The engagement between a movie and the audience is extremely important. As Yearwood suggests, "we also invest personal meanings in films" (119) and that is one reason why movies are so important for audiences because we make those stories our own and sometimes those stories help shape our lives. Movies

are a popular and cultural phenomenon and, consequently, the response of viewers should always be taken into account.

Therefore, black movies must be analyzed from the point of view of its public's response, a "black film represents a different point of view, a different way of seeing American society, and this point of view is produced through the signifying practices of the black experience, which cannot be isolated from other pressing issues of black existence" (Yearwood 120). Black movies should represent the stories and culture of the African-Americans and make their audiences feel represented by them; black movies can also allow the audiences to learn about a culture that it is not their own. As Yearwood declares, "a good black film helps us to see society and historical events through fresh eyes" (121) but it is also essential that "a good black film criticism can help make black film more accessible and meaningful to viewers" (121). In the end, what matters the most is the accuracy of the stories that are based on real events and that the fact that the directors might be able to send a message to the viewers through the movies because "only the films themselves can determine what is black cinema" (121).

Summarizing Yearwood's theories, we agree that it is particularly important for African-Americans to tell their stories right through cinema because "in black culture, the act of narration manifested in the oral tradition is an integral part of everyday activities" (124). Furthermore, narration has always been an important part of African-Americans daily life and "narration in films is what makes possible all the others perspectives that we use to discuss the movies" (124). Moreover, narration is the basis of cinema as it is for the African-Americans' culture. Yet, narration is important for all human beings on the

planet because “stories play a key role in our lives” (124). Generally speaking, they help people find their place in society, understand themselves and their past. To do so, there exist the “stories of origin [that] seek to explain who we are, where we come from and our purpose in life” (124) and audiences love to have a movie role model that they can aspire to be like.

All cultures have the necessity of sharing their stories with the world and “through the study of film narration, we can evaluate the special ways in which the black experience uses the cinema as a means for expressing its values” (125). What is true is that we can see “the values of a culture through the artistic and creative work its people produce” (125) and, in this case, movies are a magnificent way to share the values of the African-American culture. To see if a movie is giving an accurate depiction of a particular culture, it is important to focus on “subject matter, in terms of how a particular film represents the black experience” (125). By using this approach, it can be seen whether “the representation presents an accurate picture of black life or whether it presents stereotyped depictions” (126). In this same thread of thought, for Rocchio, it is of the highest importance to avoid stereotypical characters but portray real characters on screen because “films about African Americans (or any other perceived as “non-white” social group) and the discourses they circulate about race, help to define what race is and what it means to be an African American” (29) in society. The bottom line here is “to understand race not as a biological reality but rather as a social construction. Social definitions rather than biological realities define race” (29). As a consequence, movies help shape our society’s mind so the representation of the African-Americans on screen must be fair. It goes without saying, Rocchio affirms, that some movies still

“perpetuate the ideology of racial difference by insisting that there is an inherent, natural and unchanging way to be African American” (29) and that can end up being toxic for the perception of black people. Race is not a biological creation, it is created and spread by people, it certainly is a social construct as Rocchio argues:

Race is a social construct whose old meanings (blacks are lazy, uncivilized, and prone to violence, or blacks are happy to serve and to be subservient to whites) have been assigned by the dominant culture of white American for the purpose of marginalization and disenfranchisement. And race remains a social construct in films by African Americans who oppose and resist this process in order to posit new and various representations from the authority of their own experience. No film and no approach to film, is free of ideology. (39)

For the sole reason that race is created by society, it is also true that when coming to watch an African-American movie, Yearwood perceives and evidences that “the spectator brings knowledge of black expressive forms and an aesthetic sense developed through these intertextual experiences” (140). That is, the spectator goes to the cinema with a basic idea of what he is going to experience when watching the movie. The viewer is already influenced by what he has learnt through society and he “brings an emotional content to the film experience. These emotions are influenced by the larger social history of political and historic relations and the accompanying need for self-expression” (140).

In the past, most spectators who went to the cinema to watch a black movie were expected to have some kind of knowledge about the history of the black community. This idea has changed over time and nowadays there is not only black historical movies but also black films dealing with genres such as superhero, musical or comedy movies where the audiences only need to know that they are going to enjoy a story in which, after decades, it is possible to see a diverse cast in which everyone is represented.

4. Movies as a Social Practice

For the purpose of this dissertation, there is a connection between Turner's words (1988) and the overarching goal of this Dissertation on Daniels' *The Butler* when the scholar referred to the power of the film as being a social practice. Turner also points out that what matters about movies is not only what happens on the screen but also what happens in front of it. That is, from only being a form of art to becoming one of the most used forms of social practices, movies have become something indispensable in the daily lives of millions of people. Besides, and as Turner insists, movies are part of "a wider argument about representation" (59) and have a strong influence on our global culture and our social relationships.

Yearwood highlights that black film aesthetics play a most relevant role for the history of the representation of the African-Americans in cinema because given the fact that there is "a preoccupation with the way filmic signification helps to establish or challenge social meanings; and third, [what is actually very important for this dissertation] a focus on the relationship between the cinema as a social institution and the dominant system of power" (69). Furthermore Yearwood adds that a good black movie must be able to "represent which is most unique and best in black culture (. . .) [and it should] provide an intellectual challenge and engage our cognitive faculties. It can often present incisive commentary on social reality" (79). A good black movie must be able to open a debate and to create a response in the audience because "In African American culture, art has entertainment and therapeutic value but this is also a vehicle capable of producing knowledge" (80) and making an African-American

movie only for the sake of entertainment is not just what the community expects. In fact, the “African American expressive tradition, narrative entertains, but it also conveys a morality” (80) which is something that eventually movies with an African-American history need to have: a morale. In my opinion, Daniels’ *The Butler* makes a good effort regarding this as it entertains the viewers but also deals with real information about the history of the United States in an accurate manner, and it does offer a morale.

That is why, apart from being studied from many different points of view, Turner explains that a “film was examined as a cultural product and as a social practice, valuable both for itself and for what it could tell us of the systems and processes of culture” (60), as well as what it can tell us about humanity. There are many different approaches to use when studying a movie but what is important for this dissertation is that movies are a “source of pleasure and significance for so many in our culture” (Turner 61) and that movies should also be studied for a cultural point of view.

What cannot be denied is that going to the cinema is a complete experience that brings people together and it works as “release and separation from the world” (Turner 146), meaning that going to the movies is way of escapism from the real world and personal problems. When this is mixed with the fact that the audiences are comfortably seated while watching the movie, it “makes the viewer much susceptible to the power of the message” (Turner 146). Moreover, if the movie’s plot is good and it engages with the audience the boundaries between the imaginary world and the real experience disappear which is the most important part of the cinema experience as Turner explains, “This blurring of the boundaries between the imaginary and the real is at the

heart of the cinema experience” (147). People need to escape from their lives and having the chance to be someone else for a couple of hours and feeling that the lines that separate the imaginary and the real disappear and that is what makes the cinema experience so exciting and attractive to so many people.

4.1 The Power of Stories

*I find myself modestly encouraged, believing
that so long as the questions are still being asked,
what binds us together might somehow,
ultimately, prevail.¹⁹*

In 2019, Michelle and Barack Obama participated in an interview with Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar for the 2020's Academy Award winning documentary *American Factory* which was titled *American Factory: A Conversation with the Obamas*.²⁰ During that interview they talked about different topics related to American society such as racism, unemployment or violence but the one most relevant for this dissertation is the power that stories have. In the beginning, Obama stresses the importance of telling stories and how both of their careers have always been focused on them as they feel that societies and minds can be changed through the telling of good stories: "One way of looking at what we're both been doing for the last twenty years maybe most of our careers was to tell stories" (*American Factory* 00:00:34-00:00:48). Beyond the basic idea that people have about the functionality of stories, in fact, they hide our deepest fears, concerns and inspirations in life. Actually, Obama believes that we all have a story in ourselves that has motivated us to pursue our dreams, as well as bringing some sense into our lives when everything seemed negative: "We all have a sacred story in us, right? A story that gives us

¹⁹ Barack Obama, 2004 (*Dreams from My Father*, 438).

²⁰ This reference will be shortened as *American Factory* throughout the dissertation but it can be found with its full title *American Factory: A Conversation with the Obamas* in the works cited section.

meaning and purpose, and how we organize our lives” (*American Factory* 00:01:32-00:01:39). These motivations can come from people who are very close to us like those of our ancestors who tell us what has happened in their lives and we feel inspired to be as brave as they were as well as stories that we hear on the television, movies or television series which are fiction but that can create a reaction in us too.

Stories are an incalculable source of power and they are mostly made to entertain people but they can also change a lot of people’s lives and hearts with their morals and characters. Most people have a favorite movie or story. The reasons can vary, but they all have a favorite movie that they relate to and which inspires them to overcome their fears and be the best version of themselves possible. That is the reason why movies should try and work in favor of representing all of the different collectives, races and ways of thinking that exist on the planet. As it was mentioned before, cinema has played a very relevant role in the Civil Rights Movement as many movies were made to depict all that era and tell about black people experiences to people from other ethnic groups or nationalities. Stories are undoubtedly universal and, as Turner mentions, “story-telling is part of our cultural experience, inseparable and intrinsic to it” (98), since stories are used to teach and guide people throughout their lives. However, that does not mean that stories can explain the world accurately. Instead, Turner sustains, they just work as a “means of making sense of our social world and sharing that sense with others” (99). They are also a powerful form of uniting people. Apart from the fact that narratives are common to all cultures, Turner writes that there is also “structural similarities between the tales, stories and legends produced by different cultures” (99).

Hence, people need to see themselves represented on the big screen because that gives them some sense of validation and recognition which is very much needed within some collectives that have been ignored or misrepresented in movies for a long time. In fact, Michelle Obama²¹ highlights the relevance of stories by saying that her husband and she have always supported the diffusion of different stories from all over the world because different communities have the opportunity to share their lives: “And if people don’t see themselves out there and out there is the film. It is movies. It’s TV. And it’s important for us, when we have these platforms, is to do our best to put more stories out there” (*American Factory* 00:03:52-00:04:07). There would never be too many stories in the world as they all open conversations about different topics that need to be discussed to better advance as a society. What makes societies grow is sharing their stories and different points of view. That is the beginning to make a nation prosper.

Moreover, Barack Obama believes in the relevance of sharing those stories so that other people can empathize with their struggles which could eventually open new debates about issues that were unknown before: “We want people to be able to get outside of themselves and experience and understand the lives of somebody else which is what a good story does” (*American Factory* 00:08:36-00:08:47). Empathizing with other human beings should be a basic social concern as we do not live alone but amidst a lot of different people. Connecting with a person who lives far away from us and in a completely

²¹ Michelle Obama (1964-) is an American lawyer and writer who served as the 44th First Lady of the United States alongside her husband Barack Obama. She was the first African-American first lady of the history in the country. Michelle Obama is a role model across the world because of the continuous work regarding the improvement of education, nutrition, poverty and the environment.

different culture is not always easy. Therefore, that is why movies and series are so important nowadays when we live in a world that is connected online during the twenty four hours of the day. Thus, the media should be used to bring stories from other cultures and perspectives to the mass audiences who are eager to watch and listen to new stories. Although some people may consider cinema and series only to be a form of entertainment, it is, in fact, one of the most powerful means that we have to tell stories across the globe.

In this vein, Obama claims: "I think our theory is: a good story is a good story. If there's a good story to be told. If it's a documentary (. . .) or if it's a scripted story that in some ways captures our common humanity and helps people understand something that they didn't understand before" (*American Factory* 00:07:30-00:08:04). In Obama's opinion, if there is somewhere in the planet a story that needs to be told, it should be told.

Actually, Lee Daniels' *The Butler* would agree with Obama's because, thanks to his film, a new conversation about the experiences of black people working at the White House has been opened. Some people might have not known that African Americans have had the chance to work at the most important building in the country while other black people were killed and mistreated in the streets. Although some parts of the movie are fictionalized, the inclusion of some historical events as subplots of the central storyline can promote awareness in the audiences who will do some research about what they have just watched on the big screen. Cinema is one of the most powerful means of communication nowadays and it should be used as a way to educate people and create new debates.

The fact is that during the twenty-first century there has been a noteworthy growth in African American movies. That is, movies that tell stories about the African American community and plots that have a majority or even a full cast of black people. Some of them are directed by African American filmmakers but some others have been filmed by white directors. One of the most important representations of black people happened in 2009 when the worldwide famous animated films company Walt Disney finally made a movie with an African American lead character. The movie is *The Princess and the Frog* and it tells the story of a black woman named Tiana who lived in the New Orleans of 1920s and whose biggest dream was to save money and open her own restaurant. This movie was made by the white directors John Musker and Ron Clements who won several awards. Indeed, the premiere of *The Princess and the Frog* made a big impact on viewers because the Walt Disney Company finally gave black audiences the opportunity to be represented on the big screen by creating the first black princess who will be part of the catalogue of Disney princesses alongside the French Belle, the Chinese, Mulán or the native-American Pocahontas. Finally, after almost eighty years since the premiere of their first movie in 1930, Disney decided to represent black people in their world of fantasy. And this was just the beginning.

Moreover, the next decade was full of different movies who dealt with African American history such as Tate Taylor's *The Help* who focused on the daily lives of maids and white women in the 1960s America. The film was a blockbuster but it also was heavily criticized because the story was written and directed by white people. Another movie that was heavily criticized was Tarantino's *Django Unchained* because of an incorrect portrayal of slavery, its

historical inaccuracies or the excessive use of violence. Even the black director Spike Lee refused to watch it because he thought it was a dishonor to the African American history: "I can't speak on it because I'm not gonna see it (. . .) All I'm going to say is that it's disrespectful to my ancestors. That's just me...I'm not speaking on behalf of anybody else" (qtd. in Platon).

However, the majority of the African American movies that premiered from 2010 to 2020 received very good reviews and some of them were even nominated and awarded by the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences. Even movies like *The Help* or *Django Unchained*, which turned out to be quite controversial, were also nominated and won some Academy Awards. Both movies were the beginning of a decade full of stories about the black community that were brought onto the big screen. In fact, in 2013 Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* movie, which was based on Solomon Northup's memoir book about his experience of slavery (1853), was an inspiration for the upcoming movies. *12 Years a Slave* was nominated to nine Academy awards in 2014, and it won three of them that included Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress for the Kenyan Lupita Nyong'o, and Best Adapted Screenplay. Three years later, the 2016, Barry Jenkins' movie *Moonlight*, which is based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's unpublished partly autobiographical play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, was nominated to eight Academy Awards, and it also won three of them which included Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor for Mahershala Ali and Best Adapted Screenplay. Other movies that did made an impact on the audience were Ava DuVernay's *Selma* which won an Academy Award for Best Original Song for the song "Glory" written by John Legend in 2015, Denzel Washington's *Fences* which was nominated for Best Picture in

2017 but lost against *Moonlight* while Jordan Peele's horror feature length movie *Get Out* about a biracial couple was a success and was nominated to four Academy Awards in 2018 but only brought back home one award for Best Original Screenplay.

Besides, black director Spike Lee worked on a new movie in 2018 entitled *BlacKkKlansman* which is based on the 2014 memoir *Black Klansman* by Ron Stallworth. *BlacKkKlansman's* plot is set in the 1970s in Colorado where the first African-American detective in the city's police department has to infiltrate and expose the local Ku Klux Klan branch. This movie won the most important award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018, the Grand Prix, and it was also nominated to six Academy Awards in 2019 but it ended up only succeeding in the Best Adapted Screenplay category. .

Without any doubt, the movie that has changed the game for the representation of the African Americans in movies has been Ryan Coogler's superhero movie *Black Panther*. The lead character of this movie is the superhero T'Challa, best known as Black Panther, who was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby for Marvel Comics. His first appearance in the comic world was in 1966 in the comic book number fifty-two of the well-known *Fantastic Four* heroes. Black Panther was the first superhero of African descent. In fact, T'Challa is the king and protector of the Marvel fictional world of Wakanda which is situated in Africa and T'Challa's special abilities are the use of ancient Wakanda rituals, his excellent combat skills and the ability to use the advanced technology that exists in Wakanda. *Black Panther* was released on February 2018. It was the eighteenth movie of the Marvel Cinematic Universe as well as the first Marvel movie where the cast was mainly black. Marvel's *Black Panther*

was nominated to twenty hundred and twenty six awards (seven of them from the Academy) and won ninety of them which include Best Original Score, Best Costume Design and Best Production Design from the Academy; Best Visual Effects from the BAFTA Awards; two Grammy Awards for Best Rap Performance and Best Score Soundtrack for Visual Media; and several NAACP Image Awards.

Why has *Black Panther* become a social phenomenon? What made this superhero movie so important was neither the incredibly good reviews it received nor that the Black Panther turned out to be the most successful superhero movie in the history of the Oscars. Instead, it all happened because of the cultural impact that it had on society. Positive reviews about how important the Black Panther cast was for the black community, and the black youth in particular, inundated the internet and made the African American community feel proud about the success of the movie. Actually, not all the opinions were positive but even the bad ones were not that bad. The majority of the reviews agreed on the fact that *Black Panther* had helped in *the* progress of the representation of the black community on the big screen.

One of the partly negative reviews that needs to be taken into consideration is that of Johns Hopkins University historian and teacher Nathan Connolly (1977-) who showed mixed feelings about Marvel's superhero movie. Firstly, Connolly admits that *Black Panther* is "a breakthrough in black cultural representation" and that it can even be considered "our generation's *A Raisin in the Sun*." Nevertheless, Connolly states that what he does not like about Coogler's movie is that it forgets about the past of black people as it had never existed: "*Black Panther* taps a 500-year history of African descended people

imagining freedom, land and national autonomy. Wakanda conjures this past, even as it professes to stand outside it". Secondly, Connolly argues that all the elements that appear in the movie are not as African as they seem but only a mixture of different African stereotypes: "there's nothing African about the movie, at least not in any historical sense. It's a mash up of Africanisms." However, Connolly highlights what is accurately historical about *Black Panther* which is "how smartly it invokes the history of anti-colonial struggle and age-old visions of black self-determination" as well as "the collectivist aspirations of black people and the symbolic value of black monarchs." Thirdly, Connolly ends up by saying that although T'Challa's movie is not the best representation of the African history and culture, it is also true that everyone should give it a chance and watch it: "*Black Panther* doesn't offer a submerged history lesson so much as a trip to a place we should all see at least once."

On the other hand, the American writer, historian and Civil Rights activist Shaun King (1979-) gave a very positive review about Coogler's movie. He basically said that the premiere of *Black Panther* was history in the making and that "it's hard sometimes, to know how big a moment in history is when you are right in the middle of it." While Connolly mostly focuses on comparing *Black Panther* to the past of black people, King decided to focus on the fact that he was living something that will go down in history and wanted to be able to enjoy it. Actually, in his review Shaun King refers to the fact that "school and community centers bought out entire theatres. Dozens of theaters have said it was the most watched film they've ever had [and that *Black Panther*] was just not a movie but a moment of deep pride". Following, Shaun King adds that the importance of the movie lies not only on the main black superhero but also that

"*Black Panther* had a whole cast of beautiful black brilliance, black scientists, black presidents. The style. The technology. The color." Everything put together gave the whole black community a big sense of pride and unity. Moreover, Shaun King mentions new themes that Coogler's movie addressed such as Afro-futurism which is a cultural aesthetic that explores the developing of African people culture in the diaspora with the use of technology. In fact, Shaun King writes that *Black Panther* "is the first blockbuster film centered in the ethos of Afro-Futurism, where the writers, and directors, and makeup and wardrobe team all imagined a beautiful, thriving Black Africa without colonialism." Wakanda is like a heavenly place in which black "traditions and culture have not been destroyed. We have beautiful rites of passage," Shaun King concludes.

Up until now everyone has agreed on the new themes and representations that *Black Panther* has brought to cinema but when it comes to feminism, *Black Panther* should be mentioned because it shows young black girls who can do anything that they set their minds on. In fact, Truitt talks about this feminist gaze with the film critic and CEO of the Black Girl Nerds Community, Jamie Broadnax (1980-) who says that the female characters in *Black Panther* "inspire girls and young people by showing that you can strive for whatever you want and not feel like you have to look a certain way or be in a certain class in order to be seen as intellectual" (qtd. in Truitt). Then, Broadnax adds that *Black Panther* is the perfect representation of how much the world of cinema has evolved concerning black representation: "That in and of itself just speaks to how far we've come in terms of equal opportunity and representation in cinema. I couldn't be more thrilled about that" (qtd. in Truitt).

In view of the fact that any other movie could have a positive influence on black youth, some different movements were created to help disadvantaged people to be able to watch the movie in cinemas. One of the most sounded campaigns was the one initiated by Frederick Joseph, a resident in New York who started a GoFundMe²² campaign to raise money and take as many black young people as he could to watch the movie. As Tate writes, “in just five days the campaign made over \$30.000” but this was just only the beginning because the #BlackPantherChallenge reached the television and Joseph attended the worldwide famous television show, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, alongside Chadwick Boseman (1976-2020) who played Black Panther. This invitation was really important for Frederick Joseph who said that he was “grateful that all of you have answered the call and are taking action to help more kids watch their heroes on the big screen” (qtd. in Edwards).

The truth is that Frederick Joseph considered crucial for the black community to watch this film as “something that is not only wrapped in blackness but is also layered and nuanced. It has aspects of feminism, of black non-toxic masculinity, of loss, of pain, of various black existences, and that’s something very important for our kids to see” (qtd. in Agbabiaka).

In conclusion, movies and series are a fantastic way of telling stories and creating awareness in society as well as to open new conversations about topics that have been marginalized for a long time. Movies are part of the history of the human race but they also tell the history of the world and deal with the experiences of human beings. We could say that the history of the United

²² “GoFundMe” is an American for-profit crowd funding platform and website that allows people to raise money for many different types of events, ranging from a birthday party to any type of social movement.

States is in itself a story, therefore, movies and stories should work together as a medium to educate people and challenge their minds. The ultimate goal would be to have a large variety of stories that might represent each and every community that might exist on earth—respectfully made at the same time they educate people.

5. The Eyes on the Prize: A Social-Historical Contextualization

5.1 1926 – Awakenings

*I seem to have committed three sins. I have done three things that are wrong. First of all, being born a Negro. That is my first sin. Second, being tired of segregation. I have committed the sin of being tired of the injustices and discriminations heaped upon us. Third, having the moral courage to sit up and express our tiredness. That is my third sin.*²³

The 1950s was a very important decade in the history of the United States. It is the time when the first actions in favor of the Civil Rights Movement were starting to take place. The Movement also woke up people's minds to confront the problems that existed within the American society. However, it was extremely difficult to accomplish much since the Southern society was still ruled by the Jim Crow laws. Created by white legislations during the Reconstruction era, these laws were local and state rules that existed in the United and were valid from 1876 to 1965. Under the motto "separate but equal," the Jim Crow laws supported racial segregation against African American people and people of color in general. Racial segregation was present throughout the whole country—in a more or less subtle way—but it was particularly vicious in the South. During the fifties, public places like schools, transport, toilets, restaurants, parks, or even water fountains were segregated. Therefore, black and white people could not sit together in a cafeteria or attend the same school. Due to this long-life situation the African American community had always been

²³ Martin Luther King Jr.'s, 1956 (qtd. in Fairclough 28).

left aside, and treated like second-class citizens only because of the color of their skin.

Although the fifties are a good starting point when it comes to explain all the events that were part of the Civil Rights Movement, it is essential to emphasize that historically there had always existed all sorts of associations that fought for African-Americans' rights in the US. One of the most important African American groups was the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)* which was founded in 1909. The *NAACP* "was created to prevent racially motivated violence and job discrimination and to promote equality in the legal system" (Willey 65). Among others, in Purvis' words, the *NAACP* "lobbied for a national law to forbid lynching, funded litigation to reestablish protection for civil rights under the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments" (271). Moreover, Purvis adds that they also worked for "improving economic opportunity and providing social services" (271). Finally all these efforts "culminated in the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation" (Willey 65). Ironically, as Purvis highlights, "its first officers were all white, except for W. E. B. Du Bois²⁴ (. . .) [but] by the 1950s, its leadership was primarily black" (271).

With the passing of time, Willey suggest that "the *NAACP*'s stature as the leading African American civil rights organization began to diminish somewhat after 1955, as the philosophy of nonviolent direct action (. . .) became the focus of the civil rights struggle" (65). Following Purvis, a look at the statistics

²⁴ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was an American historian, civil rights activist and Pan-African author. He grew up in an integrated community and was the first African American to gain a doctorate at Harvard University. Du Bois was one of the founders of the *NAACP*, the leader of the Niagara Movement (an African American group who fought for equal rights for blacks and women) and teacher of history, sociology and economics at Atlanta University.

show that the *NAACP* “had 445,000 members by 1963, and ranked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference²⁵ as the two most influential organizations of the Civil Rights Movement” (271). However, at present the *NAACP* has “1,800 branches and a total membership of more than 50,000” (Purvis 271) and it still take action to improve the lives of African Americans lives.

Why did the movement, also called “the struggle”, started in the mid-fifties? According to McAdam, a very important factor that could have been the reason behind this was that “the structure of political opportunities, confronting backs gradually improved during the period from 1930 to 1954, thus affording insurgents more leverage with which to press their demands” (*Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency* 230)²⁶. This inspired the black community who started to demand for the same rights that white people had but being very cautious as they were aware of their place in society.

In June 1942, James Farmer²⁷ founded the Congress of Racial Equality (*CORE*) which “became nationally prominent in the Civil Rights Movement by pioneering important tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience” (Purvis 87). Its members, as Willey states, were part of the “Fellowship of Reconciliation, an interracial Christian pacifist group” (65) and “the use of non-violent direction action to promote social justice and racial equality” (65) were its main goals.

²⁵ The SCLC association will be explained later in this dissertation as its foundation took place in 1957.

²⁶ This source by McAdam will be shortened as *Political Process* when referenced in the text but it can be found with its entire reference in the Works Cited section.

²⁷ James Leonard Farmer Jr. (1920-1999) was an American civil rights activist and leader who worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr. He was the organizer of the first Freedom Ride in 1961 and he was *CORE*'s president from 1942 to 1944.

The *CORE* “entered into a fresh burst of activity in the early 1960s” (Willey 65) and their actions helped other associations to be founded. Furthermore, members of the black community started trying different approaches when fighting for their rights. Sadly, “after its Baltimore convention of July 1966 endorsed Black Power Movement, *CORE* lost much of the financial support from whites which it depended and by 1979 was bankrupt” (Purvis 87).

In fact, McAdam writes that “this expansion in political opportunities contributed to a growing sense of political efficacy within the black population as insurgents came to redefine existing conditions as subjects to change through collective action” (*Political Process* 230). Thus, the black community soon realized that their actions of creating political groups and working together could be an efficient tool to make themselves heard by the rest of the civilization. Thirdly, “with the simultaneous growth of (. . .) the black churches and colleges and *NAACP* chapter, the southern black population developed the indigenous organizational strength needed to mount and sustain a social movement” (McAdam, *Political Process* 230). As a matter of fact, the desire of the African American community to change things and their sense of brotherhood were the most powerful ingredients for this movement to happen. However, white’s brutality seemed to have no end.

One of the events that made a tremendous impact in the African American community, as well as among the American society at large, was the murder of the African-American teenager Emmet Till. Till (1941–1955) a fourteen-year old African-American boy who was brutally killed by three white American men on August 28th 1955 in Money (Mississippi). Originally from Chicago, he was sent to his mother’s hometown in the South to spend the

summer with his uncle. Little did he know that for presumably talking to and being too friendly with a white American woman at a shop his life would be at stake. His disfigured dead body was found three days after the murder in the Tallahatchie River by some fishermen who were horrified by the state of the body. Photos of Till's beaten, deformed and dead body were shown to the whole nation on television. Most people, the black community in particular, watched what have happened in awe. Besides, his mother, Mamie Till, demanded to have Till's coffin open during the funeral so everyone could see what those terrible white men have done to her son.

As this case exemplifies, racism was an ordinary thing in the United States at this time. Black people dying at the hands of white citizens was the order of the day, but this case affected the whole population deeply. Not only the African-American community was devastated but also the white liberal population of the north was shocked while the newspapers wrote about it for a long time. As late as 2007, Carolyn Bryant, the woman who Emmet Till has spoken to, admitted that everything was a lie and that Emmet had never crossed the line with her. Sadly, the case was reopened last July 2018 because some new information that seemed to be extremely relevant to the case had appeared.

For different people this case turned out to be hard to digest. For example, in her 1968 book *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Anne Moody²⁸ addresses the Emmet Till's murder and refers to the impact it made on a then fifteen—year old black girl. In Moody's words: "I was fifteen years old when I

²⁸ Anne Moody (1940-2015) was an American author who wrote about her life growing up in a poor and rural Mississippi. She was involved in the Civil Rights Movement and she helped to fight racism and segregation while she worked alongside the NAACP, CORE and SNCC.

began to hate people. I hated the white men who murdered Emmet Till and I hated all the other white who were responsible for the countless murders” (43). Above and beyond, Moody also wrote that she could not help it but to hate black people too because she felt that the community had not done enough to change things: “But I also hated Negroes, I hated them for not standing up and doing something about the murders” (43).

Notwithstanding Moody’s feelings, a woman alone started her own rebellion when she refused to give up her seat in a bus to a white man. It was the year 1955 and her name was Rosa Parks²⁹. On December 1, 1955, Parks lighted the driving flame of the revolution on an ordinary day just by stating that she was not going to be treated as a second-class citizen anymore. Parks recalled the events that happened that December evening to journalist Howell Raines³⁰ during an interview in 1977:

I had left my work. (. . .) I came across the street and looked for a Cleveland Avenue bus that apparently had some seats on. (. . .) As I got up on the bus and walked to the seat I saw there was only one vacancy that was just back of where it was considered the white section. So this was the seat I took, next to the aisle, and a man was sitting next to me. (. . .) And on the third stop there were some people getting on, and at this point, all of the front seats were taken. (. . .) The third stop is when

²⁹ Rosa Parks (1913 – 2005) was one of the most important people during the Civil Rights Movement era. She was part of the NAACP and she was awarded the Spingarn Medal. Parks also was inducted into Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame and National Women’s Hall of Fame, as well as receiving and honorary doctorate from Florida State University.

³⁰ Howell Raines (1943 -) is an American journalist, editor and writer who began his career working for southern newspapers. He has been the executive editor of *The New York Times* newspaper from 2001 to 2003. Raines has taken part in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as writing a novel, two memoirs and an oral history about that time.

all the front seats were taken, and this one man was standing and when the driver looked around and saw he was standing, he asked the four of us, the man in the seat with me and the two women across the aisle, to let him have those seats, (. . .) At this first request, didn't any of us move. Then he spoke again and said, "You'd better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats". (. . .) When the three people (. . .) stood up and moved into the aisle, I remained where I was. When the driver saw that I was still sitting there, he asked if I was going to stand up. I told him, no, I wasn't. He said "Well, if you don't stand up, I'm going to have you arrested". (. . .) A few minutes later, two policemen got on the bus, and they approached me and asked if the driver had asked me to stand up, and I said yes, and they wanted to know why I didn't. I told them I didn't think I should have to stand up (. . .) and I was taken to jail and booked on suspicion. (45)

Parks' refusal to leave her seat that day had happened before but her actions at that exact moment made a big change in American's society and history. Another person who refused to give her seat to a white American citizen nine months before Rosa Parks, on March 2, 1955, was Claudette Colvin. She was only fifteen years old when she confronted the social American order, as Font narrates:

Claudette Colvin volvía de clase con unas compañeras en un autobús en la ciudad de Montgomery cuando el conductor reclamó los asientos para una pasajera blanca. Mientras las otras dos jóvenes se levantaron y cedieron sus asientos, Colvin permaneció clavada en su sitio hasta que dos agentes de Policía la sacaron en volandas y la esposaron.

(“Claudette Colvin was coming back from school with some classmates on a bus in the city of Montgomery when the driver claimed some seats for a white female passenger. While the other two girls got up and gave their seats, Colvin remained sat until two police officers carried her away before handcuffing her.”; 43)

As Font argues, “el simbólico plante de la joven no desató ninguna revolución” (“The symbolic reaction from the girl did not start any revolution” 43). As a matter of fact, Rosa Parks made that action some months later maybe because the *NAACP* considered Colvin too young to represent the Civil Rights Movement: “Los líderes afroamericanos no confiaban en que una adolescente rebelde del barrio negro más pobre de la ciudad fuera a ser una imagen lo suficientemente sólida como para personificar un gran movimiento en las calles” (“The African-American leaders did not think that a rebel teenage girl from one of the poorest black neighborhoods in the city was going to be a good enough figure to begin a movement on the streets”; Font 43). Together with Parks and Colvin, there is still another African American woman who defied the American society seventy-one years before them. Her name was Ida B. Wells (1862–1931). Wells was the co-founder of the *NAACP* association (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and she devoted all her life to defend the civil rights and women rights in America while she also was part of the suffragist movement. Wells became a very important figure for the movement in 1884’s Memphis because she refused to give her seat to a white man in a train. Most specifically, Wells is relevant for the movement because she actively fought against the lynching of black men at the same time she

exposed the practice as being barbaric and as a way to further oppress the African American people.

Less than a year later, on November 13, the U.S Supreme Court confirmed that bus segregation was unconstitutional and that the racial segregation in public transports should be put to an ended. In addition, although she was not representative of the cause, Claudette Colvin ended up being crucial for this movement because “el año siguiente, en 1956, su testimonio fue clave en una demanda para acabar con la segregación en el transporte público” (“The following year, 1956, her testimony was key in a lawsuit to end segregation on public transportation.” (Font 43) My translation. Actually, “on December 21, 1956—the first day of integration—Martin Luther King Jr. boarded a bus and took a seat near the front. This simple act marked a historic victory for black southerners (as well as for the rest of the black communities in the country): the beginning of the end of racial segregation” (Fairclough 33).

5.2 1957 – Fighting Back

*Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate.
Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair.
Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubts.*³¹

In January 1957, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), one of the fundamental associations which fought for the African Americans civil rights, was founded in Atlanta. Some of the leading members included “Martin Luther King Jr.³², Ralph Abernathy³³, T. J. Jemison³⁴, Fred Shuttlesworth³⁵ and C. K. Steele³⁶. Most were Baptists ministers and *NAACP* members” (Willey 68). As Willey argues, the SCLC “supported the *NAACP* strategy of battling segregation in the courts, they also believed that direct action (. . .) could be highly effective” (68). These organization worked very hard through all the Civil Rights Movement era and it also “gave support to sit-in participants and Freedoms Riders and was a catalyst for the creation of SNCC” (Willey 68)

³¹ James Lawson. (qtd. in McAdam, *Freedom Summer* 30)

³² Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was an American Christian minister and activist who became the leader of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until the day he was murdered in 1968. King’s persona and actions in relation to the civil rights fight will be explained later in this dissertation.

³³ Ralph Abernathy Sr. (1926-1990) was an American civil rights activist and Baptist minister. He was King’s mentor but also a close friend of his, actually he became the president of the SCLC after King’s assassination.

³⁴ T. J. Jemison (1918-2013) was the president of the National Baptist Convention from 1982 to 1994 and he was part of the civil rights strike against the segregated seating in public means of transport.

³⁵ Fred Shuttlesworth (1922-2011) was an American activist who fought against segregation and racism while being the minister in Birmingham, Alabama.

³⁶ C. K. Steele (1914-1980) was a priest and a civil rights activist who organized the 1956 Tallahassee bus boycott and he was one of the most important members of the SCLC.

which will be dealt with later in this Dissertation. In actuality, “the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is founded to battle segregation” (Willey 16).

Less than a year later, on November 13, the U.S Supreme Court confirmed that bus segregation was unconstitutional and that the racial segregation in public transports should be put to an ended. In addition, although she was not representative of the cause, Claudette Colvin ended up being crucial for this movement because “el año siguiente, en 1956, su testimonio fue clave en una demanda para acabar con la segregación en el transporte público” (“The following year, 1956, her testimony was key in a lawsuit to end segregation on public transportation.” (Font 43) My translation. Actually, “on December 21, 1956—the first day of integration—Martin Luther King Jr. boarded a bus and took a seat near the front. This simple act marked a historic victory for black southerners (as well as for the rest of the black communities in the country): the beginning of the end of racial segregation” (Fairclough 33).

In the fall of 1957, in Little Rock (Arkansas), a group of nine African American students who were enrolled in Little Rock Central High School were denied their entrance to this racially segregated school by the Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus³⁷ an episode that fueled one of the most important crisis in the United States politics. Daisy Bates³⁸ narrates what happened that day in her book *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (1962):

³⁷ Orval Faubus (1910-1994) was a member of the Democratic Party and he was the 36th Governor of Arkansas from 1955 to 1967.

³⁸ Daisy Bates (1914 – 1999) was an American Civil Rights activist and publisher who played a key role during the Little Rock Integration Crisis. She was also the President of the Arkansas NAACP and the editor of the black newspaper Arkansas State Press.

It was Labor Day, September 2, 1957. The nine pupils who had been selected by the school authorities to enter Central High School [were] – Carlota Walls, Jefferson Thomas, Elizabeth Eckford, Telma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Ernest Green, Terrance Roberts, Gloria Ray and Minnijean Brown. (. . .)

The youngster then turned to me and asked, “Is there anything they can do – now that they lost in court? Is there any way they can stop us from entering Central tomorrow morning?”

“I don’t think so,” I said.

(. . .)

About seven o’clock that night a local newspaper reporter rang my doorbell. “Mrs. Bates, do you know that national guardsmen are surrounding Central High?”

(. . .)

We jumped into our car and drove to Central High . . . Men in full battle dress- helmets, boots and bayonets – were piling out of the trucks and lining up in front of the school.” (97)

The entire city of Little Rock had one of the worst nights in their history. The details quickly reached the American citizens who could not possibly believe their ears. Such episodes made people realize that some laws needed to be changed. Faubus’ description of the events that took place that night when the nine African-Americans were trying to enter the high school horrified everyone. Besides, it is an episode which has never been forgotten when dealing with the history of the African American community in America. According to Bates, “Faubus’ alleged reason for calling out the troops was that

he had received information that caravans of automobiles filled with white supremacists were heading toward Little Rock from all over the state” (98). To tell the truth, Faubus wanted the nation to believe that he was actually protecting the black students but he also declared “Central High School off limits to Negroes. For some inexplicable reason he added that Horace Mann, a Negro high school, would be off limits to whites” (qtd. in Bates 98) which completely showed his intentions were far from protecting the black students.

It was clear that Faubus wanted to prevent the African American kids to enter the school but he did not want to be so straightforward about his intentions in a country that was changing little by little. To summarize, as Purvis comments, “Governor Orval Faubus mobilized the National Guard, ostensibly to prevent violence, but really to block a federal court order integrating Little Rock Central High School” (228). To prove this point, Bates also refers to Faubus’ speech sent to the nation from his office when “he delivered the infamous words – blood will run in the streets – if Negro pupils should attempt to enter Central High School” (98). Faubus was responsible for inciting disturbances and violence while there were large numbers of citizens who did not know what was going to happen to those vulnerable kids as well as to the future African American students who might wish to attend white high schools.

Those were some really hard months for the whole African American community in Little Rocks but, eventually, on 24 September, president Eisenhower send more than 1,000 US Army troops to enforce the desegregation injunction and keep order in Little Rock. McAdam explains that Eisenhower’s action brought with it “feelings of optimism and efficacy [which] replaced the fatalism and grudging acquiescence to segregation that had earlier

prevailed in the black community” (*Freedom Summer* 30). Thus, once again the community felt that a new future could be achieved if they all joined together. In the same thread of thought, it is also relevant to highlight that Eisenhower’s presidential decision to send federal troops to Little Rock was perceived as “the first such commitment of federal troops since Reconstruction-- [a fact that] seemed to indicate a significant change in federal policy” (McAdam, *Freedom Summer* 30). Luckily, the situation was solved and by September 25, 1957, all the black students were able to enter the high school and the crisis ended.

To date, Eisenhower is considered one of the favorite presidents in the American history because he was a concerned president who not only cared about social problems but who was also willing to bring about some relevant changes for the progress of the country—whether they were black or white.

Notwithstanding the fact that American society was starting to perceive African Americans in a slightly different light, that did not mean that there was much to celebrate that year of 1957. According to Manning Marable³⁹, “it was no victory for black men [and women] to be allowed to sit in a formerly white-only theater or to rent hotel accommodation which had been segregated, when they had no jobs” (54). Desegregation did not mean equality and, although African Americans were able to share public places and schools with white American citizens, black people were still treated as inferior by the majority of the white population. As Marable argues, “almost every black person resisted segregation, because it was imposed upon him/her by a powerful white

³⁹ Manning Marable (1950-2011) was an American teacher of African American studies at Columbia University. He was part of many different progressive political events during his life and he founded the Institute for Research in African American Studies. Marable was the author of Malcolm X’s biography *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (2011) for which he was awarded with the Pulitzer Prize for History in 2012.

capitalist order” (55).). As a consequence, both African Americans and white citizens had to adjust to a new way of life that was completely strange to them. Therefore, it is no surprise that “the struggle for Negro equality since the Civil War has been characterized as an attempt at cultural assimilation on the part of blacks into the great social mainstream of American life” (Marable 55). Furthermore, and referring to the culture of school integration, Marable points out that “it was cruel to permit black children to sit in all-white schools, when their mothers had no money to provide their lunches” (54) which gave the African American citizens the feeling that they were together but they were different still which reminded to the old Jim Crows motto -separated but equal-. For all those reasons, among others, it was still needed to keep on working in favor of the African American people for many more years to come.

5.3 1960 – Ain't Scared of Your Jails

*Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
turn me 'round, turn me 'round.
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
I'm gonna keep on walkin', keep on a-talkin'
marching up to freedom land.⁴⁰*

The year 1960 marks the beginning of the most important period for the Civil Rights Movement era when the African American community awakes and starts to take action to improve their future. As Carson highlights “the memories of Emmett Till’s brutal killing in 1955 and of Elizabeth Eckford walking alone to Little Rock’s Central High School profoundly influenced young blacks” (107) who joined the several different protests actions that were born in America in the year of 1960. During this time, most of the demonstrations that took place were organized by students who became members of established organizations. Students usually worked with large organizations such as the NAACP or SNCC—we have already mentioned.

One crucial event during these years was “the sit-in campaign against southern segregation which began on February 1, 1960, when four black college students asked to be served at Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina; they were turned down, and refused to leave” (Purvis 373). Although, it was thought that the sit-ins would not do much of a difference in the American’s society, they ended up being one of the most important and influential actions to fight for the rights of the black citizens: “though few realized it when the sit-in began, they would eventually attract

⁴⁰ SNCC’s Workers’ Song. (qtd. in Marable 61)

national media attention and federal intervention in the South” (Carson 107).

Besides, Morris affirms that these student sit-ins:

Rapidly evolved into a mass protest that strengthened the civil rights movement and its organizational base; gave rise to the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (. . .) and gave rise to the modern white student movement of the early 1960s. (195)

The creation of the *SNCC* was fundamental for the developing of the sit-ins because “its members were active in the sit-in movement, as freedom riders, and in voter registration drives” (Purvis 389). It was founded by some “southern black college students (. . .) [and] it immediately demonstrated more militancy” (Purvis 389) than any other political groups such as the *NAACP* or the *SCLC*. According to Carson, the “*SNCC* was established at the Southside Student Leadership Conference held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, on April 15-17, 1960” which was followed by “the sit-ins by only a few months and not only solidified student involvement in the movement but placed students in the leadership roles” (108).

One of the founders was James Lawson⁴¹, a “divinity student at Vanderbilt University with a philosophical commitment to nonviolent direct action, [and it was thanks to Lawson academic background that] the students began to develop an organization that would channel their concerns and energy” (Carson 108). During the conference when the *SNCC* was founded in 1960, James Lawson defends the following words and perfectly sums up the beliefs behind the committee:

⁴¹ James Lawson (1928-) is an American activist who was the leading figure of the non-violence tactic in the Civil Rights Movement when he was the mentor of the *SNCC*. Lawson was also a university teacher.

Nonviolence [works] as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. (. . .) Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear, love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice, hope ends despair. Peace dominates war, faith reconciles doubt. (. . .) Love is the central motif of nonviolence. (. . .) By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human experience, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities. (qtd. in McAdam, *Freedom Summer* 30)

In the end, “the formation of SNCC helped transform the student movement from one that emphasized small-scale protests to a sustained force that would challenge racism through-out American society” (Carson 108) and was an essential part of the students actions. However, and despite the hard work that students have put in the movement, “the SNCC lost its prominence and had broken up by the early 1970s” (Purvis 389). Notwithstanding, the “feelings of optimism and efficacy replaced the fatalism and grudging acquiescence to segregation that had earlier prevailed in the black community” (McAdam, *Freedom Summer* 30). From then on, a new path was created for the African American community to keep on fighting for their rights.

Therefore, The Greensboro sit-ins were a series of non-violent protest that took place in the United States from February 1 to July 25, 1960. Morris confirms that there were sit-in demonstrations “in approximately seventy Southern cities” (195) which were rapidly noticed by the whole American society. People in the North were especially outraged because they could not understand the violence black people had to go through due to public segregation. As Morris chronicles it:

Between February 1 and March 1, 1960, sit-in protests had occurred at segregated lunch counters in eleven cities in North Carolina; seven in Virginia; four in South Carolina; three in Florida; two in Tennessee; two in Alabama; one in Kentucky; and one in Maryland. (197)

However, the most representative sit-in was the one that took place on February 1 when the following happened as Marable relates:

Four young black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, Joseph McNeil, David Richmond, Franklin McCain and Izell Blair, sat at a drugstore lunch counter in the “whites only” section. Politely, but firmly, they refused to move until the store was closed. (61)

This sit-in was the first one during this era but, as Morris affirms, “the four protesters knew that they were not the first to sit in in the state of North Carolina. Sit-in activity in the state had begun in the late 1950s” (198). There have already been sit-ins before 1960 but they did not make a profound change back in the fifties as it was doing it during the sixties when the whole American nation was changing. The news of this type of demonstration quickly spread through the whole nation: “news of this form of nonviolent, direct-action protest spread quickly across North Carolina and then over the country” (Marable 61). These four students are known now as “the Greensboro Four” who inspired black students to start fighting for their rights. During all that week that followed February 1, “students continued to sit in daily at the local Woolworth’s, and the protest population began to show” (Morris 199). As it could not be otherwise, the reaction from the local white population was to “close the Woolworth’s in

Greensboro, hoping to take the steam out of the developing mass movement” (Morris 199) but it did not work out that way exactly. Sit-ins kept on occurring for many months and they increased in numbers.

As it was said before, all of these demonstrations were carried out by “these activists [who] were affiliated with existing civil rights organizations and were integral members of the movement centers” (Morris 203). As Morris studied, “85 percent of the cities experiencing sit-ins were located in Southeastern, Seaboard and border states” (203) but all the country took to the streets to support this new movement. In a way, the sit-ins were a breath of fresh air for the civil rights fight and they “demonstrated that organized disruptive politics could bring about change much faster than the legal approach” (Morris 213).

The execution of the sit-in movement “produced more experienced activists and provided the movement with more funds, because blacks as well as sympathetic whites sent money to the movement following the dramatic sit-ins” (Morris 21) which largely increased the range of people who were willing to take part in the civil rights fight. As a result, the African American people were not alone in their struggle anymore because a lot of white citizens helped them all across the country. It should be taken into account that those white citizens who joined the blacks’ sit-ins received the same penalties and prosecution than the blacks.

Following the sit-ins, new forms of non-violent protest appeared such as “stand-ins at theatres refusing to sell tickets to blacks, wade-ins at municipal pools and segregated beaches, pray-ins at Jim Crow churches” (Marable 62).

This means that this type of protest was not only about desegregating cafeterias. The sit-in movement ended in July but by April “50,000 black and white students had joined the sit-in movement” (Marable 62), which shows how the sit-in was perceived.

During the events that took place in 1960, the transition to 1961 kept people waiting for more changes. Things were changing fast and everybody was aware of that. Besides, the coming presidential elections between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon were at a crucial time for the country, as they turned out to be one of the most agitated elections in American history. As Carson remarks, due to all these civil rights actions “caused both candidates to pay at least lip service to the movement” (108). This meant that the two presidential candidates had to be well informed about the social discontent between blacks and whites in their respective electoral campaigns. As a matter of fact, as Carson sustains, “John F. Kennedy’s phone call to Coretta Scott King⁴² in October 1960 following Martin Luther King Jr.’s arrest at an Atlanta sit-in had a dramatic impact on the 1960 presidential campaign” (108). It was precisely this unexpected and unheard of move that made the African American community felt supported by Kennedy. Although, “his actions were politically motivated, Kennedy’s pressure to help secure King’s release was appreciated in the black community and prompted a large black voter turnout” (108).

In summary, all the actions that the African American people took part in helped to start the shaping of America into a more progressive society. The most important aspect of this movement was the coming together of black and

⁴² Coretta Scott King (1927 – 2006) was an American activist and writer who was one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. She married Martin Luther King Jr. in 1953 and helped him during the Civil Rights Movement time until his assassination in 1968.

white Americans who wanted to support the same cause and try to amend the wrongs committed by their ancestors, and perpetrated against the black community. Actually, the sacrifices that both communities were about to make were the basis to achieve a more progressive society and the basis for the Civil Rights Movement.

5.4 1961– No Easy Walk

*Whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world,
ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice
which we ask of you.*⁴³

The words above were pronounced by one of the most well-known presidents of the United States of America. For the Civil Rights Movement, the presidential elections of 1960 in which Democrat John F. Kennedy became the 35th president against the Republican Party nominee Richard M. Nixon represent a highlight in the socio-political history of the country. At age 43, Kennedy became the second youngest president of the country and the only Catholic president that the states have had until the present year, 2020. Without a doubt, Kennedy remains one of the most popular presidents in the United States. According to McAdam, “Kennedy’s youthful enthusiasm, glamorous styles, and sense of humor marked him as one of our most personally appealing presidents” (*Freedom Summer* 23).

Contrary to former presidents, his appeal touched the black community too. Due to America’s complex social circumstances at that time, the “black staff workers in Kennedy’s campaign urged (. . .) him by appealing directly to black voters” (Marable 59) . They were sure that by doing so Kennedy could get votes from the black communities. Kennedy did exactly that and during his run to presidency, “he campaigned in urban areas with heavy concentration of black voters” (Marable 59). Little did Kennedy knew that this decision would change

⁴³ John F. Kennedy, 1962. (qtd. in “Inaugural Address”)

the history of the country and his time at the presidency of the United States—as well as his own life.

As we have briefly mentioned above, there was also an event that really helped Kennedy to get votes from black people. Only “several weeks before the election took place, [Martin Luther] King was sentenced to four months in prison for leading a nonviolent protest in downtown Atlanta” (Marable 59). Kennedy decided to help King and his family. Therefore, Kennedy, as Marable states, “wisely telephoned King’s wife, Coretta, and offered his support” while his brother and chief strategist, Robert F. Kennedy, “used his influence to obtain King’s release” (59). Kennedy’s resolution took the African American community by surprise because for the very first time someone who was running for the presidency took the black community into account. Furthermore, that might be as well the reason for Kennedy’s victory since “in most cities and states, three-fourths of all black votes went to the Democratic nominee” (59).

Perhaps, due to black vote, Kennedy’s administration felt that they did not have a choice but support the Civil Rights Movement. Besides, the violent events perpetrated against the African Americans were in need for a fast response. Therefore, McAdam clarifies that “John F. Kennedy represents perhaps the best example of a politician whose liberalism was more a response to the times than a deep thoroughgoing personal philosophy” (*Freedom Summer* 22). On his part, McAdam adds that “Kennedy must be credited with encouraging the rise in student activism and the general liberalization of American politics” (*Freedom Summer* 22), as well as holding out his hand to help the black community. And he adds that, in spite of his failings and wrongs, it is true that “Kennedy’s subjective impact on the consciousness of American

youth cannot be denied” (McAdam, *Freedom Summer* 23), since most of the Civil Rights Movement events were led by young people. For Marable’s point of view, John F. Kennedy was neither the perfect president nor the savior of the black community in America. It should be bear in mind that “publicly, Kennedy supported the gradual desegregation of American society but he took few concrete steps at first to promote civil rights,” as Marable sustains (60). Kennedy, nevertheless, opened a new path for the forthcoming presidents of the country.

Doubtlessly, the biggest challenge that the Kennedy administration had to face was the Freedom Riders actions that are an essential part of the history of the Civil Rights Movement. These “new wave of Freedom Rides begins throughout the South, touching off anti-black violence” (Willey 17) were compared to the north of the country where racism was still very present in the daily life of black citizens. Put it briefly, the Freedom Riders were an activist group that played a very important role in the Civil Rights Movement because they fought for the integration of the public transport system. As Purvis summarizes, this group put into practice “a nonviolent, civil disobedience tactic used to protest segregation of public accommodations” (148), to add that “freedom riding was initiated by the Congress of Racial Equality (*CORE*)” (148).

We should take into account that although some freedom rides existed before 1961, they were only active from May to December 1961, but their actions made a big difference in American society at the same time they helped changed the situation of the African American community.

In this vein, the Kennedy administration had to deal with one of the most famous—and atrociously violent—attacks that the Freedom Riders suffered during their first journey South, on May 4, 1961. The sheer violence exerted on the Freedom Riders also came as a big shock for the whole nation who supported the fighting for black rights. The original group was made of thirteen freedom riders who travelled from Washington D.C to New Orleans in two buses on May 4. These two buses were filled with white and black students who were travelling to the South of the country to keep on working in favor of the African rights, in general, and to teach and encourage the rural communities that their vote was needed, in particular. Although they had encountered some little obstacles throughout the journey, it was in the “Deep South [when] they began to encounter hostile white crowds” (Dittmer 91). Their safety was at stake when one of the buses arrived in Alabama and they were met with unexpected violence as a “mob stopped one of the buses, hurled an incendiary device inside, and beat up the fleeing riders as the bus burst into flames” (Dittmer 91). As Dittmer narrates, the other bus also encountered violence because when they arrived to Birmingham, they found “white men wielding baseball bats and chains worked out on the freedom riders for a full fifteen minutes before Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor’s ⁴⁴ police arrive” (91).

Later, the Freedom Riders were “reinforced by volunteers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; both groups were attacked in Montgomery and then arrested” (Purvis 148). Hence, we should highlight that,

⁴⁴ Bull Connor (1897-1973) was a Southern American Democrat and politician who served as the Commissioner of Public Safety of Birmingham (Alabama) for more than two decades. Connor, who did not support the Civil Rights Movement, enforced the laws to racial segregation and refused to give any rights to the black community. Connor was the mind behind the use of fire water-hoses and police attack dogs against pacifist civil rights activists. All of these images were shown on national television which shocked the whole nation.

though the Freedom Riders did not use any violence against the attackers, they were all taken to prison. These two attacks shocked the black community in the south as some of the riders were seriously wounded as a result of the brutal and unexpected violence.

Obviously, the above mentioned Freedom Rides of May 1961 made such an impact on the whole nation that President Kennedy sought to show a public reaction which made him face the reality of the country he was leading. As Dittmer argues, "Kennedy's objective in the freedom rides, to prevent violence, became the keystone of the Mississippi policy. They preferred to remain in the background and to avoid crises" (94). However, the presidential administration was worried about taking certain steps because that could create problems among the population who did not support the Civil Rights Movement. Actually, the truth is that, when there were really important issues the White House needed to help with, "they were more comfortable working behind the scenes with segregationists than with movement activists" (Dittmer 94). This tactic was something that the African American community was not blind to and did not approve of. Even Martin Luther King Jr. refers to them and disagrees since they "made Negroes feel like pawns in a white man's political game" (qtd. in Dittmer 94). In addition, the Southern Regional Council, Leslie W. Dunbar⁴⁵, was increasingly convinced that "there was a great reluctance to accept the fact that you had to be on somebody's side in the South" (qtd. in Dittmer 94) and the practices of Kennedy administration were pushing citizens to take parts.

⁴⁵ Leslie W. Dunbar (1921-2017) was a civil rights activist and very influential person who supported the black voter registration in the South. He also worked in the Poor People's Campaign alongside Martin Luther King Jr.

As a result of the social unrest caused, on May 24, Robert Kennedy “released a low-key statement that basically called for law and order” (Dittmer 94) and before any of the rides started vice president Kennedy phoned King “to express his disapproval for the jail-no-bail tactic⁴⁶. Filling the jails would not have the slightest effect (. . .) and attempts to embarrass the government would backfire” (Fairclough 63). Although Martin Luther King Jr. wished the president to empathize with the African community and become an ally for their cause, the situation was further complicated because the presidential administration did not want to take a stance.

Besides, Robert F. Kennedy⁴⁷ thought that activists were being too insistent. It would be a much better tactic to relax for a while until things cooled down but James Farmer answered that African Americans “had been cooling off for a hundred years and would be in a deep freeze if they cooled any further” (qtd. in Dittmer 95). Notwithstanding, the Freedom Rights had a direct result because “the Interstate Commerce Commission outlawed segregation effective November 1, 1961” (Fairclough 64) and this proved that King’s non-violent protests were a valid approach to change Africans laws in the country. On their part, it has to be highlighted that the “freedom rides which encountered ugly hostility from whites, was a major factor in creating a national consensus to

⁴⁶ The jail-no-bail tactic was a non-violent approach during the Civil Rights Movement that was adopted by African Americans which consisted on refusing to pay the bail to get out of jail and stay behind bars. By not paying the bails, they wanted to show the government that they did not approve their laws and how they were being treated.

⁴⁷ Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968) was one of John F. Kennedy brothers, an American politician and lawyer who served as the 64th United States Attorney General from 1961 to 1964. Robert Kennedy was also a U.S. Senator in New York, as well as an important member of the Democratic Party and a relevant figure of modern American liberalism. He was assassinated in June 1968.

pass the Civil Rights Act (1964), which outlawed segregation in public facilities” (Purvis 148).

The pivotal white organization that was a menace to the Freedom Rides, as well as to the whole African American community in the United States, was the Ku Klux Klan whose goal was to get rid of the African American community as they saw them as a threat to their country. The formation of the Klan dates back to the 19th century when “the Klan developed from a social club organized at Pulaski, Tennessee on May 1866” (Purvis 218). Its first representative was Nathan B. Forrest who gathered a group of people who “rapidly adapted its secrecy, costumes, and ritual to intimidate Republicans from voting and reassert white supremacy” (Purvis 218). The Ku Klux Klan became an organization of “what Forrest called –wild young men and bad men-. It spread over the South and by methods of terrorism, assassination, whipping, tarring and feathering, it sought to control the Negroes” (Gossett 260). Although not everyone in the South supported the Klan, they were “detested by responsible opinion” (Gossett 260) who were against the violent and intimidating practices that the Klan performed.

One of the most relevant characteristics of the Klan was the uniform they chose to wear. During the 1860s and 1870s they only wore masks, hoods and robes until they adapted their famous look later in 1915 when the members of the Klan enjoyed a more important revival. It should be highlighted that William J. Simmons was the man who revived the Klan in October 16, 1915. But, Purvis writes, “whereas the first Klan was primarily political, Simmon’s group was nonpartisan (. . .) [and] the first Klan had enlisted all whites, of whatever religion or birthplace, in defense of white supremacy” (218). Simmons’ ideas

were much more extreme and he “allowed in only native-born Protestants and preached a message that was not only racist, but also xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic” (218). This is the time when the Klan started wearing their popular look that consisted of their white long robes and pointed white hoods that made them look like ghostly figures. Simmons felt that this was the perfect time to bring the Ku Klux Klan back and his intentions were clear:

To insure not merely that the white man should remain in control of state and local governments in the South but that the whole country should be aroused to the dangers which threatened from Negroes and from – hyphenated-Americans – of every kind. (Gossett 340)

The Klan was the source of unspeakable fear and frustration for the African American community during Kennedy’s administration since Simmons’ extreme ideas and cruel actions had no limits. Other members were not sure about the path that their country was taking and decided to join the Klan due to their insecurities. Simmons’ racism and white supremacist ideology grew out of his obsession to “maintain Anglo-Saxon civilization on the American continent from submergence due to the encroachment and invasion of alien people of whatever clime or color” (Gossett 340). These discriminatory words delivered by Simmons did not leave anyone indifferent. They were the perfect definition of the horrors that the Klan were willing to perpetrate to achieve their goals.

The Klan’s number of members grew up considerably by 1920 and “by 1923 its membership was to be variously estimated at between three and six millions persons” (Gossett 371). Surprisingly, after 1920, it “became a national organization with more members in the North and West than the South” (Purvis

218). By 1925, “5,000,000 men (about every sixth adult male) were members, including a large minority of Midwestern and western legislators” (Purvis 218). Despite the fact that the Klan was experiencing their best times, its memberships “fell sharply in the late 1920s due to publicity about financial corruption and other scandals among Klan leaders” (Purvis 218). However, the Ku Klux Klan reappearance took place during the 1950s to fight against the first Civil Rights actions that black people were starting to organize. In this case, the majority of their members were found in the South of the country. During this time racism was increasing in the country and created numerous tensions and violence among citizens. It goes without saying that the re-birth of the Ku Klux Klan made racism increase but this time it was due “not merely of violence and open hatred but of subtle and insidious forms of discrimination” (Gossett 373) which created the Ku Klux Klan that still exists nowadays mainly because, as Kamouni denounces, “thanks to Donald Trump who is cited as a factor in the rise of right-wing groups in America after they backed him to become president”.

According to the CBS News, it is estimated that “there are between 5,000 and 8,000 Klan members nationwide, split between many factions.”⁴⁸ The contemporary Klan members defend that “American should be a nation that is free from drugs, homosexuality and immigration,” Kamouni writes. She adds that “historically, black Americans have been the KKK’s main target but more recently it has targeted Jews, immigrants, LGBT people and even Catholics.” Therefore, their supremacists view is not only against the African American community nowadays but any person who they feel might be a threat for their

⁴⁸ The full reference can be found in the Works Cited section as “Disturbing Photos of the Modern-Day Ku Klux Klan”.

idea of a perfect America. And Kamouni adds, “to this day the KKK attend rallies, and due to the United States Constitution’s First Amendment, which related to freedom of speech, their hate speech is legal.” Furthermore, they enjoyed complete freedom to spread their message of hate throughout the country. Not only that but news about the Klan are very frequently present in newspapers. It just so happens that, as Padilla writes, in August 2019:

A police officer in Michigan was terminated on Thursday after a prospective homebuyer who had been touring the officer’s house posted a picture on social media of a framed Ku Klux Klan application he had seen there, spurring an internal investigation.

This white officer named Anderson had been working with the police for twenty years and he “had been placed on administrative leave after he was found in possession of certain items associated with a white supremacist group”, Padilla explains. The man who found the Klan memorabilia is called Mathis and he is a black Army veteran who started to receive millions of messages the minute after he posted the photo. Not all of the messages were supportive because he also received threats for him and his whole family. However what worried him the most was the following:

It’s unfortunate that he’s in our community, because he might have put people in jail on false charges, especially minorities. Because he was a police officer, it was my moral obligation to say something about it. (qtd. in Padilla)

As a matter of fact the Ku Klux Klan does not scare the community any more when they march on parades or meetings because they are easily

recognizable by their characteristic clothes. The problem arises when the people cannot possibly identify them as members of the Klan. It is difficult to know if one's neighbors, friends or even family belong to that supremacist group. Much more disturbing is, though, when members of the Klan hold really powerful jobs created to protect and take care of citizens equally. That is when not only the communities the Klan consider alien and peripheral but the whole globe can be terrified.

As it has been explained, the year 1961 serves as a perfect example of how the black community kept fighting for their rights but also suffering in crescendo the consequences as most citizens were not prepared for the change they were eager to fight for. Although, Kennedy was a much more approachable person who was open to try liberal policies, it is also undeniable that "Kennedy felt no great discomfort with racial segregation" (Marable 73). De facto, as Marable argues, "Kennedy's subsequent actions were directly influenced more by cold geopolitical facts than by warm idealism" (73). In short, President Kennedy seems to have been more concerned about how the rest of the world perceived America than his fight for the civil rights themselves.

Following the path of the previous years, 1963 was a very relevant twelve-month period for the Civil Rights Movements and in particular for the southern city of Birmingham. At the beginning of the spring of 1963, the *SCLC* group was on the lead of this new non-violent campaign to stop segregation in the South for once and for all. Martin Luther King Jr., James Bevel, Fred Suttlesworth among others started to mobilize black students and organize demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. As the public America broadcaster PBS explains these marches would last for two months and they stand for "the

beginning of a series of lunch counter sit-ins, marches on City Hall and boycotts on downtown merchants to protest segregation laws in the city” (“The Birmingham Campaign⁴⁹”). These rallies were a major turning point in the history of the United States although it was only held in the metropolitan area of Birmingham. What was essential for these campaigns to work was to have a big multitude of people who might be willing to help. Even children—as the University of Stanford states: “in order to sustain the campaign, SCLC organizer James Bevel proposed using young children in demonstration” (“Birmingham Campaign⁵⁰”). As it is easy to understand, not everybody supported Bevel’s idea. However, as Bevel sustained, “young people represented and untapped source of freedom fighters without the prohibitive responsibilities of older activists” (qtd. in “Birmingham Campaign”), and for that reason, they could dedicate themselves to the cause.

Despite the fact that the marches were non-violent based, “the peaceful demonstrations would be met with violent attacks” (PBS, “The Birmingham Campaign”), and the white police officer’s attacks towards the black demonstrators were nothing but brutal and careless. For example, police officers were “using high-pressure fire hoses and police dogs on men – women and children alike” (PBS, “The Birmingham Campaign”), which shocked the whole American society. The pressure of the fire hoses was so brutal that they could take the covering of a tree from hundreds of feet away. Thus, the high-pressure water made people lost their balance, fall, roll down the streets and, as

⁴⁹ The PBS reference can be found in the works cited section as “The Birmingham Campaign”, should not be mistaken with the other article used in this dissertation titled “Birmingham Campaign” by the University of Stanford.

⁵⁰ This article by the University of Stanford can be found in the Works Cited Section as “Birmingham Campaign”, not to be mistaken with the previous PBS article on the same topic.

a consequence, hurt themselves seriously while they were also chased by trained dogs. All these scenes were shown on prime time in national and international television channels, and they also appeared on newspapers provoking outrageous responses about the way black people were being mistreated.

After all these recurrent violent episodes, the Birmingham Campaign obtained its reward on May 1963 when “local officials agreed to remove –white only- and –black only- signs from restrooms and drinking fountains” (PBS, “The “Birmingham Campaign”). They also came to an agreement to “create a biracial committee to monitor the agreement” (PBS, “The “Birmingham Campaign”). However, the desegregation process happened very slowly. There were still some racial and violent incidents because not all the citizens agreed with the new laws. As Momodu points out, in the same month that the committee was created, “a bomb damaged the Gaston Motel where King and SCLC members were staying. The next day the home of King’s brother (. . .) was bombed” but the worst incident happened some months later. On September 15:

KKK members bombed Birmingham’s Sixteen Street Baptist Church which had been the staging center for many of the spring demonstrations. Four young black girls – Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Carol Denise McNair – were killed. (Momodu).

This atrocious criminal attack against the new changes that the Civil Rights Movement were bringing left a profound wound in the African American

community who reconsidered the fact that the majority of North Americans were not ready yet for the changes that were coming.

Furthermore, another result of the Birmingham Campaign was that Martin Luther King Jr. was taken to prison in April of that year along with a large number of demonstrators. While he was imprisoned, King wrote one of the most important manuscripts in the fight for Civil Rights to the extent that became a classic of protest literature. King's letter was addressed to the clergymen who opposed the Birmingham marches and *SCLC* strategies and ideas to make the laws of the country equally fair to every citizen. In the letter, King writes about how asking for negotiation has never worked for the black community. Accordingly, this has been the main reason to send people marching and showing their discomfort in the streets:

You may well ask, "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direction action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. ("Letter from Birmingham Jail" 155)

King goes on and sustains that the *SCLC* decided to start nonviolent marches to obtain the government's attention. They also thought it necessary to put some pressure on the administration in order to be able to gather and discuss the points in question. Besides, King adds that sitting back and waiting for the administration to help them made no sense since "we know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; It

must be demanded by the oppressed” (“Letter from Birmingham Jail” 155). Thus, King adds that they had to take action and wake up the whole nation by creating all the civil rights actions because “this wait has almost always meant never” (“Letter from Birmingham Jail” 155). For King, it was time the African American community started taking action to change their lives actively. King complains that they have “waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights” (“Letter from Birmingham Jail” 155), just because the administrations had barely helped them throughout these years. On the contrary, black people still “creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter” (“Letter from Birmingham Jail” 155).

Nevertheless, what disappointed Martin Luther King Jr. the most was the fact that the worst enemy of the Civil Rights Movement was not the white population or the Ku Klux Klan but the apparently liberal politicians who would rather not take any action:

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negroes’ great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens (. . .) or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice. (“Letter from Birmingham Jail” 156)

King emphasizes the irony that it is at stake here for the black community because King declared that “shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will” (“Letter

from Birmingham Jail” 157). Just the idea that that those who could help the African American community chose to ignore them, it was devastating.

Notwithstanding, due to the big impact that the marches on Birmingham had on the country, great advance was made on June 11 of that year when President John F. Kennedy delivered a nationally televised speech to end segregation in public places. Kennedy’s 1963 television discourse is one of the most well-known and highly praised moments in his administration. The impact it made on the American society has at times been compared to President Lincoln’s⁵¹ Emancipation Proclamation. The very beginning of Kennedy’s speech reads as follows: “This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal; and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened” Kennedy’s words impeccably stated what this new statute was going to be based on (“President John F. Kennedy’s Nationally Televised Speech” 160).

King’s powerful speech echoes Lincoln’s ideas of equality at the same time that it urges for equal rights and President Kennedy reflects those same ideas. Throughout his speech, Kennedy refers to the rights of all American citizens: The right to be free and be able to eat wherever they like; attend any theatre that they please; or vote in elections for the candidate who represents them the most. Besides, Kennedy is not shy to mention Abraham Lincoln and the abolition of Slavery when he openly states that African American are not yet

⁵¹ Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) was an American politician and lawyer who served as the 16th president of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Lincoln abolished slavery and different forms of white supremacist violence in the country with the proclamation of the Thirteenth Amendment.

free: “one hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free” (“President John F. Kennedy’s Nationally Televised Speech” 161). Reading between lines we could feel Kennedy’s concert to change the situation of the black community as “second-hand citizens”.

The truth is, as Carmines and Stimson suggest, that “Kennedy initially tried to persuade the civil rights leaders to call off the March arguing that it might lead to violence and undermine public support for the bill, he reluctantly supported the action” (41). As a matter of fact, this speech did not leave anybody indifferent. Unfortunately, a few hours after it was televised, the leader of *NAACP* in Mississippi, Medgar Evers⁵², was assassinated outside his home in Jackson.

In the midst of all these events, something really significant for the African American community but also a sign of progress for the whole nation took place. On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, (commonly known as the March on Washington) which was organized by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, arrived in Washington D.C. The purpose of this march was to plead for economic and civil rights for the African American people in the country. One of the most iconic moments was when Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous speech “I Have a Dream” standing in front of the Abraham Lincoln Memorial where he asked for the end to racism and inequality. The number of people who were present that day in

⁵² Medgar Evers (1925-1963) was an American activist who was part of the Civil Rights Movement. Evers was one of the *NAACP* leaders until his assassination in 1963. He worked to overthrow segregation at universities and public facilities, as well as giving equal opportunities to the black community.

Washington D.C. to fight for jobs and freedom for the black community was around 250,000 people and it is estimated that 75% of the marchers belonged to the black community. Although this march is not represented in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, it is important to mention its existence as it was one of the pivotal moments that changed the situation of the black community in the USA—albeit temporarily.

All the same one of the saddest shocks that the whole nation went through in 1963 was the assassination of the 35th President of the United States of America. John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22 during a political campaign to stop the conflicts within the Democratic Party between liberals and conservatives in Dallas, Texas. Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline Kennedy⁵³, were sat in the back of a convertible when the president was shot. The president was taken to the nearest hospital but he passed away thirty minutes after the assault. Kennedy's death was something that profoundly impacted the nation, not only for political reasons but also for cultural ones. A whole generation of black people felt that they had lost an ally in the fight for the civil rights and that everything that they have achieved as a community could be soon lost after Kennedy's assassination. An hour after the event, the Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson swore in as the 36th President of the United States in the presence of the former first lady on board the Air Force One at Dallas.

⁵³ Jacqueline Kennedy (1929-1994) was the First Lady of the United States during the presidency of John F. Kennedy and an international icon of fashion and culture during all her life.

As a matter of fact, it seems irrefutable that the period between 1960 and 1963 marked the beginning of a new country for the American citizens who still were experiencing inequality. As Marable argues:

In three difficult years, the southern struggle had grown from a modest group of black students demonstrating peacefully at one lunch-counter to the largest mass movement for racial reform and civil rights in the twentieth century. (69)

During these three years, an evolution had begun throughout the country, connecting black people from different backgrounds together with white people to fight for an equal society in which people are seen the same under the eyes of the law. A society where nobody is mistreated for looking different or being from a different background, a fair society. Within 1960 and 1963, “20,000 men, women and children had been arrested” (Marable 69) and the numbers increase when talking about people who took part in those marches and demonstrations. Moreover, Marable points that in 1963 “1,000 desegregation protests occurred across the region, in more than 100 cities” (69) and their aim was to fight for African American’s rights. Some would say, as Marable suggests, that “King’s most effective criticism was his insistence that the Negro could no longer wait to be freed by benevolent whites” (71). This utterance is the most accurate way to describe this period within American history in which the African American community was sick and tired of waiting to have equal rights. These uprisings were the only way to stand out and force the administrations to pay attention to one of the most urgent problems in the nation.

5.5 1964 – Bridge to Freedom

*When the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say,
“There lived a race of people – a people who had the marvelous courage to
stand up for their rights, and thereby they injected
a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization.”
And we are going to do that.
God grant that we will do it, before it is too late.⁵⁴*

The following year 1964 was a significant one as it started with Lyndon B. Johnson (1908 – 1973). Johnson became the 36th president of the United States after Kennedy’s sudden assassination two months earlier. However, Johnson was not a stranger in the White House because he has been the Vice President during Kennedy’s administration and his experience in the Parliament and his familiarization with the politics of the South gave them the needed skills. Before Kennedy’s mandate, Johnson had been the Democrats leader in the Senate during President Eisenhower’s administration, and he had become an experienced negotiator. Coincidentally, that was something John F. Kennedy held in high regard. Moreover, Johnson was born in Stonewall (Texas) a fact that offered him a first-hand experienced of the ways the South has historically evolved while Kennedy was far from being an expert much as he would get involved with the African American community. It is generally agreed that counting with Johnson’s support not only helped President Kennedy to win the election but he also turned out to be a reliable good team member for Kennedy’s administration. After Kennedy’s killing, “a desire for reconciliation

⁵⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., 1957 (qtd. in Fairclough 20).

dominated the national mood” (Fairclough 94). Perhaps, as Fairclough asserts, this might be one of the reasons why Lyndon B. Johnson prioritized “this yearning for consensus, using his southern origins and vast congressional experience to pilot the Civil Rights Bill through Congress with wide bipartisan support” (94).

Undoubtedly, the crowning moment for Johnson was the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 whose main goal was to put an end to racial discrimination in public places as well as in any businesses financed by the government. It goes without saying that this giant step meant a great deal for the black community, in particular, and for the activists, in general – whether white or black. As Fairclough writes:

When President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, the civil rights movement could celebrate a major victory. Segregation in public facilities (parks, libraries, hospitals) and public accommodations (stores, restaurants, motels) became illegal. Employers could no longer lawfully discriminate on the grounds of race, color, sex, or ethnic origin. The government could initiate suits to desegregate southern school districts, as well as cut off federal funds to districts that proved recalcitrant. (93)

Therefore, the passing of this act was a very decisive action for the country. It is not exaggerated to say that the United States was about to have its most revolutionary social change since Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. Furthermore, and as Carmines and Stimson highlights, this Civil Rights Act also “demonstrated that the national government could play a major role in bringing

about equal rights” (43), instead of just meddling to ease the conflicts. Besides, the enactment of this law “revealed just how far the Democratic party had come on civil rights” (Carmines and Stimson 43), after turning a blind eye for so long. Finally, it seemed the Democratic Party “had done so not only with rhetoric and proposals but also with action” (Carmines and Stimson 44).

However, despite the historical relevance of the act, it also had its detractors. The passing of the new law caught the American population by surprise, and the majority of them would not agree to accept the new statute. As a consequence of the social unrest and as Fairclough argues, “the civil rights movement hardly had time to consolidate its advance before confronting a racist counterattack” (93). These offensives were not only violence based but “a political challenge to the leadership of the Democratic and Republican parties; a campaign of terror against the civil rights movement in the South; and an effort to discredit King personally” (Fairclough 93). In the same thread of thought Marable agrees and points out that “America’s political economy was still profoundly racist and Johnson’s legislation had erased only the crudest manifestations of racial suppression” (83). The establishment of this regulation was a well-meaning action on behalf of Johnson’s administration but we cannot say that the American society was really prepared for it. . Although this law did not do much to solve the country racial matters, Johnson’s Act represented the first step--albeit clumsy—to start working on a new equalitarian society. This, however, would take some years to come.

Four months after the signature of the Civil Rights Bill, on November 3, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson won the presidential elections against the Republican

candidate Barry Goldwater⁵⁵. Henceforth, Johnson started actively to change the face of American society. As promised in his presidential campaign, Johnson soon started to send different programs to the Congress that dealt with much needed social issues such as: scholarships for students, health care programs for elders (Medicare⁵⁶) and indigent people (Medicaid⁵⁷), as well as the proposal of a low cost housing program. All of these proposals were approved by the Congress and, in due course, the United States opened the door to social change and progress.

The following year, 1965, was for certain a weighty year in the history of the Civil Rights Movement in America as new transitions were made. It turned out to be particularly difficult for the African American community in spite of the help exerted by Johnson's administration. Notwithstanding, the most important figure in 1965 was Malcolm X (1925-1965) who was assassinated on February 21 of that year. Though much has been written about the authorship of the crime, Willey, among others, sustains that Malcolm X was killed, "allegedly by members of the Nation of Islam [NOI⁵⁸] after he broke with the group" (18) while

⁵⁵ Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) was senator in Arizona and a candidate for the 1964 American elections and although he was perceived as a warlike man, Goldwater's ideas were based on classic liberalism.

⁵⁶ Medicare is a national health insurance program that was established in 1966 in the United States. At the beginning it was directed by the Social Security Administration (SSA) but it is now controlled by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Medicare supplies Americans aged 65 or older with free health insurance. Actually the 10th anniversary of these services was in 2020 and the majority of the American population still thinks that it is one of the best measures passed by an American President.

⁵⁷ Medicaid is a free federal and national health insurance program that begun in the 1980s for poor people that also includes nursing home care and personal care services.

⁵⁸ The Nation of Islam or *NOI* (1930-) is an African American political and religious movement that was founded in Detroit by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad in 1930. Its objectives were to upgrade the mental, social and economic situation of African Americans throughout the United States. The *NOI* is seen as a hate association because of its anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT ideas and it also promoted the superiority of black people over white people.

he was delivering a speech at the Organization of Afro-American Unity⁵⁹ (OAAU). The popularity of Malcolm Little, his birth name, is due to his constant participation in the Civil Rights Movement where he fought in favor of human rights, as well as becoming an American Muslim minister. Malcolm's life was surrounded by controversy because his speeches were really straightforward, clear and concise and anti-system Malcolm X was always really harsh on white American people whom he accused of being responsible for the suffering of the African American people. During a time when Martin Luther King Jr. preached the non-violent movement, Malcolm X did the opposite. At every interview or speech Malcolm X would accuse the white population and systematically refer to historical periods where the black community had been used and abused. There were reasons enough for the opposition to abhor his incendiary speeches and his violent ideology. Therefore, the opponents accused Malcolm X of preaching racism and violence among both communities, yet there were (and still are) many different opinions about Malcolm X's approach to the Civil Rights Movement. Malcolm X's last speech was delivered on February 14 in Detroit, only a week before his assassination. This speech was part of his Malcolm X Speaking Tour.

When dealing with the events that happened in 1965, it is inexcusable to forget such relevant historical events as the Selma to Montgomery marches; the Bloody Sunday; and the Right to Vote Bill. Between March 7 and 25, a series of marches took place in Selma, Alabama. These successive marches were

⁵⁹ The Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) was a Pan-Africanist group founded by Malcolm X in 1964. Its goals were to fight for African Americans' human rights and promote the alliance between people of African descent in America and Africans.

inspired by Jimmie Lee Jackson⁶⁰'s murder, the restraint of African Americans from registering to vote, as well as the unsuccessful voter registration movement. The most important leaders of these marches were *SCLC*'s Martin Luther King Jr., Diane Nash⁶¹ and James Bevel⁶²; and *SNCC*'s Stokely Carmichael⁶³ and John Lewis⁶⁴, among others. On March 7, the Birmingham marches started to happen. Their main objective was "to protest the use of intimidation and illegal stratagems to keeps blacks from voting in Dallas County, Alabama" (Purvis 364). Previous to that, "Martin Luther King tried to lead 500 followers in a protest march from Selma, the county seat, to Montgomery" (Purvis 364) as a way to show the discontent that African American community felt because they were still being banned from voting. Therefore, as Fairclough recounts, "on Sunday, March 7, six hundred demonstrators left Selma heading toward the state capitol in Montgomery" (102). However that march was not just peaches and cream. While marching, the parades encountered violence on the outer limits while crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge where "state troopers, and mounted sheriff's deputies drove them back using clubs, whips, tear gas and

⁶⁰ Jimmie Lee Jackson (1938-1965) was an African American civil rights activist. Jackson was shot to death while participating in a peaceful voting rights march in Alabama.

⁶¹ Diane Nash (1938-) is an American civil rights activist, as well as the leader of the students during the Civil Rights Movement. Nash was part of the Freedom Riders, the Selma Voting Rights Movement, the sit-in movements and she is also the co-founder of the *SNCC*.

⁶² James Luther Bevel (1936-2008) was an African American minister and leader of the Civil Rights Movement. Bevel was the *SCLC* Director of Direct Action and he was the cornerstone of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights Movement. Bevel was accused by one of his daughters of father-daughter relationship and three other women accused him of sexual abuse. As a result of these accusations he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

⁶³ Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998) was an American socialist who became an activist while attending Howard University. Carmichael took part in the Civil Rights Movement and in the Pan-African Movement and he also led the *SNCC* and developed the Black Power movement.

⁶⁴ John Lewis (1940-2020) is an American politician and civil rights leader. He has been the United States representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district since 1987. Lewis is the leader of the *SNCC* and he was one of the key people who organized the March in Washington in 1963. Lewis' most important goal was to end racial segregation in America.

brute muscle” (Fairclough 102). It is obvious that these attacks were considered disproportionate by the public eye as it was a non-violent march. Strangely enough, King who had been the leader of this march “did not participate in the march and was widely criticized for his absence” (Fairclough 102).

However, George B. Leonard, a journalist, was present that day and was witness to the sheer brutality used against the marchers. A horrified Leonard wrote about the many abuses exerted by the white opponents and authorized by the authority. He openly states that on viewing the episodes of violence the nation was suddenly awoken by what was really happening in the country. Leonard wrote those attacks were “inhuman. No other word can describe the motions” (214). The journalist also refers to the marchers as “the heroes” (214). These attacks were shown on nationwide television the following day and “Americans across the nation, witnessing the scene on television, were outraged” (Fairclough 103). Due to its brutality and ferocious attacks, March 7th 1965 has been known since then as Bloody Sunday. The last march was held on March 21st 1965 and in this case, the marchers walked for ten miles from Selma to Montgomery but they were protected by the Alabama National Guard. The marchers and protesters reached the Alabama State Capitol on March 25th.

Consequently, President Johnson’s reaction to Bloody Sunday was to ask the congress to pass a bill to stop discrimination against black people to vote but his petition did not become a reality until March 15th. As a matter of fact, and according to Fairclough, “president Johnson was already considering voting rights legislation but the reaction to Selma’s Bloody Sunday made up his mind” (103). On the 15th, Garrow explains that Lyndon B. Johnson “addressed a joint session of Congress on national television to announce that his voting

rights legislation was ready and that his administration was committed” (“Bridge to Freedom” 207). In this speech that was delivered eight days after the incidents in Selma, Johnson addressed the violence in Alabama, the need for more rights for the black community as well as the necessity of working together to achieve an equal future for all the members of the nation:

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves, the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause too because it is not just Negroes but really it’s all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice and we shall overcome. (“Preview: President Johnson’s March 15” 00:00:00–00:00:53)

Finally, Garrow writes that on August 6 the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. Among others, this bill “allowed black southerners in many small towns and rural counties to enjoy meaningful participation and representation in the American electoral process for the first time in their lives” (“Bridge to Freedom” 208). Besides, this new law “suspended, for five years, literacy test and other discriminatory devices for registering voters in all states or election districts” (Purvis 426). The passing of this law was very important for the whole nation because “it paved the way for the emergence of a truly democratic South, one in which blacks could vote without let or hindrance; one in which blacks could hold political office and exercise power alongside whites” (Fairclough 103). People could neither forget nor ignore that this law was finally passed due to the “inhuman” events that occurred at the Edmund Pettus Bridge; it was also due to the African American community ongoing sacrifices. *De facto*, as Fairclough

sustains, it seems that by 1965 “the civil rights movement had finally evoked a solid national consensus in favor of racial equality” thanks to the passing of the Voting Rights bill (103).

5.6 1968 – Power

*Black Power is giving power to people who have not had power to determine their destiny.*⁶⁵

On his penultimate year as the president of the United States, Johnson and his administration had to deal with some serious controversial issues which would lead Johnson to announce on national media that he was not going to present himself as a candidate for the next presidential elections. The more complex and controversial national problem that Johnson had to confront in 1968 was the Vietnam War⁶⁶--a political conflict that made a great impact on American society. Johnson had to face all the critics that his administration was receiving from the media and society at large since they were accused of not handling the Vietnam conflict adequately. Anti-Vietnam War protesters grew larger in numbers and they came from the different social strata. They protested in college campuses, in the streets, and even in front of the White House. For the most part, American citizens did not approve Johnson's apparent paralysis. For the marchers and protesters, Johnson was doing nothing to stop the Vietnam War.

Even Martin Luther King Jr., the African American leader also referred to these issues and argued that the Civil Rights Movement was not only fighting

⁶⁵ Huey P. Newton, 1968. (qtd. in Catherine)

⁶⁶ The Vietnam War (1955-1975) was an armed warfare in which the United States, collaborating with South Vietnam and another allies, fought against a communist government in Vietnam. More than five thousand Americans died during the conflicts, and around seventeen hundred people were missing. The Vietnam War is included in the Cold War period in which there were geopolitical disputes between the Soviet Union and the United States.

for black people rights but also to help Americans face the need to make changes and improve their society. In this vein, Harding argues:

The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing the evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced. (236)

To stop all of this hearsay, Johnson made a stunning announcement in a speech delivered on national television on March 31, 1968, in which he addressed the bombing campaign that had destroyed the communist North Vietnam. However, that was not the most important statement of the night as the following words would leave the whole nation in a state of shock: “I shall not seek and I will not accept the nomination of my party for another term as your president” (“President Johnson’s Address to the Nation” 00:39:21-00:39:32). Through that famous speech, Johnson’s intention was to address the whole nation and share with its citizens that one of his most relevant goals had been to stop the horror that has been going on in Vietnam. However, Johnson’s personal announcement touched his audience more than anything else. It is interesting to note that when Johnson ended his presidential term in January 1969, negotiations for peace at Vietnam were already taking place, however, this would not come true until 1973 when the United States had no part on the war anymore.

Moreover, less than a week later, one of the most important figures of the Civil Rights Movement was shot dead by a sniper on April 4th in Memphis, Tennessee. As it has previously mentioned, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) has been a well-known American Christian Minister, leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and one of the commanders of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until his assassination. King's philosophy was based on non-violent activism as an inspiration from the Christian leader Mahatma Gandhi⁶⁷. King also took part in the last march in Selma, and showed his total opposition to the Vietnam War. Moreover, King won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for fighting against racial inequality by using his tactic of non-violence. He was also awarded with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Metal after his death. Furthermore, the celebration of the MLK Day takes place every January 15, King's birthday. Since its establishment in 1971 as an American federal holiday, it is considered a way of honoring King's involvement with the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, less than a week later, one of the most important figures of the Civil Rights Movement was shot dead by a sniper on April 4 in Memphis, Tennessee. As it has previously mentioned, Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) has been a well-known American Christian Minister, leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and one of the commanders of the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until his assassination. King's philosophy was based on non-violent activism as an inspiration from the Christian leader Mahatma

⁶⁷ Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was an Indian lawyer who was opposed to colonial nationalists and he used the non-violent tactic to lead Indian to its independence from the British Empire. Gandhi has been and still is an inspiration for civil rights leader across the world and across history.

Although King's relevance for the Civil Rights Movement is unquestionable, the American teacher Peniel E. Joseph⁶⁸ refers to "the equally important role of the thousands of local activists, organizers, and ordinary citizens who helped draw the nation closer to the dream of multicultural democracy and racial and economic justice" (IX). According to Joseph, these people were sometimes forgotten due to King's impressive presence and popular appeal. Besides, on several occasions, King himself had confessed that he did not want to be remembered as a hero but as a person who helped for the Civil Rights to make society fairer for the black people. According to Joseph, "yet King suggested many times during his lifetime that he would rather be remembered as a drum major for justice than as an important leader" (Joseph IX). Ultimately, what made King so celebrated in the movement was that his "advocacy for racial justice, economic equality, and world peace were rooted in a belief that these were, at their core, struggles for democracy" (IX), thus, he dedicated his entire life to these matters.

King was deadly shot on April 4, 1968 while he was staying at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis (Tennessee). He was paying a visit to the town to support some African American public workers who have been working in the city since March that year. King was murdered by James Earl Ray⁶⁹ while he was standing on the motel's balcony. He was pronounced dead one hour later at St. Joseph's Hospital. His assassination meant a turning point for the country

⁶⁸ Due to the importance of the work of the professor Peniel E. Joseph on Civil Rights matters, two of his works will be used throughout this dissertation. However, throughout the following chapters "Power" and "A Nation of Law" all his quotations are from his book *Dark Days, Bright Nights* whose full reference can be found in the Works Cited section.

⁶⁹ James Earl Ray (1928-1998) was sentenced to 99 years in jail because he confessed to have killed Martin Luther King Jr. If Ray would have been sentenced guilty by the jury trial, he would have been sentenced to death penalty.

which suffered a massive wave of riots and attacks as the black community, in particular, exploded after the murder of the Civil Rights' leader. Cities like Washington D.C., Chicago or Baltimore suffered the consequences. Besides whole neighborhoods were burnt to the ground out of the frustration the African American community felt: "many of America's cities had once-vibrant neighborhoods that were now in ruins, and thousands of people, black and white and most especially Asian, continued to die in Vietnam" (Garrow, "The Promised Land" 386). All of these riots are known as the Holy Week Uprising and it shows that "King's assassination was only one more indication to black nationalists that white capitalist America had no intention of resolving racial conflicts non-violently" (Marable 105). On their part, the African American community felt that all the advancements were lost. Black people felt hopeless as for them "King's assassination meant that any linkages between these vital reform movement would be much more difficult to achieve" (Marable 105). Thus, the feeling that the Civil Rights Movement should need to reinvent itself was present in the minds of the black community as a whole.

It was at this time when the Black Power became crucial for the African American community. It was perceived as a new movement to trust in and fight for the Civil Rights once again. This Black Power association was created in 1966 by Stokely Carmichael who thought that a new philosophy was needed. In Purvis' words, " "[Carmichael] meant that blacks should create their own base of political, economic, and social power independent of –and separate from – whites" (39). Ultimately, Joseph adds, "the [Black Power] movement therefore emerges as the destructive coda of a hopeful era, a fever-dream filled with violent images and excessive rhetoric that ultimately undermined Martin Luther

King Jr. prophetic vision of interracial democracy” (12). According to Joseph, what made the black power different was that it “offered a fresh approach to struggles for racial justice [and] it redefined national racial politics even as local activists used it as a template for regional struggles” (13).

Above and beyond, the Black Power representatives thought that “white involvement in the civil rights struggle constituted racial domination under another guise and had to be eliminated before true black liberation could be attained” (Purvis 39). Furthermore, they also believed that “only by separatism could blacks protect their own culture and fend off white attempts to manipulate them” (Purvis 39). Moreover, Joseph affirms that Carmichael also believed that black power and “the belief in self-determination, racial and cultural pride, and the global nature of domestic antiracist activism, held the key to the promotion of genuine democracy” (3).

Following this philosophy, the Black Panther Party (1966-1982) originally named Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was founded in Oakland, California in 1966 by Bobby Seale⁷⁰ and Huey Newton⁷¹. In general terms we could say that the party “combined Marxist socialism with black nationalism (. . .) We want land, bread, housing, clothing, justice, peace, and people’s community control of modern technology” (Willey 64).

⁷⁰ Bobby Seale (1936-) is an American politician and activist who cofounded the Black Panther Party with the inspiration of Malcolm X philosophy. Seale worked with Huey Newton to create the Ten Point Platform in the 1960s which main goals was to protect the African American community.

⁷¹ Huey Newton (1942-1989) was an American activist, who cofounded the Black Panther Party with Bobby Seale as well as the Ten Point Platform, who was assassinated in 1989 by a drug dealer.

In the beginning, its main goal was to protect the African American people with the use of weapons. Also, “wearing trademark black leather jackets and often bearing arms, groups of Black Panthers began to monitor police activity in inner-city areas, seeking to ensure that African Americans were not subjected to police brutality” (Willey 64). Obviously, the philosophy of the Black Panther Party was totally contrary to King’s non-violent movement. This is one of the reasons why the BPP was not considered acceptable for the majority of the Black community since most of them have been (and still were) firm believers in the non-violent ideology. Promises varied too. According to Joseph, “Carmichael defined Black Power as a movement that would allow blacks to take unfettered control of their personal lives and political destiny” (25) and allow them a more active role in the fight for their civil rights. This declaration ended up being negative for the black power movement because the American media “seized upon Carmichael’s declaration as the signpost of a new militancy” that wished to confront the white American society (Joseph 26). In addition to this, “the *Time* magazine judged the slogan –black power- to be a racist philosophy that preached segregation in reverse” (Joseph 26). Willey agrees with Joseph when he states that Black Power “espoused racial nationalism rather than integration [and] this race first advocated became known as black nationalists” (62).

Contrary to the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Panther’s philosophy was based on a revolutionary scheme whose main goal was to improve back lives. To make it clear for its members, Seale and Newton created a kind of Decalogue called “Ten Point Program”. These were the Black Panther’s ten demands from the American government. Brief, clear and to the point:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our black community.
4. We want decent housing, fit shelter for human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. (Marable 109)

In spite of the Black Panther's clear program demanding equal rights for the black citizenship, a large number of white Americans still had the idea that the panther party was only all about violence and patrols. This is why, according to Joseph, for a large amount of black American citizens, the "black power remains the most misunderstood social movement of the postwar era. It was

demonized as the civil rights movement's evil twin and stereotyped as a politics of rage" (4). However, it is also true that the Black Power movement shaped the future of the African American community, and helped them perceive the future of the black community in the United States from a different perspective—albeit fearful.

In which ways does it differ from the Civil Rights Movement? In Joseph's words, "Black Power's cultural and political flourishes, militant posture, and provocative rhetoric permanently altered the contours of American identity, citizenship and democracy" (4). What is true, though, is that the popularity of the Black Panther party increased so much that they managed to gather "at least 5,000 members by the end of 1968" (Marable 110). Furthermore, and despite the initial rejection, by the end of the decade they had been one of the most influential political groups in the history of the country.

5.7 1969 – A Nation of Law

*Why don't you live for the people.
Why don't you struggle for the people.
Why don't you die for the people.*⁷²

The year 1969 started with a presidential change at the White House as Richard Nixon became the 37th president of the United States. He remained in office until his controversial resignation in August of 1974. During his six years of mandate, Nixon took part in many different initiatives such as ending the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War in 1973 and the famous Watergate scandal⁷³ that ultimately led him to leave the presidency.

At first Nixon was not in favor of the Black Panther movement because he viewed it “as a major threat to the internal security of the US” (Weems and Randolph 66). In his numerous speeches as president of the United States, Nixon addressed the issue of social injustice when he talked about the fact that the African Americans were still living in inequality. On April 25, 1968, President Nixon declared that what most of the black community “are asking is not separation, but to be included in, not as supplicants but as owners, as entrepreneurs, to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action” (qtd. in Maass). Nixon firmly believed that the black community wanted to be given the opportunity to prove themselves and be able to contribute to the economy of the country by owning and running their own business. Nixon highlighted the fact

⁷² Fred Hampton, 1971. (qtd. in Hampton, “Fred Speaks” 509).

⁷³ The Watergate scandal happened because of the burglary of some important documents from the Watergate building in Washing D.C, which was the HQ of the Democratic Party, and the Nixon administration tried to cover up for. All this led to an investigation that uncovered illegal activities that people from Nixon's government had taken part into.

that by giving black people more opportunities, they would feel whole: “more Black ownership, for from this can flow the rest, Black pride, Black jobs, Black opportunity and, yes, Black power” (qtd. in Maass). As Nixon saw it at that time, this proposal was productive for both sides because the African American would have control over both their interest and their needs and the Black Power movement would not be a threat to the White American society.

To make a long story short, Nixon attempted to focus the attention of the African American community on certain issues that he could easily control. To this end, Nixon signed the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) law on March 5, 1969. This law was promulgated to help the African American community open their own business and improve their lives by offering them economic help. However, as Weems explains, the plan was not so perfect after all:

While *OMBE* provided only limited assistance to black business people and none of the various independent proposals for black economic development materialized, the discourse regarding black capitalism during this period helped Nixon accomplish his large ideological objective of containing potential domestic black radicalism. (127)

Consequently, and as Weems argues, the African American citizens had to choose between black capitalism or integration into the White American society. Neither of the choices were absolutely flawless, thus the Black community indecision: “most blacks apparently gravitated toward either the various derivatives of black capitalism or economic integration into American society” (127). By creating the *OMBE*, Nixon gained a large number of black supporters who helped Nixon win the 1973 elections in which he was re-elected

president. For that reason “his black capitalism initiative remained alive and well” for many years after Nixon’s presidency and then his successor. Both “continued helping black entrepreneurs in order to attract African American voter support in the presidential election of 1976” (Weems 157).

Even though Nixon was an unprecedented example as far as financially helping black people was concerned, by allowing them to own their business, it is also true that Nixon was completely intimidated by the Black Power movement and the Black Panthers, Thus, this was Nixon’s administration’s strategy to use the black power movement in his favor, and have the movement on their side. In contrast with the above, Marable highlights that “Nixon’s attorney general, John Mitchell, co-operated with Hoover and the FBI to exterminate the Black Panthers and other militant black organizations” (112). This action did not take the citizenship by surprise because Nixon had previously declared to the “*NAACP* and other Negro moderate groups that he had no intention of pursuing desegregation goals” (112).

There is one dark spot in Nixon’s apparently brilliant presidency that soon came out to the public opinion. By the end of 1968, John Edgar Hoover⁷⁴ was the leader of the FBI policemen. They were after the members of the Black Panther Party as Hoover “called upon local agents to exploit all avenues of creating dissension within the ranks of the BPP” (Gill 501). Hoover described the operation as, Gill explains, using an “imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP” (501). Hoover’s strategies did put an end to the Black Panther activities. Actually, Hoover’s main

⁷⁴ John Edgar Hoover (1895-1972) was the first director of the FBI in the United States. Hoover was extremely good at fighting crime and being an anti-espionage force.

target was Chicago Black Panther's leader Fred Hampton⁷⁵. Following Hoover's instructions, Gill adds "agents in Chicago tried to destroy the Panthers free breakfast programs⁷⁶ (. . .) [and they also] raided the Panther's headquarters on several occasions" (502). Finally, following Gill, it was not until December 1969 that the Chicago policemen "raid on the apartment, killing Hampton and Mark Clark⁷⁷ (. . .) and wounding four other party members" (502). Although, at first, the police declared that it has been a justified action in self-defense, Gill assures that "a financial settlement of \$1.85 million was awarded to the survivors of the attack and to the families of Hampton and Clark" as it was finally considered an unjustified attack (502).

By the year 1969, Willey sustains that the Black Panther Party "had gradually shifted their focus from political confrontation to community organizing, which included free lunch programs for children, educational initiatives, and voter-registration drives" (64). Their programs became an enormous inspiration for countries all over the world. In the same thread of thought, Joseph highlights that the Black Power movement was so important and it had reached so high that its "iconic personalities and organizations (some of whom were key civil rights activists) shaped debates about race, war, and democracy that still rage today" (Joseph 17). In the light of these circumstances, some political parties and social groups started to take into consideration the

⁷⁵ Fred Hampton (1948-1969) was an American socialist and activist who worked as the leader of Black Panther party in Illinois, Chicago. Hampton founded the organization Rainbow Coalition which was an alliance of the Black Panthers, Young Patriots and other Chicago organizations to work for social change.

⁷⁶ The Free Breakfast for School Children Program was a free service created and run by the Black Panther party as a way to protest against the social situation of the African American children. It was created by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton along with the Oakland Community School and they would give free meals to kids from poor neighborhoods.

⁷⁷ Mark Clark (1947-1969) was an American activist and member of the Black Panther Party.

relevance of the Black Power Party ideas—thus, putting and end to some of the propaganda used to demonize them.

5.8 1974 – The Keys to the Kingdom

*We must accommodate changing times
but cling to principles that never change.*⁷⁸

It could be argued that the Watergate Scandal (1971-1974) was an issue that occupied the spotlight on a daily basis and made Nixon live in a constant state of fatigue. Nixon's health debilitated to such an extent that he had to be rushed to the hospital on July 1973, when he was hospitalized with pneumonia. This was a shocking piece of news since Nixon was known as one of the healthiest presidents that the nation had had. As a consequence, the country worried because Nixon was now looking "puffy and weary, in contrast to his usual healthy and carefully tended appearance" (Charlton). On top of everything, the country became outraged the moment it came to be known that Nixon had been covering for the culprits of the Watergate Scandal. At a national televised speech, on August 9, 1974, all this conundrum led to announced that he was going to resign as President of the United States and that his administration's Vice-President Gerald Ford would become the new President the following day. As can be expected, the whole nation was in state of shock because of the news as this was the first time in American history that a president had resigned from his position.

Moreover, in his speech Nixon conveyed that by taking this difficult decision he was hoping to be an example for the American nation to forget about the past and be hopeful for a better future that was about to come: "By

⁷⁸ Jimmy Carter, 2018 (Carter, "Civil Rights Summit: Jimmy Carter" 00:04:47-00:04:54).

taking this action, I hope that I will have hastened the start of that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America” (“Richard Nixon’s Resignation Speech” 00:04:46-00:04:58). Furthermore, Nixon also mentioned how important the Civil Rights Movement had been for the country and encouraged the American community to feel proud of how much their society had developed.

These years have been a momentous time in the history of our Nation and the world. They have been time of achievement in which we can all be proud, achievements that represent the shared efforts of the Administration, the Congress and the people. (“Richard Nixon’s Resignation Speech” 00:06:40-00:06:54)

Nonetheless, the nation was utterly displeased. Kilpatrick wrote that “more than 10.000 phone calls were received (. . .) expressing disbelief and the hope that the president would not resign”. Nixon’s retirement undermined the nation’s moral since they lost their trust in the Republican Party as well as their faith in Richard Nixon as president. As a consequence, Gerald Ford accepted the position on August 9, 1974 and became the 38th president of the United States. During his presidency until 1977, Ford’s most important objective was for American society to regain their trust in the government and the Republican Party again, albeit this was not an easy task to complete. On September 8, President Ford made public the Proclamation 4311 which was directed to Richard Nixon with the objective of offering him the pardon for any crimes that he would have committed against the United States.

Overall, there are three enunciations that are quite representative about President Ford's intentions by forgiving the former president of the country. Firstly, he refers to the singularity of Nixon's action in the history of the USA. Ford even seems to hesitate on how to deal with this matter when he states: "There are no historic or legal precedents to which I can turn in this matter, none that precisely fit the circumstances of a private citizen who has resigned the Presidency of the United States" ("Ford Pardons Nixon in 1974" 00:02:50-00:03:07). Secondly, Ford believed that Nixon would never be fairly tried because his condition as former president of the United States, thus, he believed that his administration needed to step in and do something.

The facts, as I see them, are that a former President of the United States, instead of enjoying equal treatment with any other citizen accused of violating the law, would be cruelly and excessively penalized either in preserving the presumption of his innocence or in obtaining a speedy determination of his guilt in order to repay a legal debt to society. ("Ford Pardons Nixon in 1974" 00:04:25-00:04:55)

Thirdly, Ford talks about how extremely difficult it was for his administration to forget about the Watergate Scandal, and focus on American citizens' real problems when the polemics about the scandal were everywhere. Precisely for that reason, Ford believes that closing that chapter of the American history is needed both for the presidential administration and the future of the society:

My conscience tells me clearly and certainly that I cannot prolong the bad dreams that continue to reopen a chapter that is closed. My

conscience tells me that only I, as President, have the constitutional power to firmly shut and seal this book. (“Ford Pardons Nixon in 1974” 00:06:48-00:07:14)

American society was divided about Ford’s proclamation. Some considered it acceptable while others were still wondering why the president had decided to make such a controversial move. Perhaps, Ford took this decision in view of the Watergate Scandal and Nixon’s resignation’s continuous debates on the daily news. He needed to be dissociated from the scandal as it was a continuous concern for the whole administration. As Holson states, “most historians agree that Mr. Ford did the right thing for the country, which was reeling from (. . .) the political turmoil left over from Watergate,” and find a way to set aside Nixon’s controversy, thus finding the time for the real problems that Americans still needed to overcome.

As a matter of fact later in 1989, Gerald Ford had the opportunity to talk about Nixon’s pardon when someone asked him why he had made that decision. Without hesitating Ford answered: “I was spending 25% of my time with the problems of one man at a time when I should have been spending a 100% of my time on the problems of 240 million Americans” (“Gerald Ford on Pardoning Nixon” 00:02:12-00:02:28). Which is undeniable is that Ford’s pardon was an unprecedented historic event that is still relevant at present. In fact, in 2019, the 50th anniversary of this historical pardon was celebrated, but the controversy had not come to an end yet. Nowadays both scholars and citizens would like to know the reasons behind Ford’s reaction.

The next man who sat at the oval office was Jimmy Carter (1924-). He was the 39th president of the United States and his presidency lasted from 1977 to 1981. Carter's mandate gave priority to the administration to work on foreign policy, as well as establishing the Department of Energy and the Department of Education during his term.

Besides, the period of time that covers from 1974 to 1985 is very illustrative of the changing of times and how American society was starting to progress. At that time, the situation of poverty in the nation still worried the whole country, the increasing relevance of McDonalds as a new national symbol took American society by surprise, the new marches in favor of the Women Rights and Gay Rights were the order of the day, as well as the 1970s crisis of oil.

5.9 1986 – Back to the Movement

*True justice should never depend on whether you are rich or poor,
black or white or if you are Hispanic or Asian
or if your ancestors came from Italy, Poland, Latvia
or any other country.*⁷⁹

The administration of the 40th president of the United States was not controversy free. Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) had been an actor before sitting at the oval chair and he had also been part of the Democratic Party first, to later go for the Republican Party. Reagan's presidency lasted for two mandates (1981 to 1989), and during his mandate he passed new and innovative laws regarding political and economic issues. Moreover, Reagan created the supply-side economics, the Reaganomics, and he also reduced the taxes in the country. Reagan's persona is still very relevant nowadays and there have been many different cultural depictions of him since he was elected president. In particular in popular culture such as movies, television and even in superhero comics. It is also essential to mention the relevant role played by his spouse, Nancy Reagan (1921-2016), during Reagan's administration as she took part in many of the decisions of her husband's administration; she raised awareness

⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, 1985. (qtd. in Reagan "President Reagan's Radio Address to the Nation on Civil Rights - June 15, 1985" 00:01:34 -00:01:45)

about drugs consume; and she also worked hand in hand with the Reagan Presidential Library and Museum⁸⁰ until she passed away.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the most important issue that Reagan's administration had to face was the Apartheid system prevalent in South Africa and South West Africa. The South Africa Apartheid believed on white supremacy even though the white community was just a minority. However, people from other ethnic groups such as blacks were relegated to a secondary position in society. The Apartheid existed from 1948 to the 1990s, and its most well-known figure is Nelson Mandela (1918-2013). Mandela was a lawyer, an activist and social leader who fought for South Africa's freedom and eventually became its president from 1994 to 1999. Mandela is known as "Madiba", *the father of the nation*, and his main goals in life were to stop racism and create reconciliation between races while deposing Apartheid. Mandela gained the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. He also created a foundation to fight against poverty and AIDS—The *Nelson Mandela Foundation*—after the loss of one of his sons to AIDS.

As Gingrich⁸¹ asserts, one of Reagan's most pressing concerns regarding South Africa was "to prevent the country from falling to communism, a priority in line with his chief foreign policy goal worldwide". The Apartheid situation was quite complex for the Reagan administration to solve because, as Gingrich writes, they were forced to deal with a problem that had been present in the South African country for a long time now: "Reagan was also part of a

⁸⁰ The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum is a repository in charge of archiving and taking care of millions of documents, photographs and films about the 40th President's life.

⁸¹ Newt Gingrich (1943-) is an American politician and member of the Republican Party who was the 50th speaker of the United States House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999.

new generation of conservatives who were committed to confronting apartheid after decades of what was frankly a disappointing lack of courage on the American right.”. Because of the terribly unjust and violent situation that black people were experiencing, Gingrich writes that the Republicans thought that the best way to deal with it was by “passing economic sanctions against South Africa.” However, Reagan did not quite agree and he decided to veto that bill. Nonetheless, the Congress was able to override his veto. Since that day, it was commonly thought that Reagan was pro-Apartheid. According to Gingrich, Reagan’s reason behind his decision might be that he “believed [that] punishing South Africans economically would only have hurt the very black people we’re trying to help.” The President believed that passing that bill would do little to give the South African people the freedom that they deserved.

In a different thread of thought, Fatton denounced that there were also some interest from the Reagan administration in maintaining a good relationship with South Africa because there were “great mineral resources on which the West is so dependent” (65). Thus, Fatton points at the reason why “Reagan policy makers oppose revolutionary changes in the region” (65). He also comes to the conclusion that what can be seen as “professed neutralism in the face of great injustice is neither strategically correct nor morally acceptable” (78). Reagan’s administration, therefore, worried about their own interests before helping a whole community. In the very end, Fatton writes, “it entails more than mere capitalism expansionism and material interest.” In the end, according to Fatton, (79) the Reagan’s administration found itself trapped in having to choose between their own interests and starting a revolution (79). Fatton concludes that Reagan’s administration “desire to maintain the status quo and

stability, and to advocate evolutionary change whenever the threat of revolutionary pressures emerges, is a desire that also consumes the corporate world” (79). It might not be morally acceptable, as it has been mentioned before, but it was just a way of protecting USA own interests.

6. Lee Daniels' *The Butler*

6.1 The Real Story Behind the Movie

Apart from success of the movie, the most important aspect about Lee Daniels' *The Butler* is that it is not a fictional story but a feature film based on Eugene Allen's life. Allen was an African-American man who worked as a butler in the White House for more than three decades—from 1952 until 1986. Lee Daniels' job has been to create the protagonist of the movie who is renamed as Cecil Gaines.

Eugene Allen's real story was discovered by the African-American journalist Wil Haygood who interviewed Allen and his wife back in November of 2008. Haygood felt that it was the perfect time to share Allen's story life as it was the same year that the first African American had been proposed to be the next president of the United States. The journalist thought that it was absolutely necessary to tell Allen's story about segregation, racism, hard work and the Civil Rights Movement from the point of view of someone who had worked at the White House.

Although, at first, the Allen's family rejected Haygood's invitation to be interviewed to avoid public exposure, they finally accepted. Thus, Haygood had long conversations with the Allen's at their house in Washington D.C., and gathered part of that information for an article that published in *The Washington Post* on November 7, 2008—"A Butler Well Served by this Election"—just three days before Barack Obama's victory in the presidential elections of that same year. Haygood's is an in-depth interview where Allen—a sophisticated storyteller—narrates his three--decade experience working as a butler at the White

House. Eugene Allen's story made such an impact on the readers that Haygood wrote a book about Eugene Allen's life – *The Butler: A Witness to History* (2013).

During his thirty-four years working at the White House, Wil Haygood⁸² writes in his article, Allen “saw eight presidential administrations come and go, often working six days a week” (“A Butler WSBTE”). Thus, Allen had the opportunity to work for President Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan. In fact, Allen proudly says in the interview that he never missed a day of work (qtd. in Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”). What should be highlighted is the fact that by working at the White House, Allen was witness to one of the most important periods in the American history, the Civil Rights Movement. That is, as he narrates it, Allen was present when the different presidents were dealing with crucial historical events such as the Little Rock Crisis, the attack to the Freedom Riders bus, the Bloody Sunday or the rise of the Black Panthers. It is undeniable that The Civil Rights Movement was one of the most remarkable periods in the history of the United States. By working as a butler, Eugene Allen had the chance to experience all these national turmoil from a different perspective to that of the majority of the black community. Allen started working at the White House in 1952 for President Truman, and he always hoped for things to get better, as he felt that working in the White House was something really big for someone who had been born in

⁸² There are two different works by the journalist Wil Haygood used throughout this dissertation. One is the newspaper article “A Butler Well Served by This Election” (2008), which will be referenced in the text as “A Butler WSBTE” and the other one is the book *The Butler. A Witness to History* (2013), which will be referenced along the dissertation as *Witness to History*. Both full references can be found in the Works Cited section.

1919 and worked as a house boy in Scottsville, Virginia (Haygood, "A Butler WSBTE").

Before working at the White House, "Gene Allen worked as a waiter at the Homestead resort in Hot Springs, Vancouver, and then at a country club in Washington" (Haygood, "A Butler WSBTE"). It was in 1952 when someone told Allen about a job opening at the White House and although he was not looking for any job, he decided to go and try his luck. As a matter of fact, "Allen was offered a job as a pantry man. He washed dishes, stocked cabinets and shined silverware. He started at \$2.400 a year" (Haygood, "A Butler WSBTE"). Furthermore, "among the first tasks that Eugene Allen was given inside the White House kitchen (. . .) was washing the cups and saucers from which President Truman and Bess Truman drank their daily tea" (Haygood, *Witness to History* 32). To set the record straight, Cornwell adds that Allen's wages should be "compared with the national average wage that year of \$3.400" to really understand that the Allen's were not a wealthy family just because the patriarch was working at the White House. What Allen remark very proudly in Haygood's interview is that he shook the hand of all the presidents he ever worked for ("A Butler WSBTE").

Effectively, he even was invited to Kennedy's funeral but he decided not to attend it because, in his own words, "somebody had to be at the White House to serve people after they came from the funeral" (Haygood, "A Butler WSBTE"). Besides, Allen and his wife were also invited by First Lady Nancy Reagan to a state dinner. To this day, Allen believes that he was the only butler invited to such an important event (Haygood, "A Butler WSBTE"). Five years after the publication of the interview, Haygood confirms that "[Eugene Allen]

was one of the first butlers in the history of the White House to be invited to state dinner as a guest, a guest just like the ambassadors and business magnates who received invitations to such affairs.” (Haygood, *Witness to History* 15). Finally, Eugene Allen left his work at the White House in 1986 but he was not empty-handed. According to Cornwell, “by the time [Allen] left, he had attained the exalted level of Maitre-d, the highest rank of White House butler” which was offered to him in 1980.

Moving back to the day of the interview, which took place one week before Obama’s presidential election, Eugene and Helene Allen’s biggest concern was Barack Obama’s result in the upcoming general elections. It was very difficult for them to believe, as well as most black people felt, that “they had once been denied the right to vote” (Haygood, *Witness to History* 20). More than anything, Allen could hardly believe that an African American man would have the chance to become the president of their country.

But, as Haygood mentions, after a long and tragic journey, “all of their hopes and memories of being Negro, then black, then that epithet hurled from certain corners, now African American were rolling toward one candidate, Barack Obama” (*Witness to History* 20). To have a black man as the President of the United States would be really something important for Eugene and Helene, Haygood insists. The Allen’s had already planned that “they’d go vote together. She’d lean on her cane with one hand, and on him with the other, while walking down to the precinct. And she’d get supper going afterward” (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”). Sadly, this plan failed because Helene Allen passed away on November 3, 2008, just the day before the presidential elections. Thus, Helene did not have the opportunity to cast her vote. It was a

sad but an unforgettable day for Eugene because “he so missed telling his Helene about the black man bound for the Oval Office” (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”). However, nothing stopped him to make his and his wife’s dream, and he walked to the polling place and cast his vote for Barack Obama. As Gleeson and O’Neill write, Eugene “cried with happiness as they watched the history-making ceremony on January 20, 2009 accompanied by his son Charles and the journalist Wil Haygood” (28).

Some weeks after the publication of Haygood’s article, “president-elect Obama would be sending a VIP invitation for Eugene Allen to attend the inauguration” (Haygood, *Witness to History* 27,) but that was not the end of it. Hollywood movie producers had started calling Allen because of his amazing life story, and in November 2008 “Columbia Pictures bought the film rights to Allen’s story”, Cornwell writes. Unfortunately, Eugene Allen never got the chance to watch the movie because he passed away one year later, in 2010. It remains clear, though, that “the butler” Eugene Allen would have been very proud to see how Lee Daniels had shared his, and the black community life--lessons throughout the Civil Rights movement period.

6.1.1. Being a Butler in the White House

Although, Eugene Allen was an African American who worked for a lifetime at the official residence of the US president, the presence of blacks at the White House had not been a bed of roses. Haygood writes that “throughout history blacks have looked to the White House for help and leadership in the march toward equality” with the hope that the government would present laws to improve black’s lives, but to no avail (*Witness to History* 29). Going back in time, one of the most important events for the history of the black community in the United States happened in 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln made the Congress adopt the Thirteenth Amendment which purpose was to abolish slavery. By fighting for black people’s freedom, Lincoln’s paid with his life. He was assassinated in 1865 by John Wilkes Booth.⁸³

Only one year later, in 1866, African-American Frederick Douglass, former slave and one of the most well-known abolitionists in the country went to the White House to ask for black voting rights but the current President refused to meet him. Nevertheless, Douglass came back the following year to the White House but “on this occasion there wasn’t even the pretense of politics: President Rutherford B. Hayes had engaged Douglass to serve as master of ceremonies for a festive evening of entertainment” (Haygood, *Witness to History* 29). Almost a century later, “the first black to hold a policy or political

⁸³ John Wilkes Booth (1838-1865) was an American actor. He murdered President Abraham Lincoln in 1865 because he believed in the Confederate States of America. He did not support Lincoln’s Thirteen Amendment to abolish slavery.

position in the White House was E. Frederic Morrow⁸⁴ (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”) during Eisenhower’s presidency. That happened in 1952, when the administration “promised him a White House executive job (. . .) but Morrow ended up being placed at the Department of Commerce” (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”). Yet, in 1955, Morrow was named Administrative Officer for Special Projects and he had the opportunity to deal with “issues related to Brown desegregation ruling, Rosa Parks-led bus boycott in Montgomery, and the 1957 Little Rock school crisis” (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”).

In fact, “there just weren’t as many blacks as there should have been”, complained Ted Sorensen who worked for President Kennedy (Haygood, “A Butler WSBTE”). In reality, Kennedy, who was one of the presidents who helped the most with ending segregation, gave a reception for the black community back in 1963 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation to which a well- known interracial couple attended. According to Haygood, “Kennedy was aghast when he saw the black and white couple (. . .) and no pictures of the interracial couple would be taken (“A Butler WSBTE”). Moreover, Cornwell points out that “not until Colin Powell became Reagan’s national security adviser in 1987 did an African-American enter the inner circle of presidential advisers”.

That is why being a black butler during the Civil Rights period was far from effortless. They had to deliver an excellent service while trying to pretend they were deaf when hearing all kinds of aggravating conversations about black people. Daphne Muse knows about it because her father and uncle, Fletcher

⁸⁴ Everett Frederic Morrow (1909-1994) was the Administrative Officer for Special Projects from 1955 to 1961 during President Eisenhower’s administration; he was the first African American to work in an executive post at the White House.

Muse Sr. and George Allen Muse respectively, also worked at the White House as butlers alongside Eugene Allen. Muse adds that her dad and uncle were “two of the invisible men who heard and saw the architects of the 20th century power at work”. Besides, Muse argues that even though the butlers spent a lot of time near the presidents that did not mean that they had a chance to get to know them well because they needed to be completely focused on their job. As she puts it, “these men were consummate professionals, at times knowing more about protocol than those they served”. Indeed, the most difficult part of being a butler was to follow the protocol of discretion that came with working at the White House. Muse maintains that pretending they were “mute and deaf” was very hard for them as “they overheard decisions stealing the fates of their families, their friends, and the future of the country, including the planning of coups, sabotaging of civil rights legislation and the abortion of people’s personal dreams”.

Notwithstanding, as it is depicted in *The Butler* with Cecil Gaines and his workmates, Muse writes that “the brotherly bond among the men is evident from the kitchen to the card table where they find rare respite from the demands of the day”. To later add that it was very important for them too as they created their own black community within the walls of the White House. Not surprisingly, though, Muse denounces that butlers often had to deal with sexual politics as “these men also were on guard against the advances of white women, whose eyes and hands wandered across borders and boundaries not theirs to claim”.

In addition, due to the huge demand that butlers went through from 1940s to 1960s, “they formed the Private Butler Membership Club [also called the Private Butler Association]”, where Eugene Allen, Fletcher Muse Sr., and

George Allen Muse were among the members (Haygood, *Witness to History* 33). It is interesting that, as Haygood affirms, “many of them had been trained by Eugene Allen himself” and professionalism was their hallmark (*Witness to History* 33). That association, Muse explains, “set the pay scale for the contract butlers [and] in 1967 they were paid \$10.00 an hour for the first three hours and \$20.00 an hour thereafter” so that the administration could not gain leverage from them. It is also true, as the movie shows and Muse denounces, that the “white staff were paid more than blacks, and there were no tips” which perpetuated the inequality between the white and the black staff regardless of the fact that protesters were taking the streets to fight for equal rights for the African American people. Besides, in Haygood’s words, black butlers “were known for their punctiliousness and their professionalism, which made them prize recruits for these social affairs” (*Witness to History* 33) which was an indication of how indispensable they were for the white society. In contrast with Allen’s case, former African American butlers might have neither occupied first line positions nor have had written stories for people to be known, but everything they did within the walls of the White House helped to shape and prove white Americans that they deserved equal rights as much as anyone.

6.1.2 Eugene Allen *versus* Cecil Gaines

Just because *The Butler* is based on Eugene Allen's real life not all the events that happen in the movie are one hundred per cent true to what occurred in Allen's life. There is a mixture of reality and fiction as this is not a biopic of Allen's life but a fictional film that introduces new elements in the plot of the movie to create a dramatic or engaging effect in the audience. In fact, Gleeson and O'Neill observe that "the film provoked a lot of controversy as several newspapers pointed out important differences between the butler's story in the film and Allen's story in reality" (27). For some viewers, this made the movie lose some credibility. However, Danny Strong, the scriptwriter of the movie, rapidly addressed that controversy when he stated:

It's important to understand there's a reason why the character's name is Cecil Gaines. Because this is not the Eugene Allen story. It's not just about him. It's about several other people I spoke to that worked at the White House as well so that the film would create this universal truth for many people of what the experience was like. (qtd. in Gleeson and O'Neill 27)

Therefore, we should bear in mind that the movie was not only made to narrate Allen's life but also to reflect on the lives and circumstances of African-American people who worked at the White House during the Civil Rights Movement—a momentous social and political time that shaped the country. Differences do exist, though. For example, in *The Butler*, Cecil Gaines is born, lives, and works on a Cotton Field in Georgia while the truth is that Eugene Allen was born on a plantation in Virginia. Besides, Eugene and Helene—the Allen's—had only one son, Charles, while in the film the Gaines' have two sons,

Louis and Charles. Louis Gaines becomes a member of the Black Panther party in the movie, but Helene's and Eugene's son never worked in politics but as a state department investigator. In *The Butler*, Cecil and Gloria met at the restaurant where they were both working. Instead, Helena and Eugene met at a party in Washington. Also, in fiction, the White House calls Cecil to offer him the job while in real life Eugene found about the job thanks to a friend. However, there are some real facts about Allen's life that are depicted in the movie. For example, the couple was Obama supporters; Jackie Kennedy gave Eugene Allen one of Kennedy's ties after his assassination; and, finally, the Allen's were invited to a State Dinner by the First Lady Nancy Reagan.

6.2 The Story in the Movie

6.2.1 Summary of the Movie

The movie begins with Cecil Gaines waiting to see someone at the White House when his memory takes him back in time, and he starts telling his lifetime story. It is 1926, Cecil is a boy who is growing up on a cotton plantation in Macon, Georgia with his parents. The owner of the plantation takes his mother away, and kills his father. It is the housekeeper who teaches young and orphan Cecil to be a “house nigger.” Some years later, Cecil leaves the plantation and his mother behind to find a better future in North Carolina.

He took any job available to survive: he works as a barman, he cleans shoes in the street, and he serves food in a restaurant. Suddenly, Cecil is called to work as a butler at the hotel Excelsior in Washington D.C. so he moves there. While working at the hotel he meets Gloria who ends up being his wife and they have two boys, Louis and Charlie. It is 1957 and Cecil is still working at the hotel when he receives a job offer from the White House. After having an interview with the main butler, he is hired as a butler. The first administration that we see Cecil work for is Eisenhower’s and he is divided between his hard work at the White House, and his older son Louis who is moving to Fisk to start his college years. It is 1960 now and Louis is studying at Fisk University—an all-black university—where he starts attending the Army of Love meetings which ultimately leads him to be part of the sit-ins that happened across the country to protest segregation and racial discrimination. Due to his political involvement,

Louis is sent to jail for a month, while his parents do not know what to do to persuade him to stop putting his safety at risk.

In 1961, the White House receives John F. Kennedy as the new president of the United States. While Louis is out of jail, his mother Gloria starts having some drinking problems because she seems unable to handle everything that is going on with her life. In that same year, Louis becomes part of the Freedom Bus attack that occurred when some Ku Klux Klan members attacked one of the Freedom Riders buses in Alabama. Louis survives the attack, but he is sentenced to some days in jail to later resume protesting which leads him to spend three months in the Mississippi jail with Martin Luther King Jr. At this time, Gloria's drinking habit gets worse as she feels that his husband spends too much time at the White House without caring about his family. Out of loneliness, she has an affair with one of her neighbors. The situation seems to be out of control for the family when they find out that Louis has been arrested sixteen times in only two years.

Next, the year 1963 begins with President Kennedy delivering a speech on a nationwide television where he promises that there will not be any more segregation in public spaces from then on. However, following this announcement, Kennedy is killed and Vice-President Johnson has to assume the presidency urgently. On hearing the news, Cecil is shattered because of Kennedy's assassination as he believed that he was helping the African American community in their quest for a better future. During 1965, Louis becomes part of the Malcolm X Speaking Tour while he and his friend, Carol, start having a close relationship. This same year the Bloody Sunday happens, and Louis and Carol raise money for the families who have been affected by

this tragic episode in Selma. The war in Vietnam is one of the most important events during 1968. But Cecil is also about to have his very own war within the walls of the White House. He decides to talk to his boss about raising black people's salaries in the White House so they could get paid the same amount that the white workers. As expected, Cecil Gaines gets a no for an answer. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated that year and that event completely shatters the black community which feels lost once again.

Luckily, Louis comes back home to visit his family accompanied by Carol but he ends up being kicked out of the house by his parents because of the different opinions that he and his father hold about the Civil Rights Movement. Straight after, Louis gets arrested again and Carol is at the hospital so that one of Cecil's workmates helps Louis to get out of jail. Seeing all this, his brother Charlie decides that he wants to help his country somehow and offers himself to go to the war in Vietnam. The following year, Cecil is working for the Nixon administration. Just then, the Black Panther Party gets stronger and Louis and Carol join the party. The Nixon administration traces a plan to help them stay in the neighborhoods by helping them with money but at the same time they make it clear that they will kill anyone who might confront the law. In the meantime, Louis and Carol stop seeing each other, and Gloria and Cecil find out that Charles has died in Vietnam in 1973. During Nixon's second term, Louis is finally back in collage, and has gained a Master's in Political Sciences. He goes to the White House to talk to his father who refuses to see him. After that, Louis takes part in the elections to become a congressional candidate but he does not win.

The Reagan administration comes in and Cecil has already been twenty years working at the White House. Once again, he builds up the courage to ask his boss for raises and promotions for the black workers at the White House which are finally obtained thanks to President Reagan's support. Besides, the First Lady Nancy Reagan invites Cecil and Gloria to the state dinner that is going to be hosted at the White House, but Cecil does not feel comfortable—it seems to him that he belongs with the rest of the butlers. Amidst this, Reagan is dealing with the Apartheid that is happening in South Africa while Cecil finds out that serving at the White House does not make him happy anymore. To make his mind up, Gloria and Cecil travel back to Macon where Cecil shows her the old cotton plantation where he grew up. As for Louis, everything is fine now that he is working as a politician and helping the black community. However, a big change is about to come to his father's life when he decides to stop working at the White House. Cecil decides that it is about time to see his son again and he supports Louis by attending a protest that he is leading against Ronald Reagan's decision to Apartheid, a protest that puts them both in jail. Finally, father and son end up making peace with each other as they realize that what unites them is stronger than their cultural differences.

It is 2008 and Barack Obama is running for president which makes the African community immensely happy. At the same time, Louis is elected for the Congress. However, sadly too, some days before voting for the presidential elections, Gloria passes away but that does not stop Cecil to go and vote for the first African American president. The movie ends up with Cecil walking to the Oval Office to meet President Barack Obama.

6.2.2 The Making of the Movie

The production of Lee Daniels' *The Butler* was far from easy due to the type of movie that the director wanted to create. Daniels wanted both to find the perfect cast and honor the Civil Rights Movement activists. Making a movie with a mostly black cast is something that worries directors and producers alike because, as Haygood explains, they soon start asking themselves the following questions "Will the public attend? Will the movie only play in urban areas?" (*Witness to History* 65). However, it is also true that cinema is universal, and that it should tell stories about everyone and for everyone. In particular, Hollywood movies which are distributed around the world should set an example about it. According to Haygood:

If cinema is a universal language, what does it say about American and American movies, which are great sources of export – that is movies tend to ignore a whole segment of its populace? Is that not cultural blindness? And yet, bringing attention to the plight hardly seemed to solve the problem. (*Witness to History* 65)

That is why cinema should be used to represent and tell the stories of different communities and try to offer a fair representation of them while they also entertain the audiences. Besides, it is true that movies are a form of entertainment but, should that mean that they cannot be educational? It is perfectly possible for a movie to be a source of entertainment at the same time it can teach the viewers the most important events of the Civil Rights era. Again, movies are a big source of information in many different ways and movies bring people together, they create debates and open many people's minds.

Interesting movies should never be devaluated as they are one of the most essential representations of human life.

The adventure of taking Wil Haygood's article about Eugene Allen to the big screen begins with a well-known Hollywood producer named Laura Ziskin⁸⁵ "who had been concerned about the lack of diversity in American films" (*Witness to History* 66). In Haygood's own words, when Ziskin read Haygood's article, "she and her producing partner, Pam Williams, tracked me down in a hotel room in Memphis, Tennessee, where I was on assignment" (*Witness to History* 66). After reading Haygood's "A Butler Well Served by This Election", Ziskin and Williams had a clear idea of the kind of movie that they wanted to see and they imagined the movie as "a story that would encompass modern civil rights history through the eyes of a White House butler" (*Witness to History* 66). Before Lee Daniels, one of the directors who was interested in working in this movie was Steven Spielberg but he had to reject the project due to his busy schedule. Finally, Lee Daniels⁸⁶ came on board after meeting Ziskin and Williams and explaining his vision of the movie which "brought the two producers to tears" (Haygood, *Witness to History* 67).

To start, they needed a big budget to create this movie and that was not something easy to achieve as nobody was willing to help them. As Haygood points out: "Laura herself would plead with investors to come to her home and she told them (. . .) that the story was too important to not be told" (*Witness to*

⁸⁵ Laura Ziskin (1950-2011) was an American movie producer of numerous blockbusters such as *As Good as It Gets* (1997) or the *Spider-Man* franchise. She was also the executive producer of the famous movie *Pretty Woman* (1990) and she was the first woman in history to producing the Academy Awards in 2002 and 2007.

⁸⁶ Lee Daniels (1959-) is an American director and producer who was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for his movie *Precious* (2009), which got six nominations. He is also the co-creator and director of the television series *Empire* and *Star* (2016).

History 68). All of Ziskin's efforts finally yield results and the money started to go their way. Although this was not an easy task to complete since "to find the \$30 million budget for the film Lee Daniels needed the help no less than 40 other producers" (Gleeson and O'Neill 8).

To be able to produce a fair depiction of Eugene Allen's life and the Civil Rights movement, Danny Strong⁸⁷ became part of the project as the screenwriter of the movie and the fact that he was really passionate about telling stories about race in America was perfect for the nature of the project: "I'm really passionate about race in America (. . .) and I thought this film could be a way to cover African American history from Jim Crow to Obama. I thought this could be an epic film on race" (qtd. in Haygood, *Witness to History* 70). That is why the first decision that Strong made was that "it was going to be about the civil rights movement" and he started to develop the rest of the script from that ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:01:47-00:01:53). Therefore, Strong thought that having a family would engage audiences much easier; however, something that would be really effective for the narrative was to create a "triangle of a butler serving a president who is dealing with a crisis that the butler's son is part of" which would give a sense of connection during the whole movie ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:02:04-00:02:12). The director agrees since he firmly believes that "the heart of the movie (. . .) is the father-son love story." ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:02:43-00:02:50). To later add that *The Butler* is also "a bigger story than that and that these kids were heroes. They were fighting to

⁸⁷ Danny Strong (1974-) is an American actor, producer and screenwriter. He was part of very famous television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) or *Gilmore Girls* (2000). He also wrote the screenplays for the last movies of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, among others.

save the soul of our country”, refer to the activists that were part of the Civil Rights protests. (“Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” 00:04:08-00:04:19). It is complicated to categorize *The Butler* into only one of the stereotypical cinema genres. Oprah Winfrey offers her own definition: “it is a drama, it is a history lesson and it is a love story.” (“Oprah stars in Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” 00:03:50-00:03:53).

To tell the truth, what makes this movie tremendously popular for the black community is the cast—they all are an amazing representation of the community, and the right people to tell this story about the civil rights movement in America. This cast also includes black Americans who have been awarded with an Academy Award such as Forest Whitaker⁸⁸ who was the fourth black actor to win the Oscar as Best Actor in 2006; or Oprah Winfrey⁸⁹ who was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1989; or the worldwide known musician Lenny Kravitz⁹⁰ who is a four time Grammy Award

⁸⁸ Forest Whitaker (1961-) is an American actor, producer and director who was the 4th African American actor in winning an Academy Award with the movie *The King of Scotland* (2006). He has a very extensive filmography which varies from films such as the comedy-drama *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), the American war film *Platoon* (1986) or even blockbuster movies like *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) or *Black Panther* (2018). Whitaker is also a defender of the Sustainable Development Goals and he works alongside the United Nations and other associations to promote environmental awareness.

⁸⁹ Oprah Winfrey (1954-) is an American television producer and host, actress and author. She gained her fame through her own American talk show called *The Oprah Winfrey Show* which was the best valued show from 1986 to 2011 in the American television history. Winfrey is considered as one of the most influential people in the world as well as one the most important benefactor in many different humanitarian causes. Winfrey has won many prizes throughout her extensive career such as eighteen Daytime Emmy Awards, two Primetime Emmy Awards, a Tony Award and she also won the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award which is given by The Academy in 2011.

⁹⁰ Lenny Kravitz (1964-) is an American singer, songwriter, music producer and actor who has sold more than forty million albums worldwide. Kravitz has also won multiple awards including being the first person to win the Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal Performance for four years in a row. Besides, he has been named one of the 100 Greatest Artists of Hard Rock by the music channel VH1. Kravitz was also highly praised when he starred in the blockbuster trilogy of *The Hunger Games* in 2012.

winner; or the English-American actor David Oyelowo⁹¹ who was the first black actor to play a British king for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2001. Other black actors that are part of the cast are Terrence Howard⁹² and Cuba Gooding Jr.⁹³ who stand out for their incredible versatility as actors and who have been a relevant representation of the African American people on television and cinema for years.

However, *The Butler* would not have been possible without the cooperation of some international white actors who were more than happy to play the roles of presidents of the United States together with their respective first ladies. For example, Alan Rickman who was worldwide known thanks to his role as Severus Snape in the *Harry Potter* movie franchise plays Ronald Reagan with the two times Oscar winner actress Jane Fonda by his side who gives life to Nancy Reagan. The depiction of the most well-known administration in the White House is represented by *X-Men* and *Hairspray* actor James Marsden and *Charlie's Angels* television actress Minka Kelly who play John F. Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy respectively. Some other actors that deserve to be mentioned are Robin Williams who plays President Eisenhower, John Cusack playing Richard Nixon, Liev Schreiber depicting President Johnson or well-

⁹¹ David Oyelowo (1976-) is an English- American producer and actor and he has a very extensive and varied filmography although he started working as an actor in 1998. Oyelowo has worked in cinema, theatre, television and voice-acting. Some of his works are playing the historical figure of Martin Luther King Jr. in the autobiographical movie *Selma* (2014) but also supporting roles in feature films such as *Rise of The Planet of the Apes* (2011) or *Lincoln* (2012).

⁹² Terrence Howard (1969-) is an American actor and musician who has been very present in the mainstream culture world with movies such as *Crash* (2004), *Iron Man* (2008) or *Prisoners* (2013) or well-known series such as *Empire* (2015). Howard retired from acting on September 2019.

⁹³ Cuba Gooding Jr. (1968-) is an American actor who has worked in many different movies throughout his career such as *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), *Pearl Harbor* (2001) or *Selma* (2014). He won an Academy Award in 1996 for Best Supporting Actor with the movie *Jerry Maguire*.

known British actress Vanessa Redgrave who plays the grandmother of the owner of the plantation where Cecil was raised.

Furthermore, something that makes this movie so special is the fact that most of the actors worked for scale. That is, they were paid the lowest wage possible for an acting work because they really cared about the story behind the movie. The cast decided to be part of the movie because they considered vital to tell this story to large audiences and having the opportunity to do so was a blessing for them as members and allies of the African American community in the United States. In this thread of thought, Cuba Gooding Jr. confesses that “as an actor of color, the frustration that has been through my career is waiting for these stories to be told”, and that is the reason why it was so relevant for him to bring *The Butler's* story to the big screen (“*The Butler Interviews*” 00:10:54-00:10:59). On his part, director Lee Daniels made it clear that he wanted to produce *The Butler* so that young privileged black people could finally learn about the past of their country:

I am making this movie because my kids live in a very privileged life on the Upper West Side (. . .) and they do know more about the story of Anne Frank than they do about the civil rights. (“Gayle King Interviews the Director and Cast of Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” 00:21:25-00:21:39)

Besides, Oprah Winfrey who is one of the most famous African American artists across the globe felt really close to this movie and the message that was trying to convey so that black people ancestors and fights were not forgotten. As Winfrey puts it:

The real reason I wanted to do it, I thought the words and the story was important, I am student of my history. I grew up as an orator in school reciting speeches from Fannie Lou Hamer and Sojourner Truth (. . .) I just felt like we had an opportunity to share this story that really is our nation's story and I saw it was as a gift kind of as an offering because when you know who you are and where you come from, you can walk in a room and it's just you but come with a legacy of your heritage behind. ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:07:29-00:08:12)

Whitaker also talks about his own reasons to become fascinated with Daniels' film: he was curious about the secrecy that has historically surrounded the butlers who worked at the White House and thought that it was necessary to tell their stories:

[Butlers] don't reveal things that happened (. . .) they rarely write or talk about it so actually off record I got the chance to talk to some butlers from the White House but I didn't get to go to the White House but I did gather enough information to make it come together. ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:05:40-00:06:08)

Although there was not much information about the butlers who actually worked at the White House, that did not stop Whitaker to try and become a real butler. For this purpose, and in order to give a fair depiction of the profession, Whitaker confesses: " I hired a butler coach that worked with me. He was with me just to teach me the technical way of doing everything and also the philosophy of being a butler" ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:05:22-:00:05:31).

In addition, both the director and the screenwriter worked really hard on the characters to make them as real as possible as well as respectful towards the real people who inspired the movie. One of the parts that were changed the most was that of Gloria Gaines which delighted the actress Oprah Winfrey. She was absolutely satisfied with the innovations added to her role. Above all, Winfrey sees Gloria as a representation of the black women who lived in the 1960s, and had to give up on their dreams to take care of their families:

I saw Gloria not just as herself but as a composite of the women of that era who held the family together through their love and their guidance and their dreams, their hopes but they also had, you know, their own fire inside because of the times, they had to repress that. I wanted to play her with the sense of that repression. ("Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:08:12-00:08:40)

Apart from the black celebrities mentioned above, some new people were added to the story to make it rounder. One of them was Gloria's lover, Howard, portrayed by actor Terrence Howard who found his character tremendously interesting although he only appears in the first half of the movie. For him, Howard represents a whole generation of black men who lived under the society rules of the sixties who had to stay home and accept the status quo imposed on them instead of fighting for and achieving their dreams. According to Terrence Howard:

Howard represents that particular era of black America who may with the right encouragement have been able to go and make a stand but we have been told earlier, I mean he holds a government job and that's all

you wanted in the black community. A government job and you could have retirement, you know, you got a pension coming to you. Health care, what else do you need? Even though there was more that he'd like to accomplish. He was afraid to do more because he thought that the little he had would be taken away from him and a lot of men in America felt that way. That it was pointless to try and make a difference. They had lost faith in humanity. ("Lee Daniels' *The Butler*. Terrence Howard Official Interview" 00:01:07-00:01:52)

In any case, apart from the carefully written script and the attention to detail when writing the characters, a feeling that the entire cast shares is the relevance of telling about the Civil Rights Movement era. Alan Rickman, for example, talked about how "[*The Butler*] reminds you that real films come out of real life and that there are narratives that seem to be about one group of people but they are actually about all of us" ("Lee Daniels' *The Butler*. Alan Rickman On Set Interview" 00:02:31-00:02:45). Rickman adds that people from other communities outside the black one are absolutely welcome to come enjoy and learn from *The Butler*. On her part, Winfrey adds that "the whole point is to show that we are more alike than we are different. ("*The Butler* Interviews" 00:06:34-00:06:37). For Winfrey, helping each other is what ultimately makes the world a better place.

Moreover, Dr. Ernest Patton Jr.⁹⁴, who is one of the original Freedom Riders, argues that Daniels' movie was relevant to him because what it is depicted on the screen "is a never ending story. It will never end as long as

⁹⁴ Dr. Ernest Patton Jr. (1940-) is a civil rights activist and an original of the Freedom Riders group who was born in Nashville. He has been working all his life to put an end to racism and segregation within the black community.

there's men's injustice to men" ("The Freedom Riders" 00:03:15-00:03:24). Patton concludes the interview by saying that we will never have enough movies about this topic while violence among human beings still exists.

Besides, in his interview, Gooding Jr. focuses on America's long historical journey and the protagonism of her presidents, to the point of having Obama elected for president of the United States:

I think that the statement that this movie makes would be enlightening for us as a people to show the make-up of America. To show how we can come to an African American president. To understand that, you have to understand the presidents before him and their support staff. What else is better to do that than by watching *The Butler*? ("An American Story" 00:20:28-00:20:43)

The history of the United States needs to be understood in its context and knowing the history of the presidents of the country is one of the best ways to do so as they are the maximum representation of the land. By watching *The Butler*, Winfrey believes that a large number of people might be immersed in America's history and that includes those "who never read a book, who don't really understand or are not going to read their history. ("Gayle King Interviews the Director and Cast of Lee Daniels' *The Butler*" 00:24:29-00:24:37). But at least, Winfrey insists, they will have a notion of what happened in the country. Because they were narrating real events, all the actors involved in *The Butler* felt the responsibility of telling the history right and give a fair depiction of all the people who were part of the Civil Rights Movement and gave their lives for the

cause. Moreover, actress Yaya Alafia, who plays Carol, talks in similar terms about Daniels' *The Butler* and is not shy to express her worries:

We all felt some raw responsibility cause this is a film story but it's also historical and we need to do justice and we need to be sensitive to the fact that these people are still alive, this is real. We felt pressure to do it right. ("Lee Daniels' *The Butler*: David Oyelowo & Yaya Alafia Official Interview" 00:03:57-00:04:11)

It is relevant that for the black actors and actresses as well as for the mainstream ones, one of the main goals had to do with education. They wanted to educate people—in particular to educate a whole generation of young people who still do not know much about the fight for equal rights in America. A piece of information that is still very much needed because there are many socio-cultural aspects that have not been conquered yet. Minka Kelly, who plays Jackie Kennedy, declares that "there is a whole generation that may not even know that part of our history and it's important for them to be educated. If you're not reading books, at least learn from this" ("Lee Daniels' *The Butler*: Minka Kelly Los Angeles Premiere Interview" 00:02:22-00:02:33).

Probably what the cast emphasizes the most about *The Butler* is that they wanted to make the audiences think about and reflect on how far the American society has come. Looking back is always a good way of avoiding the repetition of the same mistakes. It also helps to realize how progressive the American society is nowadays compared to that of the past. It is true that there some things that still need to be changed and some fields that still need to be conquered but it is important to talk and bring back the stories of those who

fought to make the world better for an entire community. Along the same line, Robin Williams, who played President Eisenhower, also encourages us to think about the Civil Rights Movement to really understand how difficult that era was for the African-American community: “You realize how intense it was, how violent it was, how provocative it was and this changes with now having a black president and that’s kind of the whole purpose of the script, to say. Do you remember what it was like?” (“An American Story” 00:05:55-00:06:06). Certainly, another member of the original Freedom Riders, Charles Person⁹⁵, reflects on how young people need to be aware of “how things were because some of the things that happened defy imagination. People can’t believe we treated one another the way we did” (“The Freedom Riders” 00:03:24-00:03:35), and Person concludes that these stories need to be told to honor the people who were part of them.

Related to this Winfrey talks about how proud she feels for the people who came before her. In some way, Winfrey feels that she owes everything that she is and has got to those black people who worked hard in the most difficult times in the American history so that she can honor their history now: “I feel such a sense of gratitude for those who came before me, who had so little and had no idea that this day could be possible” (“Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” 00:15:40-00:15:47). Another young and talented actor that is David Oyelowo, who plays Gaines’ old son, makes us think of the stupendous history that America has had, which is represented in *The Butler*, in such a short period of time when he challenges the audience and readers: “I would defy you to find another country on the planet earth where you literally have that

⁹⁵ Charles Person (1942-) is an African American civil rights leader who participated in the first Freedom Ride in 1961.

amount of change within a century and we are talking 1926 to 2008” (“Academy Conversations: Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” 00:12:42-00:12:55).

6.2.3 The Award Season: Success, Reviews and Controversies

As its director Lee Daniels' hoped, since its premiere in August 2013, *The Butler* became a social phenomenon that left no one indifferent as the movie received numerous awards nominations: good reviews, as well as bad reviews and some controversies. *The Butler* received fifty-three nominations during the award season in 2014, and some of these nominations included Best Supporting Actress for Oprah Winfrey and Best Make Up / Hair at the BAFTAs or Outstanding Performance by a male in a leading role for Forest Whitaker or Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture at the SAG awards. Apart from the nominations, *The Butler* went home with 17 wins which included a NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture for David Oyelowo, Movie of the Year in the Acapulco Black Film Festival or Director of the Year for Lee Daniels in the Hamptons International Film Festival, among others.

Despite the sheer quantity of awards, *The Butler* could not escape from bad press as there were also different controversies concerning the movie, such as the choice of some actors or the depiction of the presidents in the picture. Thus, in his review Viner writes that "the fine actors playing the various presidents are forced into parodies rather than performances" as he did not find accurate the depiction of the several American presidents who appear in the movie. One of the strongest controversies that Daniels had to deal with was related to the actress Jane Fonda who portrays Nancy Reagan in the movie. A belligerent Bell writes, "at least one theater owner is refusing to show the film at all because Jane Fonda and her anti-Vietnam War behavior 41 years ago". To

understand this angry outburst we need to go back to 1972 when Fonda, at age 35, as Bell highlights, “paid a visit to North Vietnam, where she was famously photographed sitting atop an anti-aircraft gun and laughing with members of the enemy army” which infuriated the whole population back in the United States. Although this episode happened a long time ago, Bell writes that “four decades later people are still pretty sore about it”. Therefore, that is the reason why Vietnam Veterans or even regular American citizens would not support the casting of Jane Fonda as one of the nation’s favorite First Ladies.

Besides, another serious controversy that affected *The Butler* was Michael Reagan’s⁹⁶ statement about the depiction of his father, the President Ronald Reagan, in the movie. Michael Reagan claims his father was depicted as a racist in the full-length film because “he was in favor of lifting economic sanctions against South Africa and [that he felt that it was a] simplistic and dishonest” way to represent his father. To prove that, Michael Reagan argued that President Reagan played football in college and that “one of his best friends was a black teammate”, he also “invited black players home for dinner once (. . .) and he invited them to stay overnight at his home”. During his political career as the Governor of California he was the one who “appointed more blacks to positions of power than any of his predecessors combined”. Moreover, Michael Reagan clarifies that “it was his father who promoted Mr. Allen to maître d’hôtel” instead of Eugene asking for a promotion like it appears in the movie. Furthermore, Joseph and Kengor agree with Michael Reagan and write that among the “political spectrum, historians, biographers, and former Reagan aides condemned the movies outrageous caricature of Ronald Reagan

⁹⁶ Not be confused with the President Ronald Reagan when looking for a reference in the Works Cited section.

as historically inaccurate and personally unfair”. A fact that made the people who had known the 40th President of the United States quite discontented. Joseph and Kengor add that “the president didn’t have a racist bone in his body and was actually remarkable in his sensitivities and warmers to blacks and other minorities” which coincides with Michael Reagan’s words.

The sheer amount and variety of reviews that Daniels’ movie received was enormous but one of the most relevant pieces about *The Butler* was written by Peniel E. Joseph. Joseph is an American teacher that works within the field of race issues and the Civil Rights Movement. He has also written some books about the civil rights movement such as *Waiting till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2006) or *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Obama* (2010) which are mentioned in this dissertation. Overall, Joseph’s review is very positive as he believes that *The Butler* offers a fair representation and is very respectful of what the black community went through during the civil rights movement. What Joseph remarks and likes the most has to do with the fact that the majority of the cast is African-American which is something that has never happened in a Hollywood movie about the fight for equal rights before: “*The Butler* is by any conventional measure a rarity, a major Hollywood production that focuses on African-American history by using a largely black cast to tell you the story”⁹⁷. However, Joseph also points out the fact that there are also a lot of white actors and actresses in the movie which reminds us that Hollywood has always wrongly believed that the best way “to tell a black story is through white historical characters and actors”.

⁹⁷ Throughout this chapter “The Award Season: Success, Reviews and Controversies”, Joseph’s quotations are from his article “A Civil Rights Professor Reviews Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*” in Indie Wire whose full reference can be found in the Works Cited section.

Besides, Joseph denounces the fact that the director took “dramatic license” and changed some facts about Eugene Allen and his family. In his opinion, the “most obvious and at times implausible is the way in which Louis Gaines manages to participate in every mayor racial struggle of the 1960s”. Turan agrees with Joseph’s complains and writes that “it strains credulity to have it all happen to one person, and all in the context of a strained father-son relationship”. On his part, Anderson believes that the movie is not credible when “the director can’t resist the commercial impulse to make Cecil a hero” at the end of the movie. Anderson feels that “you can’t have it both ways without making a movie with a personality disorder”.

Among the benevolent reviews, McCarthy writes that the movie is “always engaging, often entertaining and certainly never dull”. In Scott words, *The Butler* is a reliable account of the Civil Rights era as it is a “truthful movie on a subject that is usually shrouded in wishful thinking, myth mongering and outright denial” to later add that “the genius of it lies in the sly and self-assured way it connects public affairs to private experience”. Braund agrees with Scott and writes that *The Butler* “has a dramatic potential, providing both fly-on-the-wall access to the corridors of power and an intimate view of the impact policy-making has on ordinary people’s lives” which makes the audiences connect easily with the story. However, Braund also claims that although the message is well formed the movie “is unlikely to sit well with audiences outside the US”, which proved to be wrong as far as the European reception was concerned.

Then again, something that most critics coincide with is the fact that *The Butler* “presents a depiction of civil rights era violence that’s powerful and moving” as Joseph writes. Kermode agrees and adds that “there is still a

genuine passion (. . .) in this fanciful retelling of contemporary history”. Evans believes that *The Butler* is “certainly educational in its own way” at the same time that it reminds the human kind “how far African Americans have come and of our history of perseverance in the face of difficult” which may be one of the characteristics that makes the viewers appreciate *The Butler* so much, and overall, because it is a journey fighting for black lives.

Although African-Americans were able to achieve relevant triumphs more than fifty years ago, Joseph asserts that *The Butler’s* release “marks an important contribution to reinvigorating this dialogue in the present” which means to open the dialogue on equal rights once again. Joseph ends up by saying that granting that *The Butler* “might have been a masterpiece, instead, it will have to settle as the most important outstanding movie ever made about the civil rights movement’s heroic period”. As far as Joseph is concerned, Daniel’s *The Butler* sets an example for the future movies that might deal with a similar topic.

7. A Study of the Representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*

7.1 1926 – Macon, Georgia

*Any white man could kill any of us at any time
and not be punished for it.
The law wasn't on our side.
The law was against us.*⁹⁸

The Butler begins with Cecil Gaines waiting outside of the Oval Office to meet the 44th president of the United States Barack Obama. That scene alternates with the image of two African American men hanging from a pole after they have been lynched. The American flag is waving in the back. Right then, the audience can hear Gaines' voice over (a cinematic device that is present throughout the whole movie), and he says: "The only thing I ever knew was cotton" (00:01:26-00:01:31)⁹⁹. The scene shows a cotton farm in Macon, Georgia back in 1926, from where Cecil Gaines starts narrating the happenings of his life. During the first fifteen minutes of *The Butler*, we follow Cecil Gaines through his infancy on the cotton farm, how he later learns skills for food server jobs, what happens to him when he leaves the farm for Washington D.C, where he finds his first job in the city to the time he ends up living in Washington D.C.

Although it is short scene, the camera takes its time to give a representation of slavery times by focusing on an average day in the lives of

⁹⁸ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler*. (00:07:42-00:07:51)

⁹⁹ Throughout this chapter, all the time-minute references will be from the movie *The Butler* that it is being analyzed, unless otherwise specified. This is a way to shorten the references and avoid the repetition of Daniels' movie title. When other segments of videos are used, the reference will appear within the text, and can be also found in the Works Cited section.

people who worked on the cotton plantations. Also, it is interesting to note that even though this part of the movie is fictional—as Eugene Allen never worked in a cotton plantation—it is clear that the director wanted to include it to honor a period of black American history that is most relevant for the whole country. In fact, slavery is directly related to the Civil Rights Movement. By including certain shots about the slavery period in a film that deals, most specifically, with the struggle of African Americans to gain equal treatment under the law from the sixties on, director Daniels show how long and painful this fight has been.

7.2 1957 – The Eisenhower Administration

*When the President sent those troops down to Little Rock, it was the first time I'd ever seen a white man stick his neck out for us.*¹⁰⁰

The first time that anything related to the Civil Rights Movement appears in *The Butler* dates back to 1957, when the Gaines' family is in the kitchen about to start their daily routine. They are having breakfast when, suddenly, Gloria Gaines starts talking about Emmet Till, a fourteen-year old kid who was brutally murdered by two white brothers and a friend: "That woman whose son got killed, she's around doing speeches now. What's her name, honey?" (00:14:29-00:14:34), she asks her husband. Instead, her teenage son Louis quickly responds, "Mamie Till" (00:14:36-00:14:37). This brief dialogue shows how shocking this episode has been for the African American community because someone as young as Louis can easily remember what had happened two years before. As a matter of fact, the whole nation learnt about Emmet Till because "Jet Magazine showed Till's corpse beaten, mutilated, shot through the head. A generation of black people would remember the horror of that photo" ("Awakenings (1954-1956)" 00:16:59-00:17:09). After such a horrendous crime, Mamie Till wanted the assassination of his son to become a lesson to be learnt by blacks and whites alike. She also aimed to inspire people across the country because the torture her son suffered at the hands of three strong white men

¹⁰⁰ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler* (00:29:36-00:29:44).

should not be forgotten. After her son's passing, Till found the strength to address a paralyzed black audience in the following terms:

I believe that the whole United States is mourning with me and if the death of my son can mean something to the other unfortunate people all over the world then for him to die a hero would mean more to me than just have died. (qtd. in "Awakenings (1954-1956)" 00:17:24-00:17:39)

Because she has two sons, it is hard for Gloria Gaines to forget what happened to Emmet Till when she says: "It was dis-damn-graceful what they did to that boy just for looking at a white woman. Beat him up, threw his body in the river...killed him. He was no older than Louis, fourteen at the time" (00:14:46-00:15:00). In truth, Till's assassination also made a great impact on the African Americans who lived in the north and who were not used to such hate crimes. They were paralyzed by the shock of the sheer brutality of the murder of a young and innocent black boy. Indeed, Cecil refers to the murderers as "crazy white folks down south" (00:15:00-00:15:02) to make a distinction between the situation of black people in the north and in the south. Gloria replies: "Least we have it a little better here in DC, huh?" (00:15:03-00:15:05). But Cecil quickly responds: "Still treating us bad too" (00:15:05-00:15:06). Cecil knows more about racism because he has worked for white people, he has been serving them for years and, therefore, he has suffered from racism. Emmet Till's assassination marked the beginning of an era for the African American people because even though "race killings were down by the 1950s but over the years, there have been more than 500 documented lynchings in Mississippi alone" ("Awakenings (1954-1956)" 00:25:38-00:25:46). In view of this rampant brutality

black people felt that a revolution was much needed to stop racial differences and discriminatory practices.

Later in the movie, Cecil comes back home from work and finds a flyer on the living room table that says: "Mamie Till, Mother of Emmet Till, Speaks Out!" (00:27:21-00:27:29). He quickly realizes that it belongs to his oldest son Louis. Cecil does not understand why his son is interested in that sort of events but Louis tells him: "I want to go to this" (00:27:34-00:27:36). His father gives him a disapproval look and Louis adds: "This could have been me" (00:27:32-00:27:33). Louis feels that he owes it to black people in the south to help and support them in any way possible because his life would have been completely different if he had not grown up in Washington D.C. However, Cecil can only think about the well-being of his own son and he angrily reminds him "It happened down south. I got out of there so we could have us a better life" (00:27:51-00:27:54). Cecil goes upstairs leaving Louis frustrated because his father does not understand his feelings. Both stances are understandable: Cecil wants to keep his family safe away from the strong racial inequality and discrimination that still exists in the south because he has personally experienced some of it. As for Louis, he wants to help the movement as much as he is able to because he feels partly guilty since he enjoys a decent life while there are still black people like him who are brutally beaten, assassinated, and lynched.

As with Emmet Till's, the case of the Little Rock Nine is also portrayed in *The Butler*. It happened in Arkansas during the Eisenhower administration which is the first presidential mandate that is depicted in the movie although in real life Eugene Allen started working in the White House in 1952 for President

Truman. When Cecil walks into the Oval Office, he sees President Eisenhower talking with Sherman Adams, the Chief of Staff, and Herbert Brownell, the Attorney General. They are discussing their strategic plan to solve the problem in Little Rock. Sherman Adams does not agree with sending troops to Little Rock (00:25:10-00:25:12), while President Eisenhower follows his advice and states: "I can't see any situation where I'd send troops to the South. Ever. It would cause another Civil War" (00:25:15-00:25:23). Eisenhower's plan is to give it a little time and wait for things to calm down because it would be difficult for the president to interfere without creating a big chaos. However, Herbert Brownell does not fully agree "I understand Mr. President, but if Faubus continues to block the negro children then what do we do? We must enforce the constitution" (00:25:35-00:25:41). In real life, Eisenhower declared: "I personally believe that if we try to go too far, too fast in laws in this delicate field, that involves the emotion of so many millions of Americans, you're making a mistake" ("Fighting Back 1957-1962" 00:06:08-00:06:19) which is quite similar to President Eisenhower's opinion depicted in the movie.

Brownell was right. Later in the movie when President Eisenhower heard that Faubus was not escorting the black kids into the school as he promised, the President delivered a televised national speech that is a reproduction of the real speech that President Eisenhower gave in 1957 to stop the violence in Little Rock. Before showing the recreation of Eisenhower's speech, a real picture of Melba Pattillo¹⁰¹, one the Little Rock Nine, walking to the school in Little Rock, is shown on the screen. That photo was taken while Pattillo was

¹⁰¹ Melba Pattillo (1941-) is an American journalist and college teacher who is known as a member of the Little Rock Nine who were the first group to integrate the high school Little Rock Central in Little Rock, Arkansas.

walking to Little Rock Central High School and that moment is documented in both *Eyes on the Prize* (“Fighting Back 1957-1962” 00:10:15-00:10:33), and in *A Time for Justice* documentaries (00:09:14-00:09:30). In fact, Eisenhower’s speech in *The Butler* reads as follows “I have today issued an Executive Order directing the use of troops under Federal authority to aid in the execution of Federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas” (00:29:22-00:29:33). These are the exact words that Eisenhower used in the real speech that he delivered on national television (“60 Years Ago: Pres. Eisenhower on Little Rock School Integration” 00:02:45-00:02:58).

The decision that President Eisenhower took that September night to protect the African American students was something that really hit home for a lot of people in the country and Cecil Gaines could not be an exception. This is Gaines reaction: “When the President sent those troops down to Little Rock, it was the first time I’d even seen a White man stick his neck out for us” (00:29:36-00:29:44). As a result of President Eisenhower radical and unheard of decision, most African Americans felt for the first time that they were not alone.

7.3 1960 – Fisk University

*If I can't sit at any lunch counter I want
then I might as well as be dead.*¹⁰²

The year 1960 begins with Louis arriving at Fisk University, an all-black institution (00:35:34), and meeting Carol Hammie who tells him about the James Lawson's Army of Love group: "That's what we call the Lawson workshop, the love school" (00:36:04-00:36:06), to later take Louis where the meetings takes place. This group existed in real life and its main goal was to work in favor of desegregation and the integration of the African American community in daily main stream American life. Lawson's work was focused on achieving equality for black people and to do so his tactic was based on non-violence: "The students were drawn by activist James Lawson and his workshops in non-violent action" ("Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)" 00:05:23-00:05:30). When Louis and Carol arrive at the workshop, James Lawson is explaining what they are going to do and which approach they are going to take: "So we're going to form an army, you and I. This army has one weapon, and this weapon is love" (00:37:06-00:37:12). This scene is a recreation of the real classes that Lawson taught at the university to capture the interest of those students who wanted to support the cause. An example of this real class can be seen in the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* ("Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)" 00:05:29-00:05:45) and the resemblance is uncanny.

¹⁰² Louis Gaines in *The Butler* (00:43:31-00:43:34).

One of the things that they did in these love school classes was to prepare the students for the real situations that they would face while attending a demonstration. To do so, they used a role play approach and they divided the students in the class into two groups: half of them had to shout insults and inappropriate words to the other half while the “victims” of the attacks have to remain absolutely calm and in control. Following his instructions, James Lawson explained that they would be ready for the worst scenario. Thus, he was “trying to set the stage for an actual demonstration, for an actual sit-in” (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:05:35-00:05:45) as he explains in a real class video. *The Butler* depicts all of this and shows how the character of James Lawson encourages the students to help each other be prepared for the real harsh situations that they will have to face in a near future. By shouting “Attack. This is an experiment. So do whatever it takes to break their spirit” (00:39:05-00:39:12), Daniels’ film offers a fair representation of the school of love spirit. The whole role play scenes (00.39:05-00:39:29) are alternated with the sit-in images, as well as the state dinner that Cecil Gaines is serving at the White House. As mentioned above, *The Butler’s* role play scenes are based on the real practices of Lawson’s and his students and the resemblance is extraordinary as it can be seen in *Eyes on the Prize* (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:06:16-00:06:32).

After the scenes of Lawson’s school of love, Lee Daniels dedicates four minutes (00:37:42-00:41:53) of the movie to represent what happened in the sit-ins that took place in the United States during the sixties. The action is placed in the Woolworths Department Stores which is a real location where the first sit-ins took place. All of the students, including Louis and Carol, walk down the street

to this store, enter pacifically, and they sit down on the white side of the counter. This makes all of the white customers and waiters very nervous and scared and even more so when one of the waiters yells at the students “You can order food in the colored section but I’m not gonna be serving you here” (00:38:33-00:38:36). During all the tense situation, Louis keeps answering calmly without moving to the colored section: “We would like to be served, please” (00:38:52-00:38:53), as they have been practicing in Lawson’s classes. As an example of the anger that white people felt when the black citizens dared to change the status quo, an old woman starts screaming against them for being seated in the white zone. She finally leaves the store because nobody is doing anything to move them: “If you want us to shop in this establishment, make them go!” (00:39:52-00:39:53). Actually, nobody moves and nobody else screams and time starts passing by until it is completely dark outside and mobs of extremely angry white people appear at the doors of the establishment screaming and threatening the black students. While the African American teenagers are reading books and studying on the counter, a group of furious white teenagers walk into the establishment and start shouting, spitting and throwing food on them (00:40:09-00:40:22). One of them even dumps ketchup on a black girl’s head, another one spits on Carol’s face and another one throws hot coffee on Louis’ face which makes him scream (00:40:45-00:41:33).

The director made a fantastic job when representing what the army of love actions were based on. It is interesting to highlight that although the black students were not violent at all, the white citizens were not happy with their pacific behavior because they were threatening their main principles and not respecting the discriminatory laws thus, whites answered with violence. The

veracity of the sit-in showed in *The Butler* is outstanding as it can be seen in *Eyes on the Prize* (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:09:07-00:09:37) where the black students are peacefully seated until some white people come in and start harassing them out of anger which is perfectly represented in the movie. Since the pacific black students do not respect country laws, they all get arrested (00:41:41-00:41:52), and it is then when Cecil finds out that his son also has been arrested because he sees it on television (00:42:04-00:42:25). It should be noted that the black university students also got arrested in real life, more than eighty black students in total (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:09:38-00:09:52). Daniels decides to finish this part of the movie by inserting some real footage of the sit-ins to show the audiences that what they have seen was a rendition of a real event (00:42:27-00:42:34). Above and beyond, some real images of sit-ins are also present in *A Time for Justice* (00:12:00-00:12:41) which are similar to what is represented in *The Butler*. Later in the movie, all the army of love students are sentenced to jail as the judge rules: “You are all sentenced to thirty days in the county jail” (00:42:40-00:42:42), while they are all seated in the courtroom. This also happened in real life as all the people who took part in the sit-in were found guilty and send to jail and there exists authentic footage of those occurrences that are collected in *Eyes on the Prize* (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:12:41-00:12:57).

7.4 1961 – The Kennedy Administration

*It is my right to ride that bus.
That is my legal right and
I will exercise my rights as an American citizen.*¹⁰³

At the beginning of the year 1961, Louis is still part of the civil rights activists and participates in every action in favor of black people's equality. During the brief phone calls with her son, Gloria finds out that he has joined the Freedom Riders. However, Gloria does not really know what the freedom riders are all about. As a black mother, she is just worried about her son and believes that Louis will end up in jail again: "He said he joined something called the Freedom Riders, whatever the hell that's supposed to mean" (00:44:29-00:44:33). Meanwhile, Cecil also shares with his colleagues that Louis is now part of the Freedom Riders and that he is not pleased about it either: "I think he's doing that freedom riding thing" (00:49:36-00:49:37).

At this point, it is relevant to note that John F. Kennedy's administration begins that same year, and Cecil gets the chance to work for another American president. The whole White House is quite excited to get to know Kennedy as he is rumored to be a very understanding and approachable person. Even Cecil talks about Kennedy's family decisions and views about the civil rights movement with his workmates, Holloway and Carter. Kennedy seems to be the kind of president that they all really like in spite of the fact that they not always agree with the decisions that African Americans would like him to make. As a matter of fact, Holloway and Carter talk about how John and Robert Kennedy are dealing with the civil rights problems. Holloways says that "Bobby told the

¹⁰³ Louis Gaines in *The Butler* (00:54:31-00:54:36).

President that they shouldn't be worried about the Negro sit-ins. Polls shows the US does not support civil rights" (00:49:14-00:49:21), which is something that presumably Holloway must have been overheard while he was working. This assertion irritates Carter a little bit who replies: "Told you that white boy was smooth...a little too smooth for my money" (00:49:22-00:49:25). Therefore, although the action of the movie moves mostly around Cecil's and Louis' relationship, the political reality of the era is also present throughout the feature film.

One of the most representative events concerning the fight for civil rights refers to the attack that one of the first Freedom Riders' buses suffered when they were travelling from Washington D.C to the south of the country. This assault does appear in *The Butler* as Louis is part of the passengers who suffer the attack, together with a dozen freedom riders more (00:50:22-00:52:46). Inside the bus, there are white and black freedom riders as well as some journalists, and they are about to enter Montgomery (Alabama) when they first encounter some hostilities. Everyone inside the bus seems to be relaxed, they are all enjoying the trip, and some of them are even flirting with each other. In *The Butler*, Louis and Carol are sitting next to each other while talking about mundane things until Louis notices a big light and a car carrying an enormous Ku Klux Klan cross on top which is approaching the bus (00:51:22-00:51:32). When the bus driver turns around to change the route, they encounter more cars that block the way so the driver is forced to stop the bus. That is the moment when the freedom riders watch people with banners that read "Alabama hates niggers" and who shout at them to go home because they are not welcome there. There are also men wearing the Ku Klux Klan costumes and

holding torches. They approach the bus while others start to smash the windows of the vehicle with bats and chains; they block the bus doors while the freedom riders seek shelter in the middle of the bus. However, the worst happens when one of the Ku Klux Klan members approaches the bus, takes his Klan hood off, and throws a Molotov cocktail into the bus which instantly sets the back of the bus on fire (00:51:47-00:52:46).

The veracity of what is shown in *The Butler* can be confirmed when watching both documentaries *Eyes on the Prize* and *A Time for Justice*, as well as the historical documentary film Stanley Nelson's *Freedom Riders* (2010). However, there is an important difference between the real historical facts and what is depicted in *The Butler*. In reality, the freedom bus attack occurred during the day while *The Butler* sets the attack during the night which makes the scene much more terrifying for the audience. However, most of this scene is a carbon copy of the real events. For example, in *Eyes on the Prize*, some real photos of the passengers in the bus are shown, thus proving that interracial relationships were not forbidden among the students activist ("Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)" 00:30:09-00:30:28). There are also some real pictures of the interior of the bus in *A Time for Justice* which look very similar to the ones depicted in the movie (00:13:22-00:13:40). Moreover, the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* offers some explanations about the attack. A voice over explains that "a mob firebombed the bust and blocked the exits" ("Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)" 00:30:15-00:30:20). To later add that "12 riders were hospitalized and the bus was destroyed" (00:30:32-00:30:37). Indeed, what makes this scene absolutely truthful is the fact that Daniels chooses to add a real photo of the freedom riders attack at the end of the sequence (00:52:49-00:52:51). Some

others pictures that are almost identical to the ones in the movie are shown in the three documentary movies, already mentioned *Eyes on the Prize* (“Ain’t Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)” 00:30:29-00:30:40), *A Time for Justice* (00:14:30-00:14:57) or even a real video of the freedom bus burning in *Freedom Riders* (00:29:03-00:29:16).

The next scene in the movie brings us back to the Gaines’ home where Cecil and Gloria are watching a report about the freedom bus attack on television. All the images that are shown on the small screen are real footage from the news that were broadcasted nationwide in 1961 (00:53:29-00:53:51). This is a silent scene that is only accompanied by the testimonies of some of the victims of the attack. All the audios contain real voices from people who were travelling in that freedom bus. In *The Butler*, the first person who offers her witness statement is a woman who affirms: “Can’t tell you if I walked off the bus or if I crawled off or if someone pull me off” (00:53:29-00:53:35). That woman is Mae F. Moultrie Howard who was one of the students who was part of that freedom ride. Howard talks about it in the movie *Freedom Riders* and those exact words can also be heard (00:27:06-00:27:11). Therefore, it is also possible that Daniels might have used this documentary film when working on the making of *The Butler*. Furthermore, the other testimony that is shown in *The Butler* after Howard’s is also real. This is a man called Hank Thomas and he refers to his experience in the freedom bus, and the sheer brutality of the attack:

I got off of the bus, a man came up to me, and I’m coughing and strangling and he said “Boy, you alright?” I nodded my head and the next thing I knew I was on the ground. He had hit me with a baseball bat. (00:53:40-00:53:51)

Together with Mae, Thomas and others appear in in Nelson's movie *Freedom Riders* where these exact same words are recorded (00:27:15-00:27:31).

Next, in 1963, Birmingham was still the main center of attention for civil rights issues, and the civil rights leaders considered very important that the president's administration might get involved in that part of the geography because it was the perfect representation of how segregated the American south was. Martin Luther King Jr., among other activists, has led several marches in the city of Alabama in favor of civil rights which caused a lot of social commotion and ended up with numerous protesters in jail.

To capture such a momentous time in the history of the civil rights movement, Daniels takes the viewers into the living room of the White House where we see President John Kennedy and the first lady Jackie Kennedy watching the news on the television while Cecil Gaines is serving them. On the screen, Daniel shows some white and black archival footage of black children and teens being hosed down in the street by firemen, police dogs attacking them, and numerous protesters being arrested (00:54:55-00:55:14). In *The Butler*, all these images contain real footage related to the non-violent demonstrations that were taking place in the streets of the South back in 1963. They are accompanied by the voice over of a news reporter who narrates the outcome of an episode of nonviolent resistance:

Negro and white in Birmingham have been building up to scenes and clashes like this. The situation was perilously close to an explosion. Arrests were made in mass lots, everyone charged with the same offense: parading without a permit. (00:54:55-00:55:14)

Some of this footage also appears in *Eyes on the Prize* which proves its veracity. Among others, there are images of the police dogs brutally attacking the kids, as well as the policemen hitting the marchers (“No Easy Walk (1961-1963)” 00:32:44-00:32:55). There are also some pictures of black people falling down or being pushed around by the high pressured water that comes from the fire hoses (“No Easy Walk (1961-1963)” 00:32:56-00:33:21). Some trees with the bark ripped off because of the fire hoses are shown in *A Time for Justice* to graphically illustrate cases of police violence which shows the use of inappropriate force against black young people. There appear images of people screaming in desperation because there were taking part in a non-violent protest (00:18:00-00:18:49). The television news in *The Butler* show teenagers being arrested as it happened in real life. Statistics show that more than 2.500 people were taken to jail, and that more than 2.000 of them were children (“No Easy Walk (1961-1963)” 00:37:51-00:38:03). As a consequence, all the jails in the surrounding counties were filled to capacity. People were particularly outraged because the authorities were putting underage kids behind bars. *De facto*, it is possible to prove the veracity of those events thanks to the footage that appears in *Eyes on the Prize* where hundreds of children were held prisoners in very small cells (“No Easy Walk (1961-1963)” 00:38:09-00:38:32).

Following, there are some scenes in Daniels’ movie that recreate the assaults that blacks suffered when the members of the police tried to disperse the peaceful crowd with the help of fire hoses. In *The Butler*, Louis and Carol are trying to escape from some police dogs and the fire hoses that are hurting them. Both of them are screaming and at the verge of tears while Louis tries to cover Carol with his own body, but the water from the fire hoses is so strong

that it pushes both of them down (00:55:31-00:55:40). It also depicted how a dog is trying to attack both Louis and Carol (00:55:41-00:55:48). Following, there are some scenes in Daniels' movie that recreate the assaults that blacks suffered when the members of the police tried to disperse the peaceful crowd with the help of fire hoses. In *The Butler*, Louis and Carol are trying to escape from some police dogs and the fire hoses that are hurting them. Both of them are screaming and at the verge of tears while Louis tries to cover Carol with his own body, but the water from the fire hoses is so strong that it pushes both of them down ("No Easy Walk (1961-1963)" 00:37:27-00:37:49).

Later in *The Butler*, Gloria and Howard are at the Gaines' house watching the news that shows Martin Luther King Jr. walking down the streets of Alabama and participating in one of the Birmingham marches (00:55:49-00:55:56). While they watch the television footage of the protestors, a news reporter confirms that "protesters have taken to the streets in Birmingham, Alabama to bring attention to their efforts against the segregation of black Americans" (00:55:53-00:55:57). The exact footage that appears in this scene of the movie is quite reliable since identical images of Martin Luther King Jr. walking along with protestors in Birmingham appear in *Eyes on the Prize* ("No Easy Walk (1961-1963)" 00:27:53-00:28:00). However, the documentary also includes the scenes that show the moment when King—the non-violent activist—was arrested in the middle of the protest, and sent to jail where he would write his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (16 April 1963).

As it happened in real life, it got to a point where President Kennedy could neither stand the abuses and violence that African American people were exposed in Birmingham, nor could he overlook the dramatic moment. Thus,

Kennedy delivered a televised speech to address the situation (00:59:19-01:00:12). The representation of one of the most famous speeches by John F. Kennedy is fairly done in *The Butler*. Although, Daniels does not make use of real footage, the actor who plays the president pronounces the same words that Kennedy did back in 1963. The only mirror difference we find in the fictional speech is that Daniels has altered the order of the paragraphs. By so doing, Daniels highlighted some sections whether because he thought they were more powerful or because they worked better for the drama of the movie.

It is worth mentioning that while Kennedy's discourse lasted thirteen minutes, screenwriter Danny Strong wrote a summarized version that is just one minute long, thus, only the most representative parts of the speech regarding the ending of segregation are shown in *The Butler*. As, a matter of fact, Marsden's Kennedy begins the speech by saying that "The fires of discord are burning in every north and south, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, with demonstrations, parades, and protests" (00:59:19-00:59:30) which is exactly what Kennedy said in his authentic speech ("President John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Address" 00:06:12-00:06:26). Next, *The Butler's* Kennedy addresses the situation of inequality experienced by the African American community and affirms that not a single human being deserves to be treated differently. Once again, these were Kennedy's exact words from his seminal speech ("President John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Address" 00:08:35-00:08:58):

I am therefore asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public. Hotels, restaurants, theatres, retail stores and similar establishments. This seems to

me to be an elementary right. Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure, but many do. (00:59:31-00:59:55)

In Daniels's *The Butler*, President Kennedy ends the televised speech by saying that they all have to work together for the own good of the country. Although this was not the end in Kennedy's actual speech, it is the same word-for-word presidential speech ("President John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Address" 00:07:08-00:07:24).

A great change is at hand. And our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all. Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. (00:59:56-01:00:12)

While Marsden's President Kennedy is delivering his speech directly into the camera that focuses on his eyes—thus, using a close-up of Kennedy's eyes—it later fades to the real footage from the CBS News Bulletin where President Kennedy's assassination was announced (01:00:14-01:00:17). Then, the television cuts to file footage of the journalist Walter Cronkite¹⁰⁴ making the famous announcement about the President's murder as he takes his glasses off. However, the movie is silent now and the audience cannot hear Cronkite's voice (01:00:19-01:00:25). In real life, the afternoon of Kennedy's assassination, the soap opera *As the World Turns*¹⁰⁵ was being broadcasted as any other regular day when the CBS News Bulletin interrupted it. This bulletin briefly shared with the nation the terrible news from Texas:

¹⁰⁴ Walter Cronkite (1916-2009) was one of the most famous news presenters and journalists in the United States. He was the presenter of one of the most watched television news in America, the CBS Evening News.

¹⁰⁵ *As the World Turns* was an American television soap opera created by Irna Phillips for CBS which was broadcasted during more than fifty years, from 1956 until 2010.

Here's a bulletin from CBS News. In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President's Kennedy's motorcade in Downtown Dallas. The first report says that President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting. (Cronkite 00:00:26-00:00:42)

After this announcement the CBS carried on with the transmission of the soap opera. Some minutes later, Walter Cronkite went on air to give the latest news about the President's situation: "From Dallas, Texas. President Kennedy died at 1pm at CST, 2 o'clock EST, some thirty minutes ago" (00:01:12-00:01:30). This is precisely the same exact footage that it is shown in *The Butler*, Walter Cronkite's close up of his face when making this historical announcement is one of the most iconic moments in the history of the United States. Lee Daniels may have included it to add authenticity in times of a major crisis that challenged the notion of equal rights for all.

7.5 1964 – The Johnson Administration

*President Johnson just passed the greatest piece of civil rights legislation since Lincoln freed the slaves, it's gonna to be very difficult to pass another bill anytime soon.*¹⁰⁶

Kennedy's assassination news came as a heavy blow to millions of people all over the world. It shocked those who worked with him at the White House. As for the people in the United States, most felt stranded once again because President Kennedy had helped the civil rights fight considerably. Lyndon B. Johnson, though, became the 36th President of the country right after Kennedy's passed away. It was obvious that Johnson's personality was really different from that of Kennedy's. As *The Butler* shows, compared to John F. Kennedy, Johnson talks tough but deep down he is also close to the people he works with (01:05:08-01:05:35). As it was previously dealt with in the historical context, this was the year when Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2nd. This new law prohibited discrimination in public places as well as integrated schools and other public facilities. The signing of this new civil rights is not included in *The Butler*, but that does not mean that it is not mentioned in the movie as it is a seminal moment in the history of the civil rights movement.

Later in *The Butler*, the movie takes us to the Holloway's house where the Gaines' and the Carter's families have been invited to a party. As it might happen at any gathering, they start talking about the current political situation in their country. Helen Holloway mentions in passing something that his husband has told her about Martin Luther King Jr. and the right to vote: "James said that

¹⁰⁶ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler* (01:07:18-01:07:25).

Dr. King told the President that we would be going to the streets down south for our right to vote” (01:06:27-01:06:32). After this conversation, both Carter and Cecil are shocked because his workmate has been sharing some insights from the White House with his spouse which is strictly forbidden. Gloria takes advantage of the conversation and asks her husband “Honey, you think the President ought to do something about the voting rights bill?” (01:07:13-01:07:17) to check whether Cecil knows something about it. Absolutely sure of himself, Cecil answers: “President Johnson just passed the greatest piece of civil rights legislation since Lincoln freed the slaves, it’s going to be very difficult to pass another bill anytime soon” (01:07:18-01:07:25) to which everyone agrees. Therefore, although Daniels’ does not include any real footage of the president or recreated President Johnson’s signing the bill, or addressing the event, it is somewhat present in the movie as the lead characters discuss it. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was welcome because it forbade discrimination at different levels. As far as the black community was concerned it helped to recognize them as first class citizens—as whites were—something hundreds of people had been fighting to achieve for decades. Many people died while they struggled, and large numbers of people were still in jail because they supported equality and justice for all. It is no wonder, then, that African American people’s faith on the presidential administration was restored once it was clear that Johnson was ready to alter the system and support the claim that the black community was part and parcel of the United States of America.

Another event worth mentioning is the assassination of Malcolm X on February 21th, 1965. He had been an important black figure—albeit controversial—for the African American community during the civil rights fight.

Although, Daniels does not deal in depth with this black Muslim leader in the movie, Malcolm X is mentioned in passing when Louis and Carol are walking down an alley with some friends after attending one of Malcolm X's speeches. They are all carrying flyers that read "Malcolm X Speaks Tonight" (01:08:37-01:09:20), This talk is part of the Malcolm X Speaking Tour that Malcolm did back in 1965 just before his death. They are talking about the event but the camera focuses on Louis' and Carol's exchange. While Louis does not truly agree with Malcolm's approach, Carol seems to like his methodology. Louis says "I'm not sure what to make of Malcolm X" (01:08:37-01:08:38), to what Carol answers: "I know what to make of him. Gotta better plan in place than Dr. King" (01:08:38-01:08:41). Thus, touching the different ideologies of the respective black leaders — that is, King's non-violent protests versus Malcolm X use of violence "by any means". However this is the only time that Malcolm X is mentioned throughout the whole feature film. Perhaps, the reason behind this absence may be related to the fact that Cecil Gaines has not met the leader personally. The same could be said about other figures from the movement such as Martin Luther King Jr., who is barely present in *The Butler*.

Undoubtedly, the most important events that took place in 1965 were the marches from Selma to Montgomery¹⁰⁷ in favor of equal rights which led to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by President Johnson. The first of these non-violent marches took place on March 7, 1965, and it was led by Hosea Williams and John Lewis. The march went peacefully until they reached

¹⁰⁷ *Selma* (2014), the movie, was directed by African American female director Ava DuVernay, to honor the 50th anniversary of the historical March on Selma led by King. The movie received rave reviews and critical acclaim together with some others which questioned DuVernay's film historical accuracy. For those who complained about the re-interpretation of historical events, DuVernay reminded the critics that *Selma* was not a historical documentary but a "work of art". As I try to prove in this dissertation, *The Butler* is truthful to historical events, thus, becoming a serious tool for the learning of the Civil Rights Movement period.

the bridge as it is shown in *Eyes on the Prize* (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:21:03-00:21:44). The real footage shows how the protestors have already started marching across the bridge when they encountered some law enforcement officers wearing gas masks who told them to disperse because the march was not authorized and, therefore, it could not happen (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:22:15-00:23:05). The protestors stopped on their tracks and the police officers approached the marches. However, they did not move an inch which led to the subsequent altercation and the use of brutal violence by the police (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:23:06-00:23:28).

To refer to this event, Daniels inserts some real archival footage which cover the full screen and where black protestors are being pushed, hit and battered by policemen on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma (01:10:29-01:10:42). These images are quite similar to the ones that appear in the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* where viewers are witness to the policemen’s choreography or violence – they push and beat marchers who start falling on the ground while others, in panic, caused an stampede (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:23:29-00:23:51). Note that, Cecil’s voice telling what happened in Selma is heard over the real footage images shown on television: “Once again, them kids got beat. This one was so bad that the press called it Bloody Sunday” (01:10:34-01:10:41). Immediately after this scene the action of the movie moves to the White House where viewers see President Johnson watching the news about Selma surrounded by three different television sets.

On the first television, Mike Wallace¹⁰⁸ appears delivering the news in the *CBS Morning News* and the video includes real footage from the program that was broadcasted in 1965 (01:10:48-01:10:54). On the screen in the middle, some close up images about African American marchers wounded and lying on the ground are shown (01:10:54-01:11:01). These images are exactly the same ones that appear in *Eyes on the Prize* which clearly show how violent the police attacks were to the point that people could not get up from the floor after they have been brutally beaten (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:23:53-00:23:59). Finally, on the third television, there is some footage of the police officers using tear gas to disperse the crowd on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Besides, there are images of people fainted as the result of the gas while, at the same time, the screaming from terrified people can be heard on the background (01:10:48-01:10:54).

All, these images are also real and they are collected in *Eyes on the Prize* where they can be seen clearer on a full screen (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:24:00-00:24:17). It was the horror of those images and everything that happened that day what made journalists refer to it as “Bloody Sunday”, as Cecil mentions earlier in *The Butler*. Given the seriousness of the situation, the narrator in *Eyes on the Prize* clarifies that on that Sunday night “television networks broke their regular programming to show these scenes to a national audience. ABC interrupted its prime time movie” (“Bridge to Freedom (1965)” 00:27:03-00:27:11). These atrocious events helped to completely change the

¹⁰⁸ Mike Wallace (1918-2012) was an American journalist, actor and media persona. Since 1968, Wallace was one of the presenters for CBS' *60 Minutes* until he retired in 2006. Wallace interviewed many politicians, celebrities and academics such as Martin Luther King Jr., Salvador Dalí or Barbra Streisand, among others.

way American people perceived the south. They finally realized, together with President Johnson, that some legal measures needed to be taken urgently.

On March 15th, only eight days after Selma, President Johnson delivered a nationally televised speech where he addressed the events at Selma to later announce that he was planning to pass a bill to the Congress so every American citizen would have an equal right to vote. Doubtlessly, this voting rights speech is shown in *The Butler* together with the recreation of the real one that Johnson delivered on the Senate floor. However, *The Butler's* Lyndon B. Johnson's discourse is made up of new sections written by Danny Strong mixed with some real words said by the president himself in 1965. Liev Schreiber's President Johnson says: "Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. Yet the harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and woman are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes" (01:11:32-01:11:49). These words somewhat summarize what the real President Johnson said in his considerably longer real speech. Following, Daniels' President Johnson recites "it's all of us that must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice" (01:12:00-01:12:09), thus, repeating President Johnson's exact same words in his Voting Rights Speech as it can be seen in the real footage included in *Eyes on the Prize* ("Bridge to Freedom (1965)" 00:42:11-00:42:26). Schreiber's President Johnson finished his speech by saying "and we shall overcome" (01:12:10-01:12:12). Moreover, a photo of President Johnson signing the rights voting bill on August 6, 1965, can be seen in the series *Eyes on the Prize* ("Bridge to Freedom (1965)" 00:54:59-00:55:09) at the end of this episode as a way of closure for this year which changed the future of the United States.

7.6 1968 – Memphis, Tennessee

*Even as I stand at this hour, I cannot even allow hate to enter my heart at this time for it was sickness, not meanness, that killed him.*¹⁰⁹

Right after Johnson's Voting Rights Act speech concludes, the representation of the year 1968 in *The Butler* begins by showing the viewers some real archival footage from the Vietnam War where bombs exploding and soldiers running across the battlefield are shown (01:12:13-01:12:24). Then, the movie cuts to some real videos of hippie protesters outside the White House who shout against the Vietnam War and scream the following rhyme: "Hey hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today? Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" (01:12:26-01:12:30). Then, some more archival video about some demonstrations against the Vietnam War are presented. The audience can see people holding banners until there is a close-up shot of one of them that reads: "I don't give a damn for Uncle Sam. I ain't going to Vietnam" (01:12:31-01:12:33). Next, the movie shows an extremely worried Johnson inside his bedroom in the White House (01:12:34-01:12:40), while the chant from the protestors can still be heard in the background. Daniels chooses to film a scene that shows one of the African American women who works at the White House cleaning a mirror and saying hopelessly: "I wish they'd shut up" (01:12:42-01:12:43). In doing so, Daniels shows the viewers that even the black staff at the White House was tired of the protestors' chant. While depicting the above

¹⁰⁹ Jesse Jackson about Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in *The Butler* (01:17:15-01:17:25).

mentioned scenes in *The Butler*, Daniels does not miss the chance to represent how not only some American people were not happy with Johnson's decisions about the USA involvement in the Vietnam War, but also how that war had exhausted the president to such an extent that he had decided not to run for another presidential year. Although it is briefly addressed, Johnson's Vietnam's conflict is present in the movie through the use of archival footage which makes Johnson's reaching saturation point more authentic.

In the successive shots, the movie takes the narration to Memphis, Tennessee, where Louis is staying at the Lorraine Motel with Martin Luther King Jr., together with some other aides and students. This motel exists in reality but it is not used as a motel anymore. It has now become a Civil Rights museum. In *Eyes on the Prize*, a shot of the iconic Lorraine Motel's sign from back in 1968 is shown ("The Promised Land (1967-1968)" 00:37:48-00:37:51). Luckily, the hotel stands still in the same spot at present ("Rev. Jesse Jackson remembers"¹¹⁰ 00:02:08-00:02:10). The decision for The Lorraine motel to be kept alive as a museum is a way to keep the memory of the Civil Rights movement present. For the black community, it is obviously a significant spot charged with historical and personal meaning.

Back to Daniels' movie, they are all resting in a pretty small hotel room—The Lorraine Motel—while watching some footage of the Vietnam War on television (01:12:52:01:13:03), which moves them to talk about the current social and political situation in their country. After talking for a while with Louis, Dr. King asks him what is his father's profession, and Louis responds that he is a butler

¹¹⁰ The title has been shortened here; the full reference that can be found in the Works Cited section is "Rev. Jesse Jackson remembers MLK's assassination from balcony of Lorraine Motel".

(01:13:36-01:13:37). Louis is really embarrassed when he shares his secret with Dr. King but—to Louis Gaines’ surprise—King affirms that “the black domestic plays an important role in our history” (01:13:38-01:13:40). With this answer, both director Daniels and scriptwriter Strong are undoubtedly trying to honor the people who have experienced the horror of American slavery. Probably, that might be a way to show the viewers that although several laws have been passed thanks to people’s struggle and the Civil Rights Movement, it should never be forgotten what happened in the country during the slavery era, when millions of African American people had to work for white people under the most dehumanizing conditions. In *The Butler*, Louis does think that King is making fun of his father’s and he quickly adds: “I didn’t tell you that to make fun of me” (01:13:41-01:13:42). Immediately after, King sits straight to talk to him in a very serious tone. For some, it is in this particular scene where King makes use of some of the most meaningful words when he addresses a still young and unexperienced Louis:

Young brother, the black domestic defies racial stereotypes by being hardworking and trustworthy. He slowly breaks down racial hatred with the example of his strong work ethic and dignified character. Now while we perceive the butler or the maid as being subservient, in many ways they are subversive without even knowing it. (01:13:44-01:14:15)

While Dr. King speaks, some images of Cecil working at the White House are shown. It could be concluded that, while the civil rights leader is talking about how the past has also helped the African American community to prosper, the audiences can see Cecil serving white people. However, according to King’s words, that apparently subservient job might be in itself subversive. As

subversive as to exchange the plantation house for the White House. Even though, *The Butler* only deals in passing with the slavery times at the beginning of the movie, the screenwriter does not forget to address the people who indirectly helped Cecil to be where he is working today, and pays a homage to them. By so doing, King's words might help Louis to realize that his father's role in society is also important in its very own way. Including a reference about past centuries in a movie that deals with the struggle of the civil rights movement of the sixties is essential for the self-esteem of the African American community.

Continuing with the same scene, the camera takes the viewers back to the exterior of the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King Jr. is standing in the balcony while smoking a cigarette (01:16:02-01:16:06). The similarity between the fictional model is uncanny when it is compared to the real motel ("The Promised Land (1967-1968)" 00:37:43-00:37:47) as both buildings have the same colors covering the structure and there is also a parking in front of the motel. Nevertheless, it is also accurate the fact that Daniels' Martin Luther King Jr. is standing in front of the room 306 which is the one that Dr. King occupied with his people the day he was shot.

Next, a close up of King Jr.'s is shown on the full screen while the camera is moving backwards to capture the whole exterior of the Lorraine Motel. Here, an off-screen newscast is reporting his assassination. The broadcast news recording that is present in Daniels' movie is an extract from the broadcast news where the journalist Walter Cronkite, delivers the news of King's murder. In *The Butler*, Cronkite's same exact words pronounced back in 1968 can be heard as it can be seen in the archival video from the CBS channel ("1968 King

Assassination Report (CBS News)" 00:00:23-00:00:40). The words that can be heard as a voice-over are the following:

Dr. Martin Luther King, the apostle of non-violence in the civil rights movement has been shot to death in Memphis, Tennessee. Police have issued an all-points bulletin for a well-dressed young white man seen running from the scene. Officers also reportedly chased and fired on a radio equipped car containing two white men. (01:15:57-01:16:14)

As the newscast is heard in the background of the action, the camera moves to focus on Cecil who is driving on his way back home in Washington D.C. Cecil is listening to Cronkite's news about King on the radio when he suddenly identifies three black men running towards a liquor store in the street—just in front of his car—when they throw a Molotov cocktail at it (01:16:11-01:16:20). The butler is terrified, but he keeps on driving as he just wants to get home safely (01:16:21-01:16:23). However, the situation gets worse when he encounters crowds of people in the streets who are blocking the roads. When he cannot drive any longer he decides to get out of his car and walk home (01:16:23-01:16:26). The whole street is a chaos, most of the shops are burning, some people are crying disconsolately, some others are screaming at the top of their lungs while some others are hurt on the floor waiting for medical attention (01:16:27-01:17:02). Cecil has never felt this lost before, the whole black community felt abandoned once again after King's death and mixed feeling of sadness and fear inundated the streets of Washington D.C.

But Washington D.C. was not the only city that experienced the sadness that came over the black community when their civil rights leader and hope for a

better future was killed in cold blood. Riots like the ones represented in Daniels' movie happened in real life all over the country. Other cities such as Chicago and Baltimore where the African American community is really large could also reflect the traumatic loss of a nevertheless controversial leader. The sadness filled the streets of America the night that Dr. King was killed. And as it is said in *Eyes on the Prize*, "that night American cities exploded" ("The Promised Land (1967-1968)" 00:40:47-00:40:48). The streets caught on fire caused by the anger that African American people felt after their Messiah had been taken away from them. Some archival videos of the cities burning and people struggling to understand what was happening in their country that night are shown in *Eyes on the Prize* ("The Promised Land (1967-1968)" 00:40:47-00:41:42). They resemble those depicted in Daniels' movie. Obviously, *The Butler* portrays the reaction that King's assassination caused in the African communities. Although not all black people agreed with King's non-violent philosophy, but would rather support Malcolm X's more violent discourse, it is safe to say that Dr. King's passing away was one of the most difficult moments for the whole community

To echo how the black people were feeling on that night, the screenwriter Danny Strong allows the audience to listen to Cecil's stream of consciousness while he was walking the burning streets of Washington only a few hours after Dr. King was shot. In a voice-over, Cecil recalls:

I didn't know if I was gonna get home alive. It was the first time that I felt like I didn't belong in my own neighborhood. The whole world was changing and I didn't know where I fit in. (01:16:41-01:16:56).

Through these words the audience can have a better understanding about how hopeless and disoriented black people felt after King's assassination. Cecil's words are heard while some more images of people crying and fighting out of rage and confusion are shown. It does not take a lot of time until the police appear to try and calm the situation (01:16:41-01:17:02). At the same time, Carol and Louis are watching the news about King's assassination on tv. The footage shown is a real interview with Jesse Jackson¹¹¹. Louis and Carol are devastated and they listen attentively to Jesse Jackson's words:

To some extent, Dr. King has been a buffer the last two years between the black community and the white community. The white people do not know it but the white people's best friend is dead. The black people's leader, our Moses, the once in a four or five hundred years leader, has been taken from us by hatred and bitterness. Even as I stand at this hour, I cannot even allow hate to enter my heart at this time for it was sickness, not meanness, that killed him. (01:17:00-01:17:25)

Once again, this real interview with Jesse Jackson can be found in Henry Louis Gates Jr's documentary *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* ("Episode 6: A More Perfect Union (1968-2013)" 00:02:01-00:02:11), as well as in a special news report about King's murder from 1968 ("1968 Special Report: The Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." 00:06:52-00:07:21). By choosing to use some real videos and not recreating them, the director brings another dose of

¹¹¹ Jesse Jackson (1941-) is a Baptist minister and a civil rights activist. He also served as a shadow U.S Senator for the District of Columbia from 1991 to 1997. Jackson is the founder of the Rainbow/Push non-profit organization that pursues social justice through civil rights and political activist. One of Jackson's sons, Jonathan Luther Jackson, is the leader of this organization nowadays. He worked with Martin Luther King Jr. during the Selma to Montgomery marches and even King offered him to work in the SCLC office in Chicago in 1965. Jackson was present the day that King's was shot and he was considered for a while as the perfect successor for Dr. King.

realism to *The Butler*. This time is highly relevant because the targeted killing of Martin Luther King Jr., profoundly affected the African American community. It painfully damaged the souls of black people who had been working for change for decades.

Forthcoming, Louis decides to come back home to visit his family and when that happens he is wearing black cargo pants, a black leather jacket and a beret over an Afro hairstyle (01:18:07-01:18:09). Some images of real members of the Black Panther Party wearing those pieces of clothing as uniforms can be seen in *Eyes on the Prize* when the SNCC and the Black Panther Party are meeting for a debate (“Power! (1966-1968)” 00:33:31-00:33:40). There are also more images of the members in full leather outfits and afro-hairstyles in VH1’s documentary series *Lords of the Revolution* (“Episode 3: The Black Panthers” 00:07:22-00:07:27). Actually, the clothing that the black panthers wore “became very much a part of the look of the sixties and pop culture of the sixties” affirms New Yorker Black Panther Jamal Joseph¹¹² (“Episode 3: The Black Panthers” 00:07:44-00:07:49). They also became a symbol for the black young people of the era.

However, Louis does not come home alone but Carol is with him and they all have a family dinner together (01:18:12-01:18:21). Note that Carol has the same hairstyle and wears the same type of clothes that Louis which clashes with the traditional style of the Gaines’ household. As it happens in any familiar meeting, they start talking about politics and what is going to happen after

¹¹² Jamal Joseph is an American writer, activist and educator, among other things, who was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Joseph was also one of the Panther 21 which was a group who was prosecuted by the law for being accused of arrested for, allegedly, planned coordinated bombing and rifle attacks on several police stations in New York.

King's murder. The Gaines' oldest son thinks that "Dr. King's philosophy ultimately got him murdered. It worked when we started, but now it's time to take the next step which is politics" (01:19:02-01:19:10). The whole family is shocked to hear the statement. Louis gets very serious and adds that "although we have started our own political party" (01:19:25-01:19:27). This makes the whole family understand that he is being serious. This is the time when Carol clears up the uncomfortable situation and says in an arrogant way that the party that they are part of now is called "The Black Panther Party" (01:19:36-01:19:38). Instantly, Cecil looks at his son half confused and asks "What kind of name is that? What that stand for?" (01:19:39-01:19:43) to what Carol quickly responds in a patronizing way: "We provide free breakfast for children, free medical clinics, free clothing and self defense classes" (01:19:43-01:19:49). Carol's informative words can be related to Bobby Seale, Black Panther Party's co-founder summary of what the Black Panther Party fights for: "We wanted land, house, education, clothing, justice and peace" ("Power! (1966-1968)" 00:31:15-00:31:17). As a matter of fact, the Free Breakfast Program was something that really encouraged kids to feel proud of being black at the same time the party made sure that they were well fed to properly pay attention in class. Some archival footage about the breakfasts are collected in *Eyes on the Prize* where it can be seen that members of the party are cooking the meals for the kids while some other are taking care of the children. They are even cheering them up with songs ("Power! (1966-1968)" 00:31:18-00:31:55).

Admittedly, Gloria is interested in the last part of Carol's speech and she asks "And why y'all need self-defense?" (01:19:50-01:19:51). Louis quickly responds: "We ain't getting' beat no more!" (01:19:52-01:19:53).Everybody

keeps quiet while Cecil and Gloria look at each other with a very worried semblance. They also feel uncomfortable as they are unable to react. They know very little about this Black Panther new party.

Gloria decides to change the topic of the conversations and she starts talking about a movie that Cecil and her had watched not long ago: “Me and your daddy saw a wonderful movie the other night, reminded me so much of you” (01:20:00-01:20:03). Louis smiles at what his mother is saying as he is very interested until Gloria reveals the title of the movie: “*In the Heat of the Night* with Sidney Poitier. Lord, Sidney Poitier. I love Sidney Poitier. Sid--“ (01:20:10-01:20:18). When he hears the movie’s title, Louis gets angry and interrupts his mother’s talking: “Sidney Poitier is the white man’s fantasy of what he wants us to be” (01:20:18-01:20:21). Cecil tries to stay calm and replies also in a very calmly way “But his movies have him fighting for equal rights” (01:20:23-01:20:25). Louis cannot stay silent and interrupts his father this time by saying “Only in a way that is acceptable to the white status quo” (01:20:25-01:20:27) which makes Carol laugh. Although, Sidney Poitier’s movies dealt with race and interracial relations some people thought that the representation of the black community was not fair because everything was whitewashed. Indeed, Manzoor talks about how Poitier “was accused of being a white person’s fantasy of blackness”. Notwithstanding Poitier’s presence on the screen helped extremely the representation of blacks in Hollywood movies. In fact, Poitier was the founder of the “African American Students Association which provided university scholarships to Kenyan students. Among the students who benefited from the program was a Kenyan called Barack Obama,” Manzoor

writes. Thus, in some way, Sidney Poitier helped Obama to get to the White House by giving him access to a good education.

In *The Butler*, Cecil looks upset because Louis is making fun of someone that he admires and he says hopelessly “He just won the Academy Award...he’s breaking down barriers for all of us” (01:20:34-01:20:37) to prove that the actor is achieving things that an African American could only dream of a couple of decades ago. On his part, as Newton writes, “Poitier was the first black male to engage the American national consciousness at a time when the prevailing image of a film star was still that of someone white”. He concludes that the African American community felt really connected to Sidney Poitier. Moreover, Staples highlights that Poitier’s presence in the movies opened people’s mind and allowed “Americans to envision black people not just as butlers and maids, but also as doctors, psychiatrists, engineers, war correspondents, teachers and police detectives” a really important contribution for the African people who still felt inferior within the American society.

However, Louis keeps replying to his father in a very arrogant way and sharing his opinion about Poitier, as if he knew more about that subject than anyone who’s sat around the table: “By being white, by acting white. Sidney Poitier is nothing but a rich Uncle Tom” (01:20:38-01:20:43). To a certain extent, it is interesting that Louis would verbalize the feelings of part of the African American population at that time.. They were surrounded by the Sidney Poitier revolution but they did not like that he always played the same kind of role. That is, as Mason argues: “a good guy in a totally white world, with no wife, no sweetheart, no woman to love or kiss, helping the white man solve the white man's problem”. According to Staples, Poitier has defended himself in multiple

occasions against “critics who attacked him during the 1960's as an "Uncle Tom" and a "house nigger”. Even Mason himself considered Poitier “unreal, as he has for nearly two decades, playing essentially the same role, the antiseptic one-dimensional hero.”

Nevertheless, Cecil keeps talking serenely but it shows that he is hurt because of his son’s words and behavior towards the whole family. Cecil reproached his son’s attitude of superiority and the fact that Louis has been throwing away his money for the university:

Look at you. You all puffed up. You got your hat on your head. Coming in here. Saying whatever you want. (. . .) You don’t even think you need to go to school even though I gave you the money. (01:20:46-01:21:01)

In fact, Cecil is very angry and disappointed at his son because he did not do anything fruitful with the money that he gave him and that makes Cecil feel like a bad father but also like an imbecile who had been working really hard for his son to have a better future. *The Butler’s* protagonist cannot hold it anymore and he calls him out by shouting at him: “Get the hell out of my house” (01:21:13-01:21:15), which makes everyone stand up, even Gloria rushes in between her husband and her son to stop the fight. In the heat of the moment, Louis screams to his father: “I’m sorry, Mister Butler! I didn’t mean to make fun of your hero” (01:21:24-01:21:26) which infuriates his mother even more to the point that she slaps Louis on his face (01:21:26-01:21:29). Everyone in the room stands still while Gloria pronounces the final words before Louis and Carol furiously leave the house, “Everything you are, and everything you has is because of that butler” (01:21:29-01:21:33). Cecil, Gloria and Charlie sit back

again around the table but an awkward silence follows. What has just happened has broken the family forever.

7.7 1969 – The Nixon Administration

*I promise you, they'll always beware of the nigger with a gun.*¹¹³

The next part of the movie begins with the Nixon administration and the action takes us inside the Oval Office, where Cecil is serving some tea. Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman¹¹⁴ and Domestic Affairs Assistant John Ehrlichman¹¹⁵ (played by Alex Manette and Colin Walker, respectively) are having a meeting with the president to discuss some important issues (01:24:58-01:25:11). The sequence in the White House alternates with some images of the Black Panthers reunited at their headquarters in Oakland, California as a way to contrast both political situations (01:25:12-01:25:18). By alternating both settings, the spectator can observe the President Nixon discussing how his administration will deal with the black power movement while the actual black panthers are talking about their objectives as a political group at their center of operations.

¹¹³ Eldridge Huggins in *The Butler* (01:26:32-01:26:36).

¹¹⁴ Bob Haldeman (1926-1993) was an American politician and businessman who worked as White House Chief of Staff for Richard Nixon. He also was involved in the Watergate Scandal and sent to prison for eighteen months.

¹¹⁵ John Ehrlichman (1925-1999) was the assistant of the president Nixon for Domestic Affairs. Ehrlichman was also implicated in the Watergate Scandal for several reasons and was sent to prison for almost two years.

At the Oakland headquarters, the Black Panther's spokesperson Eldridge Huggins¹¹⁶ is explaining to some black panthers what the party is about. All the black panthers, including Louis and Carol, are wearing black jackets, afro-hairstyles and berets and they are listening carefully to what Huggins is saying:

You know, the pigs in the media describe us as terrorists. A terrorist is one who terrorizes and frightens others. We're the ones getting terrorized! How can we exist in peace when we are scared to walk down the street to the store? (01:25:12-01:25:27)

With this quotation, the screenwriter shows that the media portrayed the Black Panthers as a violent and merciless group while they perceived themselves as a group who was just taking care of their community because they have always felt that their Presidents only cared about cleansing their images and not giving equal opportunities to black people. Consecutively, the action takes us back to the Oval Office where President Nixon and his advisers are discussing which actions they should take to please the Black Panthers—at the same time they do something that benefits the whole country and their administration. While Cecil is still there, President Nixon explains what his perfect idea would be to support the black power in a way that is beneficial for the whole country, at the same time that distract people from pushing him to do something about desegregation:

What if Nixon promotes black power to mean black businesses, and we find ways to support black entrepreneurs? We pass the buck on

¹¹⁶ His real name was Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998) but he is referred to in Daniels' movie as Eldridge Huggins. Cleaver was an American political activist and writer who was one of the first leaders of the Black Panther Party.

desegregation to the courts, but push black enterprise to win the 20% of the votes that could swing our way... (01:25:36-01:25:49)

By adding this explanation, *The Butler* is addressing the Office of Minority Business that Nixon's administration started in 1969 to support black business owners. Actually, the movie makes a big statement when it overlaps the Oval Office action with the action taking place in the Black Panther's headquarters so audiences can see how society was divided into two when it came to how the black power should be perceived. The majority of the white community perceived the Black Panther party as a threat while a greater number of the black community thought that the black power was just trying to help and defend their lives. However, it is also true that Daniels' movie gives a fairly violent depiction of the Black Panthers when Eldridge Huggins says things like "It's time that we take a stand against these injustices that has plagued our community! They take one of ours? We takin' two of theirs!" (01:26:00-01:26:08) or "I promise you they'll always beware the nigger with a gun" (01:26:32-01:26:36). Nevertheless, it clearly shows audiences that President Nixon was against Black Power as well as very much afraid of its repercussions.

Back to the Oval Office, Ehrlichman tells the president: "We just need to make sure that Nixon's black power doesn't equate Nixon with the Black Panthers" (01:26:10-01:26:15) to what the president answers rapidly while using a condescending tone: "Have you lost your mind? Did you read Hoover's last memo on that?" (01:26:16-01:26:18). With that response, it is clear to the viewers that President Nixon supports what Hoover said and if there is still any doubts about the president's stance, Nixon later adds "I gave him the green light to gun those sons of bitches" (01:26:20-01:26:22) which makes Cecil tremble

because of his son. Although *The Butler* mentions Hoover briefly, his addition makes sense as he was a very important figure in the history of the Black Panther Party. Therefore, Nixon's place in this dispute is fairly represented in the movie while the representation of the black panthers may be a bit exaggerated¹¹⁷. However, it would be justified if the director aimed to explain why they were seen as a violent group. In an age where Martin Luther King Jr. was still very present in a large number of black people's lives, the fact of having a new political group that was meant to represent the black community but who justified the use of violence was something really difficult for some members of the community to understand and accept.

Also in passing, the movie brings up the issue of the Breakfast Program that the Black Panther Party carried out as a way of honoring their community. It can be heard at the back of the main action how Huggins asks the rest of black panthers how the program is going "How many kids we got coming to the breakfast tomorrow morning?" (01:26:54-01:26:56), to which a black panther responds: "Got about twenty-five to thirty." (01:26:56-01:26:58). Huggins nods proudly and reminds the panthers the reason why they are working so hard on the Breakfast Program: "Twenty-five to thirty kids will be able to go to school and focus on their lessons" (01:26:58-01:27:02) which lifts up the spirits of all the panthers.

Then, the movie cuts to a real photo of a group of Black Panthers (01:28:18-01:28:23) while some newscasts refers to the massive killings of the black power and the altercations that took place between the panthers and the police.

¹¹⁷ For more information on Eldridge Cleaver's ideology, read his memoir *Soul on Ice* (1968), written while he was in jail.

Note that, all these voice-over are from archival footage, and all of the statements overlap each other which excite a feeling of anger or annoyance in the audience. It also clarifies how the panthers felt when they were prosecuted by the police and how the police felt threatened by the party:

Today, a day after police shot it out with the Black Panthers killing two of them, they raided an apartment behind...The shooting of 26 panthers in the past year may represent a national campaign by police to wipeout the Panthers... The immediate violent, criminal reaction in shooting at announced police officers emphasizes the extreme viciousness of the Black Panther Party... (01:28:14-01:28:32)

While the newscast can still be heard in the background, there is a full screen image of the chalkboard placed at the Black Panthers headquarters that it had also seen previously behind Eldridge Huggins. On the blackboard there are some rules for the panthers to follow: "1. Speak politely, 2. Pay fairly for what you buy, 3. Return everything you borrow, 4. Pay for anything you need" (01:28:24-01:28:35) as a way to show the audiences that the Black Panthers were not as violent as the media described them. These rules also remind to the "Ten Point Program" written by Seale and Newton in 1968 when laying the foundations for the Black Panther Party.

Following, the shot of the blackboard fades away to show some archival images on full screen of the television musical show *Soul Train*¹¹⁸ which had been very popular among the African American community for many decades,

¹¹⁸ *Soul Train* (1971-2006) was an American television program that was about music and dance and featured African Americans performers and performances. Don Cornelius was the creator of the format but also the host and executive producer of this television show that shaped the way that black people dressed and lived in America.

while the 1975s song “Party Is a Groovy Thing” by The People’s Choice¹¹⁹ is playing on the background (01:28:36-01:28:49). The veracity of those images can be confirmed when they are compared to some other footage of the show in different documentaries that exist about *Soul Train*. For example, we find them in *Original Soul Train Dancers Reminisce on What It Took To Dance on Soul Train!* (00:02:14-00:02:25) and *Soul Train: The Hippest Trip in America* (00:17:09-00:17:39), there are some minutes of real footage that are very similar to what is shown in *The Butler*. Perhaps, Daniels’ *The Butler* included some real footage about the television show *Soul Train* because it was quite popular among the black community, mostly during the seventies, as it helped to bring the community together while it gave some room for the African Americans on television. It should be highlighted that the regular performers on the show became real celebrities among the black community who looked up to them, mostly the young population. As it is explained in *Original Soul Train Dancers Reminisce on What It Took To Dance on Soul Train!*, “the soul train gang soon became icons” (00:01:58-00:02:00) and through the weekly television show they all “shifted the aesthetics and defined black beauty, fashion and what dance looked like in America” (00:02:03-00:02:10).

In Daniels’ movie, Gloria appears dancing to *Soul Train* which is playing on the television while wearing an afro-hairstyle wig and a black and white suit (01:28:50-01:28:56). *De facto*, perhaps Gloria is wearing a wig with a different hairstyle because she has been influenced by the television show in which the performers embraced and showed their natural hair as a way to prove that black

¹¹⁹ The People’s Choice (1971-1985) was an American funk band from Philadelphia formed by Frank Brunson and David Thompson. Although they had several vocalists, their biggest hits were instrumental songs but their debut single “I Likes to Do It” was a nationwide success. They also received a gold disc with another of their singles called “Do It Any Way You Wanna”.

is beautiful. That must have been a big shock for women of Gloria's age who have grown up thinking that they had to straighten their hair to look beautiful. Now they had to wear wigs to feel beautiful about their roots.

While Gloria is immersed in her dancing, Cecil walks in the house from work and they get ready to celebrate Cecil's birthday but the doorbell rings. When Cecil opens the door there are two military officers standing in front of him, and though they do not say a word, Cecil instantly knows that they came with bad news about his youngest son Charlie (01:31:35-01:31:54). Standing still, Cecil stares at them while saying repeatedly: "You got the wrong house... It's the wrong house" (01:31:45-01:31:52), before closing the door right in front of the military men because he feels unable to face the truth. Consequently, the movie takes the viewers to Charlie's funeral where his coffin is covered with the American flag and is taken to the cemetery in a carriage (01:32:20-01:32:24). Everyone that works alongside Cecil in the White House are there to express their condolences to the Gaines' family; all the black butlers and staff accompanied by their families look very sad at what has happened to someone so young (01:32:26-01:32:41). Some military men fire into the air as a way to honor Charlie's job in Vietnam (01:32:42-01:32:50). But Cecil and Gloria are staring at the coffin heartbroken because they had not only lost their youngest son but also because Louis refused to attend his brother's funeral (01:32:50-01:33:12). This scene helps Daniels to show how to celebrate a funeral for a soldier who had fallen in battle during the Vietnam War time.

7.8 1974 – Nixon’s Second Term

*The years started to drift by,
but the pain in my heart never went away.*¹²⁰

In Daniels’ *The Butler*, the representation of the year 1974 begins with Cecil Gaines working at the White House as he is serving a drink to President Nixon. Nixon is lying on the sofa with a weary look. Unlike the previous years, Gaines does not seem very happy to be working for a president of the United States due to the recent loss of his son Charlie. President Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate Scandal does not help much either. In fact, Cusack’s Richard Nixon is not shy to address the scandal to assure his butler that he should not worry about it: “There’s been a lot of talk of me resigning and things of that nature, but I just want you to know that it’s never gonna happen. I’m gonna come out of this thing stronger than ever” (01:34:07-01:34:19). The irony here lies in the fact that this pompous statement clashes with what later happened in reality. Although in passing, Daniels makes sure to mention Nixon’s situation because of the Watergate scandal followed by his resignation. It is also true that perhaps Daniels should have chosen a more direct discourse to refer to these issues but the director only makes a light allusion to them.

Following, there is an image montage about the most important events, stories, television shows and musical acts that are part of North American history from 1974 to 1985. This scene starts with Gaines sat on a chair while he

¹²⁰ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler* (01:36:09-01:36:15).

is watching the footage available on television. He is getting older (01:36:27-01:37:18). On the background, an original song written in 2013 by Lenny Kravitz for *The Butler* and performed by Gladys Knight¹²¹ is heard. In the first archival video that is shown, the audience is witness to Gerald Ford's pardon on Richard Nixon which took place on September 8, 1974. To summarize, the movie only includes one sentence from the whole speech which is "As we are a nation under God so I am sworn to uphold our laws" (01:36:33-01:36:38), which accurately reflects Ford's thoughts. The veracity of the video is confirmed when contrasting it with another archival video about President Ford while he is talking from the Oval Office, and where he repeats the same exact words (Ford 00:01:55-00:02:01). Next, there are some images of the Wipe Out Poverty Demonstrations that took place in Washington D.C. during the sixties. People holding banners which read "Wipe out poverty, not people!" are shown on full screen (01:36:35-01:36:36). This picture is also real as it can be seen in one of the largest websites that deal with the recollection of images, Getty Images. Thus, this exact banner and image is collected there (Footage, Film Audio Services 00:00:01-00:00:03).

Succeeding, a montage of several different images from McDonalds¹²² advertisements are shown to represent how this fast food restaurant has become a symbol of the American society all over the world (01:36:37-

¹²¹ Gladys Knight (1944-), also known as Empress of Soul, is an American singer, actress and author who won seven Grammy Awards. From the sixties to the eighties she was part of a music group called Gladys Knight & The Pips with her brother and cousins, but now Knight has a solo music career and she is considered as one of the 100 Greatest Singers of All Time by the magazine *Rolling Stone*.

¹²² McDonalds is an American fast food company, specialized in hamburgers and French fries, founded by Richard and Maurice McDonald in 1940 in Chicago, Illinois. Nowadays, McDonalds is the largest restaurant company. It serves almost seventy million people per day and it is present in more than one hundred countries.

01:36:38). Actually, the movie shows one of its most famous slogans: “Nobody can do it like McDonalds can” .That was also the inspiration to create a jingle for the adverts entitled “Nobody can do it”. Moreover, the different McDonalds representations that appear in *The Butler* are very similar to an extended advert from in which both the jingle and the slogan are used (“Nobody Can Do It Like McDonalds Can 1919 TV AD”).

Subsequent, some women parading in favor of Women’s rights appear on the screen holding a banner that reads “N.O.W Legislative One to One Committee” while one of them shouts “We need equal rights for equal pay” (01:36:39-01:36:41). These women are supporters of the American feminist organization called *NOW* (National Organization for Women), as it can be seen on the banner. *NOW* was founded in 1966 by Betty Friedan and Pauli Murray and it helped to fight for women’s equality, lesbian rights, the legalization of abortion, and the fight against anti-discrimination laws.

Then, there is a rapid image of Jimmy Carter’s inauguration followed by his handshake with the previous President, Gerald Ford (01:36:43-01:36:45). This is a real video that matches an archival video about Carter’s installation (“Inauguration of President Jimmy Carter, Part 1” 00:00:58-00:01:01). Besides, there appear some images from a demonstration in favor of Gay Rights. Although it has been difficult to find the origin of that footage, it is also true that it could be related to the Stonewall riots¹²³. In Daniels movie, though, some men are holding banners that read “Gay rights” while they shout “Unite!” are seen

¹²³ The Stonewall Riots (1969) were some spontaneous but violent demonstrations carried out by the LGBT community against policemen at the Stonewall Inn in Manhattan, New York. They are considered to be one of the first movements in favor of gay rights. The Inn is still honored nowadays because of its importance within the LGBT community.

(01:36:45-01:36:46).. A series of spontaneous demonstrations by gay members followed after the Stonewall uprising.

Next, some images of Gladys Knight and The Pips appear a couple of times while they are performing throughout the video montage. First, there is a close-up of Gladys' face (01:36:46-01:36:48). As a matter of fact, this performance is part of the British television program Top of the Pops¹²⁴ where Gladys Knight and The Pips were invited in 1976 to sing their hit *Midnight Train to Georgia*. Therefore, some footage from that performance has been used for *The Butler* such as: the same exact close-up of Gladys' face is shown ("Gladys Knight & The Pips – Midnight Train to Georgia Live (1976)" 00:01:53-00:01:57), as well as the images of the whole band performing are present in the original archival video that exists of the television show ("Gladys Knight & The Pips – Midnight Train to Georgia Live (1976)" 00:02:14-00:02:16). The truth is that, Daniels was thoughtful enough to include in the montage some images of the first years of Gladys Knight's music career while one of her latest song is heard in the background. What makes *The Butler* different from many other movies is that apart from dealing with the civil rights movement. Daniels pays attention to every detail to make the movie as reliable and truthful as possible. The soundtrack is just a vivid example.

After the energizing and empowering performance, the television shows a highway filled up with cars. The voice-over of a news reporter informs: "Nearly half of our oil is now imported" (01:36:57-01:36:58). This clip is related to the

¹²⁴ Top of The Pops was a British music television show created by Johnnie Steward for the BBC network and it broadcasted from 1964 to 2006. The shows consisted of performances from the best-selling artist of each week. The first band to perform on the show was The Rolling Stones.

1979 oil crisis that occurred worldwide because of the lack of oil during the Iranian Revolution¹²⁵ that took place in the Asiatic country from January 7, 1978 to February 11, 1979. Following, the montage takes the viewers back to the Oval Office where Jimmy Carter is delivering a speech: “It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national world”, the President says effusively (01:36:58-01:37:02). This lie is part of a speech that President Carter delivered in 1979 to address American citizens concerning the lack of self-esteem and motivation that American society—as a whole—have been experiencing due to the world-wide dislike of the Vietnam War, and the lies behind the Watergate Scandal. The American society felt that their country has been nothing but a mess for the past decade. As a result, President Carter thought it necessary to talk to his citizens. Carter’s speech was nationally televised in July 15, 1979. *De facto*, in Daniel’s movie, President Carter’s words are the same exact words that appear in some archival footage (“CBS News Archives: Carter’s Famous Malaise Speech” 00:00:23-00:00:28).

Besides, that speech has been popularly known as the “Malaise Speech.” According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “malaise” is—“a general feeling of being ill or having no energy, or an uncomfortable feeling that something is wrong, especially with society, and that you cannot change the situation”—a definition that mirrors the discomfort of the American society about their country political situation. Interestingly enough, President Carter never mentioned the word “malaise” in his address to the nation.

¹²⁵ The Iranian Revolution was a series of demonstrations carried out by students and leftist Islamist organizations to topple the dynasty of Pahlavi and installing an Islamic Republic. These events happened between 1978 and 1979.

As for *The Butler*, Daniels also considered important to add some footage from relevant television series of that time. Thus, some clips from *Sanford and Son*¹²⁶ (01:37:01-01:37:02) and *Barney Miller*¹²⁷ (01:37:03-01:37:04) are included in the movie as a way to highlight the fact that the African American community would finally have a TV show where black people appear in the leading roles. Succeeding, there are some archival images of Ronald Reagan assassination attempt in 1981. It alternates with some images of Gladys Knight and The Pips' performance that was mentioned before. First, the audiences can see how Reagan takes refuge by getting into the car just after the first gunshots are heard (01:37:11-01:37:12). Once again, these are the same exact images of what happened and they can be contrasted with some other footage ("Reagan Assassination Attempt" 00:00:31-00:00:36). Immediately after, there are some more images of the chaos that followed the shots—people are falling on the ground, and one man from Reagan's security gets shot (01:37:14-01:37:15). As earlier in this dissertation, the veracity of the video can be confirmed when watching the archival video that deals with this assassination attempt ("Reagan Assassination Attempt" (00:00:49-00:00:53).

Finally—unexpectedly, too—to close this video montage, Daniels adds a very short clip of Diana, The Princess of Wales¹²⁸, which totally takes the

¹²⁶ *Sanford and Son* was an American comedy series that was broadcasted in the NBC from 1972 to 1977. It soon became very famous because of its use of racial humor and easy gags. *Sanford and Son* was a success during its six seasons and a precursor of many more African American sitcoms that came afterwards.

¹²⁷ *Barney Miller* was also an American sitcom television show who was set in a New York Police department and it broadcasted from 1975 to 1982 in ABC.

¹²⁸ Diana, Princess of Wales (1961-1997) was a member of the Royal British Family who married Charles, Prince of Wales. Despite her early death, Diana is still an international fashion icon. She gained a lot of popularity for her activism, as well as for her turbulent private and public life.

viewers by surprise because it is one of the few foreign historical events that are addressed in the video montage. Furthermore, by including Princess Diana of Wales, the audience understands that the Gaines' family is no longer in the seventies, but that ten years had gone by and they are now living in the late eighties—an apparently more “glamorous” decade.

7.9 1986 – The Reagan Administration

*Americans always turned a blind eye to what we had done to our own.
We look out to the world and judge.
We hear about the concentration camps,
but these camps went on for two hundred years...
right here, in America.*¹²⁹

After the video montage that summarizes the most important events from 1974 to 1985, the action of *The Butler* is set during the year 1986. Therefore, Ronald Reagan is the president of the United States and he is starting his second mandate in the White House. Cecil Gaines is still working at the presidential palace, but the year 1986 would change his life forever. It begins with Nancy Reagan's invitation for Gaines and his wife to attend the State Dinner that would take place at the White House. As a matter of fact, this invitation occurred in real life to Eugene Allen, and the director Lee Daniels chose to include that crucial moment in Allen's life as a way to underline that he has been immensely appreciated in the White House due to his expertise and professional credentials.

To a certain extent, the Reagan's invitation to an official dinner, which included the most influential people in the world, might work as a way to recompense Eugene Allen's/Cecil Gaines' impeccable career. Cecil Gaines is working at the White House, while the camera moves to Nancy Reagan walking

¹²⁹ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler*. (01:48:12-01:48:34)

down the corridor and speaking with James Baker,¹³⁰ Reagan's Secretary of the Treasury, about foreign policy. In a strictly confidential way Nancy Reagan comments: "I'm not comfortable with all the foreign policy hawks surrounding Ronnie, we need more moderates on his staff and I want a summit with the Russians. Ronnie has to meet with them face to face if we really ever gonna thaw this ice" (01:41:25-01:41:36). These lines show Nancy's, Reagan's wife, involvement in current politics. She was also an important figure within the White House. When the first lady notices Cecil, she stops her conversation with the Secretary of the Treasury and walks over to the butler. As usual, Cecil shows his best smile to Mrs. Reagan who smiles back at him before saying : "I'd like to invite you to the State Dinner next week" (01:41:55-01:41:57). Cecil responds that he will be there working as always. Nancy Reagan cannot avoid giggling at Cecil's words, but she sweetly adds: "No, not as a butler, Cecil, I'm inviting you as a guest" (01:42:00-01:42:05)), which makes Cecil feel very confused because he has never been invited to any kind of official event before. The first lady nods at him while saying: "So, we'll see you next week" —to make sure that Cecil understands that the presidential couple will be waiting for the Gaines' for dinner (01:42:14-01:42:16).

Even though Cecil's invitation to the state dinner stands out as one of the most important domestic advances during Reagan's administration, the scene from *The Butler* contributes to make the movie reliable and close to the audiences as they can feel the Cecil's previous excitement about the event.

¹³⁰ James Baker (1930-) is an American lawyer and politic who served as a White House Chief of Staff and United States Secretary of the Treasury under President Reagan's mandate, as well as the United States Secretary of State and White House Chief of Staff under President George H.W. Bush's term.

Following, the director shows the importance that the Apartheid had during Ronald Reagan's presidency by having a whole scene in the movie where the president is discussing his position about it with the Communications Director Pat Buchanan¹³¹, the Republican Senator Nancy Kassebaum¹³² together with some other republican senators. Once again, Cecil is working for the president while he is having this relevant meeting. In Daniel's film, the scene begins with President Reagan's harsh words: "If Congress passes sanctions against South Africa, I will be forced to veto those sanctions" (01:44:38-01:44:49). Senator Kassebaum rapidly answers him with intent to change the President's mind:

Well, Mr. President, we feel that would be a major mistake. The brutal repression of South African black citizens is no longer just a foreign policy issue, but a United States racial issue. We're senators from your own party. That's why we feel so comfortable in letting you know that South Africa is a human rights disaster. Black people are being beaten, tortured, gunned down in the middle of the street. Americans see this on TV, they're horrified by Apartheid. (01:44:49-01:45:20)

President Reagan seems to be listening to Kassebaum's but he looks frustrated. President Reagan is not ready to change his mind and firmly repeats: "I've made my decision" (01:45:21-01:45:22), Senator Kassebaum insists: "Mr. President, your reputation as a world leader is at stake. The United States of

¹³¹ Pat Buchanan (1938-) is an American political commentator, columnist and politician who held the position of the Communications Office Director of the White House for the presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan.

¹³² Nancy Landon Kassebaum (1932-) is an American politician who was the representation of the State of Kansas in the United States Senate from 1978 to 1997. Kassebaum was the first woman to be elected to a full term in the Senate.

America needs to be on the right side of history on the race issue” (01:45:23-01:45:32). Nothing seems to make the president change his mind and he is unmoved by Kassebaum’s words: “I’ll say it again. If Congress passes this bill, I will veto it. Period” (01:45:33-01:45:43). Everyone in the room stares at President Reagan, they are feeling upset and confused about the president’s decision. However, it is Cecil Gaines—the president’s butler—who feels absolutely flabbergasted and completely lost while he stares at the president. Something is hurting Gaines deep inside—but he cannot possibly find the words to describe it.

After such a revelatory meeting, Cecil feels the need to go back to where he grew up and find himself. He travels with his wife Gloria to the Westfall’s Cotton Farm where he grew up to connect with his roots (01:48:08-01:49:23). While they are walking around the cotton farm, Cecil’s voice-over can be heard in the background:

Americans always turned a blind eye to what we had done to our own. We look out to the world and judge. We hear about the concentration camps, but these camps went on for two hundred years... right here, in America. (01:48:12-01:48:34)

A feeling of sadness overwhelms Cecil while he is looking at what is left of the cotton farm where his father was killed, and where he left his mother in search of a better life. This is one of most emotional scenes in *The Butler*, and one that will change Cecil’s life forever.

Consequently, the action of the movie is set at the White House where Cecil is attending the president at Reagan’s own bedroom. Cecil uses this time

alone with the president to inform him that he would like to resign from his job at the presidential house. President Reagan looks very surprised at the news, and Cecil shows he is genuine sad about making that decision. Nevertheless, Cecil is very proud of how hard he has been working during all these years and how far he has come in life. That is why he says to Reagan: "It's been an honor serving you" (01:49:39-01:49:41). Cecil considers that it is time for him to help his country in a different way. President Reagan is shocked to hear the news but he tells Cecil fondly: "Well, not just for me, I'm sure I speak for all the Presidents when I say that you've served your country well" (01:49:47-01:49:50), which makes Cecil smile humbly. Just when Cecil is about to leave the room, the President calls him and he turns around. Then, the President Reagan finally starts talking about what has been concerning him: "This whole civil rights issue... I sometimes fear I'm on the wrong side of it... that I'm just wrong" (01:50:03-01:50:17). Instead, Cecil stands still trying to find the appropriate words as this issue hits him personally. Finally, Cecil finds the guts to tell the President: "Sometimes I think I'm just scared of what it really means. But I'm trying not to be so scared anymore" (01:50:19-01:50:25).

Cecil Gaines (Eugene Allen) was really appreciated at the White House, therefore, it would have been very difficult for the butler to feel suddenly disenchanted with the place he had devoted twenty nine years of his life. More than anything, the above mentioned meeting broke Cecil's heart and created a lot of confusion in his heart.

As far as Daniels' movie is concerned, it deals with the Apartheid and lets viewers see the human side of President Reagan—he both hesitates and is still worried about the decisions he might have made. Ronald Reagan was not the

evil man that the previous scene made us believe, Daniels seem to conclude. By opening up to Cecil, this scene shows that President Reagan not only cared about his political decisions but that he also trusted Cecil's common sense. To be honest, this is the right way to end with Cecil's work at the White House. After this conversation, Cecil feels freer than before and is ready for his new life away from the White House.

Straightaway, the movie shows hundreds of protestors who are holding banners that read "Freedom in South Africa" and "End Apartheid", outside the South African Embassy in Washington D.C. Louis is at the very front of the crowd and is leading the protest: "Who do we want to free?" (01:50:28-01:50:29), and the crowd shouts back: "Mandela!" (01:49:20-01:49:21). "When do we want him free?" (01:50:30-01:50:31). "Now" (01:50:31-01:50:32). It is both interesting and quite instructive for the audience to see the other side of the Apartheid and with an American gaze. This scene shows how a large number of American citizens were not happy with the decisions made by the American government. It is then when Louis firmly grabs the megaphone to deliver a short speech about the Apartheid:

Twenty years ago, we marched in this country for our rights, today we march to free the people of South Africa. Ronald Reagan has attacked or dismantled every civil rights program that has even been put in to place. Aiding the oppression of black South African is absolutely consistent with his policies on race issues. Am I right? Am I right? (01:50:33-01:51:01)

Louis reflects on the fact that the country seems to be going backwards—to the sixties and the struggle for the civil rights movement of the

black community—when President Reagan is not shy to turn a blind eye on the Apartheid. However, Louis is still hopeful that everything will get better if people fight for it. Life might have changed Louis, but nothing has changed his will to change the world.

Following, the camera focuses on Cecil who is looking at Louis while he delivers his speech. When Louis spots his father among the crowd, he passes the megaphone to a colleague and walks to his father whom he has neither seen nor talked to in years. Very sincerely Cecil says to his son: “I came to be in a protest with you” (01:51:47-01:51:48). Just to warn him, Louis tells his father “You’ll get arrested dad. You’ll lose your job” (01:51:51-01:51:54). However, without hesitating Cecil responds: “I’ve lost you” (01:51:56-01:51:57). Undoubtedly this is one more of the most touching scenes in the movie. The audiences can see how two African-American men from different generations are finally able to find common ground to understand and support each other.

In the next scene, Cecil and Louis are in jail but neither of them feels sad or worried. They both feel hopeful as they are sharing this historical moment as father and son (01:52:29-01:52:52). In fact during the jail scene, Cecil’s voice can be heard in the background as he says: “After going to jail, I thought I had seen it all” (01:52:48-01:52:52), but that scene slowly fades to the year 2008 where the whole Gaines’ family together with some friends are sitting on the porch celebrating Obama’s presidential candidacy (01:52:52-01:53:42).

7.10 2008 – The Obama Administration

I'd never imagined I'd see a black man be a real contender

*for the President of the United States.*¹³³

Twenty years later, the Gaines' porch is covered with Obama's campaign posters— "Obama Biden" or "Change, we can believe in" (01:52:52-01:53:42). This transition scene celebrates the figure of an African-American man running for president of the United States—Barack Obama—as well as it sums up what Daniels' whole film is about. Moreover, the audience is aware of Cecil Gaines's unbelievable joy when he says: "After going to jail, I thought I had seen it all" (01:52:48-01:52:52), to later add: "but I'd have never imagined I'd see a black man be a real contender for the President of the United States" (01:52:59-01:53:06). All this resonates with the happiness that the scene on the porch is meant to transmitting. Then, Cecil continues: "Gloria and I would walk to our polling place every night to see where we would be voting for Barack Obama. We just stare at it and smile" (01:53:28-01:53:42).

Succeeding, the action of the movie takes the viewers inside the Gaines' kitchen on a 2008 morning where Cecil and Gloria are having tea while waiting for Louis to pick them up to go the church. One of the most heart touching and tough scenes happens when Cecil gets up to find Gloria's Bible and leaves her alone in the kitchen. When he comes back, Cecil finds Gloria resting her head on the kitchen table and after noticing that she is not answering his words, he instantly realizes that his wife has passed away (01:55:37-01:56:22). As it has

¹³³ Cecil Gaines in *The Butler* (01:52:29-01:53:06).

been mentioned in the previous chapter, it is true that Helene Allen died the day before the 2008 presidential elections as it is mentioned in Haygood's article "A Butler Well Served by This Election." Without any trace of doubt, this is one of the hardest moments in Cecil's life because he will never have the chance to fulfill his dream of voting for Barack Obama alongside his wife. However, as Eugene Allen recalls in the above mentioned interview, his wife had always been present in his mind while he went to the poll station to cast his vote—it surely was a way of honoring her memory.

After Gloria's passing, Louis and his father are expending the primary election's night together at the family house. While his father is downstairs watching the news, Louis is at his old bedroom looking through some old family photographs. His heart sinks when he spots an old photograph of his father, mother, and brother Charlie that brings back a lot of memories. A picture of his father with his parents at the cotton plantation (01:56:50-01:57:20) makes Louis reflect about their different paths. These two pictures perfectly depict the parallel between two generations that have existed before and after the Civil Rights Movement. This vivid moment of recollection is interrupted by Cecil's joyful shouts urging his son Louis to come downstairs as something historic was about to happen: "Louis! Louis come on down! Come down" (01:57:16-01:57:26). When Louis runs downstairs, the CNN news host Anderson Cooper's voice¹³⁴ can be heard from the television announcing Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential elections: "And CNN can now project that Barack Obama, 47 years old, will become the President Elect of the United States" (01:57:29-

¹³⁴ Anderson Cooper (1967-) is an American television presenter and journalist. Cooper is the presenter of the CNN program *Anderson Cooper 360°*. He is also a correspondent for the CBS show *60 Minutes*.

01:57:37). The news footage that is shown on the television coincides with the television program that was broadcasted the night of the 2008 presidential elections (“Election Night 2008 (CNN HD) p.1 – Obama Wins, McCain Concedes” 00:23:35-00:23:43).

Back at *The Butler*, Louis and Cecil keep watching the television without blinking as they cannot possibly believe that they are living such a momentous historical event. It is still difficult to digest that a black man has become the president of the United States—where, for centuries the black community has been considered second-class citizens. Following, Barack Obama is on television giving his victory speech which brings Cecil to tears—as it happened to Eugene Allen. Gleeson and O’Neill write: “Eugene Allen cried with happiness as they watched the history-making ceremony on January 20, 2009 accompanied by his son Charles and the journalist Wil Haygood” (28). Here is part of Obama’s speech:

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer. (01:57:39-01:58:01)

The footage that is shown in *The Butler* is a fragment from Obama’s real victory speech delivered after winning the 2008 presidential elections (“C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)” 00:02:15-00:02:38).

Without any doubt, this scene perfectly sums up Daniels’ parallel objectives: 1) to show blacks’ long journey, struggles and fight in defense of their civil

rights; 2) to personalize the bitter-sweet social and political experience—and victory—through an average black family who mirrors the trope of “the house divided.” 3) More than anything, Obama’s presidency might work as a metaphor for the prize the African American community has paid since they were first brought by force from the African continents to the shores of the USA to work as slaves.

Furthermore, the final part of *The Butler* is very representative for the whole movie as the audience watches how Cecil’s life has changed for the better during the presidency of the first African American man. Barack Obama’s first year as president of the United States is represented in Daniels’ movie by his invitation for Cecil Gaines to visit the White House. As it has been mentioned above, the real butler, Eugene Allen, was indeed invited by the president himself to attend Obama’s inauguration as Haygood writes in *A Witness to History* (2). In Daniels’ movie, though, Gaines is not invited to the presidential inauguration but to a private meeting with the president.

The camera takes us into the entrance hall of the White House where Cecil Gaines is waiting for someone to attend him. An African-American man walks up to him and says: “Mr. Gaines, I’m Admiral Rochon,¹³⁵ the Chief Usher” (01:59:35-01:59:39). As expected, Cecil looks surprised because he cannot believe that a black person has been finally promoted to chief usher, and feels very proud of it: “Nice to meet you, Admiral” (01:59:46-01:59:48).

It is interesting to see that Rochon is also quite excited to meet Cecil Gaines when he says: “The pleasure’s all mine. I just wanted to tell you what an honor it

¹³⁵ Stephen W. Rochon is the former Director of the Executive Residence and White House Chief Usher. Rochon was the first African-American White House Chief Usher. He worked in the White House during George W. Bush and Barack Obama’s presidencies.

is to meet you, sir” (01:59:49-01:59:56), which makes Cecil smile and feel proud of himself. Following, the two men start walking down the hall when Rochon says in all honesty: “The President is so excited to meet with you” (02:00:01-02:00:02) to what Cecil answers with the tranquil voice that characterizes him: “Well, that’s just fine, isn’t it?” (02:00:09-02:00:11). The Chief Usher cannot help it but to smile while gesturing toward the State Dining Room, and says: “Let me show you the way” (02:00:11-02:00:12), but Cecil stares at him while proudly but courteously responds: “I know the way” (02:00:13-02:00:14).

Cecil starts walking alone down the long hallway towards the State Dining Room while Rochon watches him with a smile. It is now when the original soundtrack of the movie by Rodrigo Leão¹³⁶ plays in the background making this scene both powerful and emotional. While Cecil keeps walking, he passes the official portraits of the former Presidents and some of their most famous quotations can be heard in the background. The first one belongs to John F. Kennedy’s voice addressing equality, in 1963: “The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities” (02:00:19-02:00:25) which corresponds to Kennedy’s real speech (“President John F. Kennedy’s Civil Rights Address” 00:04:07 – 00:04:14). Then, Lyndon B. Johnson’s voice is heard stating that he is in favor of voting rights for the black community, from 1965: “It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life” (02:00:27-02:00:36), which also corresponds to what he said in real life (“Preview: President Johnson’s March 15, 1965 Voting Rights Speech to Congress” 00:00:17-00:00:27). Finally,

¹³⁶ Rodrigo Leão (1964-) is a well-known Portuguese composer and musician specialized in Modern Classical music, as well as being part of the Portuguese bands *Madredeus* and *Sétima Legião*.

Barack Obama's voice is heard louder than the rest of the president's—his words are taken from his victory speech in 2008 (“C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)” 00:18:36-00:18:43): “We will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can!” (02:00:36-02:00:38).

After Obama's words, the screen fades to black and a message in memory of the people who fought during the Civil Rights Movement is shown on the full screen: “This film is dedicated to the brave men and women who fought for our freedom in the Civil Rights Movement” (02:00:38-02:00:40). The soundtrack is played at the loudest which makes it very emotional for three main reasons. Firstly, it shows that Lee Daniels and his whole crew really cared about the Civil Rights Movement as they dedicated the movie to all of the people who fought for equality; Secondly, the audience has been witness to Cecil Gaines' journey from his time on the cotton plantation until he gets to meet and greet the first African-American President in the White House. Finally, and most important for the purpose of this dissertation is the fact that most of the footage shown on screen is based on real events. Both Cecil Gaines' story and the Civil Rights era were real and happened less than seventy years ago which might invite the audience to reflect on how the American society has progressed. Still, there is a lot of work to do. It goes without saying that *The Butler* also helps to uplift the audience's spirits at the same time that fills their hearts in the hope that if humanity would work together, the most unexpected things might be achieved. . It surely and painfully proves that “a house divided” would not help to keep the dream of democracy and equal rights for all alive.

Let's not forget that the people who initiated change were not famous nor powerful but average people from humble neighborhoods who believed that a better society for everyone was possible and they were not afraid to raise their voices. People like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Sidney Poitier and Oprah Winfrey are an example that change happens. We should never forget Martin Luther King Jr.'s words:

“A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right.

A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice.

A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.”¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma on March 8, 1965, one day after Bloody Sunday events.

8. From the Civil Rights Movement to Barack Obama

*Rosa sat, so Martin could walk,
so Barack could run,
so that your children can fly.*¹³⁸

After working on the history of the Civil Rights Movement in which millions of people and hundreds of politicians helped with the cause of fighting equality, I think it is relevant to deal with the importance of the rise of Barack Obama and his posterior victory in the presidential election of 2008. It is impossible to turn a blind eye to the fact that after hundreds of years of slavery and inequality, an African American man would occupy the White House. However, this traces back to the foundation of America, as Obama mentions in his book *The Audacity of Hope* when he talks about how hard the founding fathers have worked for the country: “I think about America and those who built it. This nation’s founders, who somehow rose above petty ambitions and narrow calculations to image a nation unfurling across a continent” (427).

Besides, Obama never forgets the people who were the heart of the civil rights movement —“those like Lincoln and King, who ultimately laid down their lives in the service of perfecting and imperfect union” (427) who were a role model for many more people after them. Such important figures like Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. will always set an example when talking about the fight for civil rights and that is something that Barack Obama would never forget. Nonetheless, the victories that had been achieved in the country were

¹³⁸ Peniel E. Joseph, 2010 (qtd.in *Dark Days, Bright Nights 2*).

not only pursued by powerful and influential people but also by each ordinary person who volunteered or took part in the movement. Those who believed that if the society comes together they can change the world:

All the faceless, nameless men and women, slaves and soldiers and tailors, and butchers, constructing lives for themselves and their children and grandchildren, brick by brick, rail by rail, calloused hand by calloused hand, to fill in the landscape of our collective dreams. (427)

Related to this, Obama discusses the fact that the most important part of the Civil Rights Movement was not the riots or the protests but those “Americans [who] held common dreams that required shared commitment and sacrifice” (qtd. in Joseph 162) which is what inspires him the most. Thus, Obama talks about how big of an inspiration the Civil Rights era was for him in a very recent interview with David Letterman in 2018.

And I was inspired by the Civil Rights Movement when I graduated, I thought to myself – I can’t think of anything more worthy of my efforts than those young Freedom Riders did, vote registrars and people who risked everything to try and advance our democracy. (*My Next Guest Needs No Introduction* 00:23:49-00:24:08)

In the same interview, Obama highlights the importance of figures like John Lewis or Dr. King who opened different conversations about the inequality of black people in America and that “what they teach us is to ask ourselves questions if we see cruelty, if we see inequalities, if we see injustice” (00:31:39-00:31:51). The ultimate teaching that Obama wants citizens to interiorize is to stay alert and to keep their minds open to change and to help each other in

situations of injustice. In the end, as Joseph writes, the “civil rights represents not simply a struggle for black equality but also for a deeper and more meaningful definition of democracy, one that continues to animate contemporary struggles for social, political and economic justice” (209), that brings people together and inspires them to work together for a better future. Later in the interview, Obama insists that the progress in a country “typically has to do with ordinary people deciding- You know what? That’s not right!” (*My Next Guest Needs No Introduction* 00:32:17-00:32:23). Thus, for Barack Obama, what makes the civil rights movement so powerful and inspiring is the fact that it is based on people coming together and believing in a common purpose.

It does not matter how many treatises in favor of racial equality are signed if people stop asking themselves questions to make sure everything around them is actually right within their communities. In fact, Barack Obama believes that questions such as “What is our community and how might that community be reconciled with our freedom? How far do our obligations reach? How do we transform mere power into justice, mere sentiment into love?” (*Dreams from My Father* 438) should always be present in people’s daily lives because keeping those questions alive means keeping the conversation open for improvement.

There is a belief that Obama lives by and that has been the basis of his whole run to presidency:

A tradition based on the simple idea that we have a stake in one another, and that what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart, and that if enough people believe in the truth of that proposition and act on it,

then we might not solve every problem, but we can get something meaningful done. (*The Audacity of Hope* 4)

In short, Obama believes in the goodwill of the people and the force that comes out of working together. Throughout black history, the force that bounds people together has been religion and the churches all across the country where African American people gathered with their communities. Religion played a very important role during the Civil Rights Movement in America. It is no wonder then that Obama admires “the power of the African American religious tradition to spur social change” (*The Audacity of Hope* 245).

Civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., who was a Baptist pastor, gave speeches that were really influenced by the sermons that were delivered in churches and it was through his speeches that he was able to denounce the inequalities that existed and inspire his community to change them. In fact, Obama believes that “the majority of great performers in American history –not only were motivated by faith by repeatedly used religious language to argue their causes” (*The Audacity of Hope* 259). Moreover, Obama firmly believes that “the black church rarely had the luxury of separating individual salvation from collective salvation. It had to serve as the center of the community’s political, economic and social as well as spiritual life” (*The Audacity of Hope* 245). Thus, the African American churches were instrumental for gathering people to protest against inequality because the black community also felt that they were supported by religion. By going to meetings with civil rights leaders in churches, the African American people had the feeling that they were being sent on a mission from high above and that they were the chosen ones to fight for the future of their people. Although they knew that fighting for their rights was the

correct thing to do, there was a huge motivation to feel that God was in some way supporting them.

What stands out is the important relation that was created between the Civil Rights Movement and the church and how efficiently the leaders of the movement used the influence of religion and the inspiration in favor of the fight. Admittedly, Obama also uses in his speeches the same rhetoric language that Martin Luther King Jr. used fifty years ago because it still lights up the hearts and minds of millions of people in the United States as well around the globe. Obama confesses that he “was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death; rather, it was an active, palpable agent in the world” (*The Audacity of Hope* 245). More than anything what Obama tried to achieve during his campaign was to share his message of hope with the nation.

Furthermore, the African American parents who lived through the Civil Rights Movement were also true heroes who quitted from making their dreams come true in order to give their sons and daughters a better life:

And it is also a testament to that generation of African American mothers and fathers whose heroism was less dramatic but no less important: parents who worked all their lives in jobs that were too small for them, without complaint, scrimping and saving to buy a small home; parents who did without so that their children could take dance classes or the school-sponsored field trip. (286)

As Obama writes, it all comes down to the “parents who pushed their children to achieve and fortified them with a love that could withstand whatever

the larger society might throw at them” (*The Audacity of Hope* 287). Ultimately, as Obama states in the documentary movie *The Final Year*, “that is where politics, government, diplomacy has to be rooted” (00:24:04-00:24:14) — in what worries the majority of the citizenship and everything that they have in common. Even if having the support of politicians and the government is indispensable, Barack Obama states that the true change “will be in the direction of a less violent, more empathetic, more generous world. And that requires individuals fighting for that future” (qtd. in *The Final Year* 01:21:02-01:21:30).

Barack Obama was also inspired by Malcolm X’s persona when he was young. What Obama liked the most about Malcolm was his “uncanny ability to reinvent himself at crucial points in his life” (qtd. in Joseph 167), and to always find a way to solve the problem that would appear in his way. Besides, Obama also admired former President “Reagan’s uncanny ability to craft a national vision that called Americans to a higher purpose” (Joseph 176). Thus, Obama’s vision of America has been influenced by two different personalities. Barack Obama has been constantly trying to reformulate himself—one of his most powerful characteristics are his creativity and the new vision of politics that contrasts with what has been done before in the country. Besides, Obama really believes in the creation of a nationwide idea of America and bringing people together to work for a common purpose. For Obama, every American citizen is important and that is why they all should take part into shaping their country.

Additionally, Obama took part in numerous demonstrations and marches when he was a young man and he also protested against the Apartheid regime. As he puts it, he had the opportunity to give “a brief speech at a rally that left

him invigorated and yearning for more opportunities to share his views with larger audiences” (Joseph 169) which might have been the starting point for his political career.

However not everyone was happy while Barack Obama was running for the Oval Office and people like Jesse Jackson whose “hopeful and expansive messages, brilliant campaign strategies, and tactical victories in the Democratic Primary process helped to pave the way for Obama” (Joseph 177), expressed in more than one occasion his displeasure towards Barack Obama. Although he worked hard to make his way to the White House, some people believed that Obama would not have got so far away if it were not for the work that Jesse Jackson had done in politics the previous decades.

It is a fact that “Jackson became the most well-known and respected black leader in America– the unofficial President of Black America” (Joseph 177), after Martin Luther King Jr.’s death and mostly from 1984 until 1988 so it was complicated for Jackson to understand that someone younger than him was about to achieve what he had been fighting for years. As Joseph writes, Jesse Jackson’s jealousy for Barack Obama “reveals deep generations and ideological fissures within the African American community” (186) and shows that the African American people who were political figures of the Civil Rights Movement were not perfect and that there was professional envy among them too. Perhaps Jackson’s disapproval of Barack Obama’s success can be traced back to him being “one of the few contemporary leaders who can claim a distinctive and continuous legacy of social justice activism that stretches back to the 1960s” (Joseph 189). Thus, it must have been difficult for Jackson to accept

Barack as the first African American candidate for President of the United States.

Nonetheless, Jesse Jackson was not the only person who did not support Obama's candidacy entirely because some black activists also disagreed. What some activists felt that "his unwillingness to candidly address the gritty issues facing inner-city America, denounce contemporary white racism and police brutality and offer a plan to empower African Americans is clear proof of his uneasiness around such subjects" (Joseph 206). Most of these activists accused former President Obama of being worried about pleasing white American voters because they could be of great help to win the elections. Joseph agrees that "Obama's campaign and early presidency remains broadly tailored to pleasing the majority of white American voters" (206). Despite the fact that some black activists may not have supported Obama's message or persona, it is true that he brought back the revolutionary and inspiring spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. As Joseph writes, "yet at the same time they must also concede that Obama's campaign unleashed the kind of political energy within and beyond the African American community not witnessed since the late 1960s and early 1970s" (207).

Moreover, Obama's background was highly valued during his presidential campaign as "his personal biography reflected the breadth and depth of national commitments to racial and ethnic diversity, democratic pluralism and an increasingly multicultural future" (Joseph 181). All these personal and political achievements were sort of a novelty effect in the political history of the country. As Joseph adds, "over the course of the first half of 2008, Barack Obama became a universal symbol of America's racial progress" (184).

On the other side, “for whites, Obama’s ability to compartmentalize American’s past from its present while boldly symbolizing its color-blind future is both refreshing and inspiring” (Joseph 192) marks a progress in the American society and its ability to change according to the times. Actually, Obama’s message of racial equality and him being a black citizen along with “his inspirational message of hope, optimism and democratic renewal enthralled multitudes of both and black voters on a scale unprecedented in American history” (Joseph 208) and there has never been so many black voters coming to the polls until the 2008 elections when all records were broken. This elections were so important for the whole country because Obama represented an evolution of the United States which was a “nation founded in a racial slavery, nurtured in Jim Crow, and steeped in the color-line could elect a black president speaks to American democracy’s capacity for reform, innovation and evolution” (Joseph 213) that will have the opportunity to vote for a black man to rule the country now. To have an African American president in the United States fifty years ago would have been something inconceivable, therefore Barack Obama was a symbol of a new future, a new America where every citizen could be equal under the law.

However, Barack Obama wanted to be more than a black man who was running for president but it was difficult for him to make the majority of people see through the color of his skin. As Joseph explains, “regardless of his efforts, however from the beginning race formed the underlying focus of the intense fascination and eventual scrutiny of Obama’s candidacy” (182), and people found it fascinating that his parents were biracial and that he was raised up by his white mother and grandparents.

The issue of race was something present during Obama's whole campaign and when asked his opinion about having the first African American president, some of the white citizens said things like "I don't think that America is ready for it yet. Just because of his race and his views" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 00:14:45-00:14:53) or simply just saying "No, no" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 00:05:43-00:05:44) using a very sharp tone when answering as if it was something bad. Some others would argue that "He wasn't born in America" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:24:09-01:24:10) just because of the color of his skin although Barack Obama was born in Hawaii, one of the fifty states that form the United States of America, therefore their statement was false. There were also people who would affirm "I do not want a black man running my country" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:24:10-01:24:12) without explaining himself concretely.

However, the opinions that affected Obama's presidential campaign the most were the ones which compared him to a terrorist or the ones which made fun of the color of his skin. In Rice and Sams' HBO documentary *By the People: Election of Barack Obama* (2008), there is a young white man who explains why American society does not want Obama as the president of his country: "People are saying like they've viewing him kind of as a terrorist. They associate him with the terrorists and stuff so it's... I don't know. I think he'll have a tough time winning just because of that whole association by race" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 00:14:54-00:15:04). An example of this common belief of Obama being a terrorist can be seen in this documentary when a white middle aged man is holding a banner that says "Vote McCain, Not Hussein" (*By the*

People: Election of Barack Obama 01:24:17-01:24:18). By writing Hussein, Obama's middle name, they wanted to make people associate Barack Obama with Saddam Husein who was one of the biggest enemies of the United States, as well as allegedly having a bond with the terrorist militant organization Al-Qaeda. In fact one of the most direct images of people comparing Obama to Husein is a white middle aged man who appears on screen while holding a monkey stuffed animal which has a headband with Obama's campaign logo. The man is shaking the stuffed animal while laughing and saying "This is little Hussein" (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:24:13-01:24:15). With this simple gesture the man is laughing at Barack Obama by implying that he is a terrorist and at the same time he is calling him a monkey which was an insult used by white people against blacks in the slavery times. What cannot be denied is that Obama "enjoyed the benefits of both the civil rights and Black Power movements while maintaining a safe distance from both" (Joseph 195) because he wanted to remember the nation the importance of it but at the same time he did not want to be too involved in it.

Despite the controversies and negative opinions, "Obama went from answering questions about his blackness to becoming the most resoundingly beloved and admired figure in African American public life since Martin Luther King Jr." (Joseph 186) which made black people feel that Obama was their 21st century Dr. King. By recalling the civil rights movement era and its figures, Obama used the feeling of nostalgia to his advantage to attract voters and to make people engage more with him. Besides, "much of his 2008 presidential campaign projected Obama's candidacy as a chance for national redemption" (Joseph 213) which was indeed needed in America to heal for its turbulent past.

Obama wanted people to feel that if he became the president, the country would be in peace with its racial and segregationist past and that it will be a new chapter to write a more prosperous and equal future for everybody. What Obama highlighted during his whole campaign was the importance of hope and to be willing to fight for their rights which reminded to the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. Obama writes in his second book that “the audacity of hope. That was the best of American spirit (. . .) having the audacity to believe despite all the evidence to the contrary that we could restore a sense of community to a nation torn by conflict” (*The Audacity of Hope* 421) and that by working together they could have a better country to live in.

Finally, on November 4, 2008 at 11pm EST, Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential elections and was elected the first black president in the history of the United States. All of this was thanks to “long lines at polling booths around the nation hinted at the levels of excitement and enthusiasm sparked by his candidacy. Many voters waited several hours at polling places in order to cast a vote in an election universally regarded as historic” (Joseph 210). The 2008 election day will always be remember as the day that the most people went to the polling stations to cast their vote. The year 2008 showed how Americans really worry and care about their country when they believe in a candidate and his speech. In fact, in Rice and Sams’ documentary, they had the opportunity to talk to some people at the voting stations to show viewers how the citizens lived that historic day. A black middle aged woman from Michigan got emotional when she saw how many people voted in the 2008 elections: “Today is history. That’s what it is, it’s history. When I got in my car and I saw the line, I actually cried” (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:32:34-

01:32:39). While a young white man from Maine said very proudly “I’ve never seen this kind of a line here in 20 years so I’m feeling optimistic. It’s a great sign seeing everybody getting out” (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:32:41-01:32:47). However, the most touching testimony is from a black old woman whose words are very close to the civil rights movement spirit: “I’m 63 years old. I’ve been crying since 4:00 this morning. This is momentous. Win or lose, the game has been changed” (*By the People: Election of Barack Obama* 01:36:45-01:36:56). What that African American woman did not know is that Obama was going to win the elections and by doing this he will be writing a new chapter in American history, a chapter who will not be allowing racism, segregation and inequality between races, a chapter in which people would fight for a better America. Because of Obama’s victory, the black citizens felt that “the chance at fostering racial reconciliation triumphed over those who stoked division and fear” (Joseph 214) but there still were many things that needed to be done before accomplishing that.

Something that will always be part of worldwide history is the speech that Barack Obama delivered after his victory on November 4, 2008. This speech “plumbed the nation’s racial depths in a way not seen since the torrential political storms of the late 1960s” (Joseph 190) and addressed the massive queues of people waiting to vote, the volunteers who helped during the campaign, the importance of telling stories from the past and Obama also mentioned some key moments from the Civil Rights movement that inspired him. It was very important for Obama to thank the people “who waited three hours and four hours many for the very first time in their lives because they believed that this time must be different, that their voice could be that

difference” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:02:54-00:03:08) and it was very important to highlight the fact that some of them who voted for the first time because they felt that finally a candidate represented all that they are. Besides, the former President gave the victory to all the volunteers who helped him and his team because they believed in them: “from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized, and proved that more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from this earth. This is your victory” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:09:13-00:09:27). What Obama was trying to say by addressing all of this is that America is the best version of itself when people work together for a cause and when they leave differences aside for a common purpose. Therefore, Obama invites each and every citizen to work for the creating of a better country: “I will ask you join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it’s been done in America for two hundred and twenty-one years, block by block, brick by brick, callused hand by callused hand” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:11:30-00:11:43).

After this, Obama takes a moment to mention the 16th President of the United States Abraham Lincoln and quote some of his words to inspire people to work together for a better future: “We are not enemies, but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:13:22-00:13:34). Also, the black activist Ann Nixon Cooper¹³⁹ (1902-2009) is mentioned in this

¹³⁹ Ann Nixon Cooper (1902-2009) was an activist in favor of civil rights and part of the African American community in Atlanta. She worked during her whole life in helping black communities and fighting for their rights as citizens.

discourse because she was one hundred and six years old in 2008 when she casted her vote in Atlanta therefore she had lived through all the Civil Rights Movement to see a black man become a president. As Obama says, “she was born just a generation past slavery (. . .) when someone like her couldn’t vote for two reasons, because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:15:42-00:15:56). Actually, Cooper is the perfect representation of a person who has lived through the most important historical moments in America. The former president Obama reflects on everything that Cooper has seen during her life: “I think about all that she’s seen throughout her century in America, the heartache and the hope, the struggle and the progress, the times we were told that we can’t and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes, we can” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:15:59-00:16:16).

Cooper’s life is an inspiration for all the Americans who had suffered as she is the embodiment and a coming-of-age story of someone who has seen the worst but also the best of the country. Besides, Obama does not forget to mention the most important events of the Civil Rights Movement when talking about Cooper’s life: “She was there in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that *We Shall Overcome.*” (*C.SPAN: President-Elect Barack Obama Victory Speech (Full Video)* 00:16:55-00:17:07). Although, Obama worked very hard during the whole campaign for people to see him beyond his race, it is true that he also wanted to make a tribute to all those people who fought and gave their lives in favor of civil rights.

In the end, Obama explains that what he wanted to communicate with this speech is “a vision of America finally freed from the past of Jim Crow and slavery (. . .) an America that fulfills Dr. King’s promise that we be judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character” (*The Audacity of Hope* 274). With this discourse, Obama tried to boost their attitudes against injustice while appealing to their emotions and nostalgia so everyone would reconsider what they can do to stop inequality. The former president Barack Obama’s speech was delivered with such certainty that made the whole audience around the world realize that in the middle of the 21st century, equality should be something present in the daily lives of every person living on this earth.

Nevertheless, the question that everyone was asking themselves is if Barack Obama becoming the president of the United States in 2008 was that big of success for the black community. Related to this, Joseph talks about the importance of looking at this event from two different perspectives, the individual and the collective perspective. In one hand, Joseph writes that “if racial progress is measured by the success of specific individuals, a black president represents a watershed achievement: the breaking of a racial glass ceiling once thought to be impenetrable” (200). And in the other hand, Joseph explains that “historically, African American civil rights activists have measured racial progress by group rather than individual success stories, even as they celebrated every hard-won racial first achieved. From this perspective, Obama’s political ascent proves to be more ambiguous” (200). Therefore, Obama’s victory can be seen as an individual victory in which Barack Obama is a representation of breaking from the segregationist and racist past while if we

see his victory from a collective point of view it may will not be considered a victory because it is only one man who is winning. However, Barack Obama is the face, voice and embodiment of all the volunteers and politicians who worked for the Democratic Party and helped to make his winning a reality. Moreover, Obama is a symbol of the black community who makes them feel more visible as the country had a black president.

Indeed, Obama is mostly seen “as a symbol of America’s multicultural future [and a symbol of how things have evolved from fifty years ago to the present] Obama is both a black leader and a post-racial icon, both the ultimate insider and racial outlier” (Joseph 204). Although some people might think that Obama becoming president is something negative for the country, he definitely “does not signal the death of black politics so much as the evolving character or race and American democracy” (Joseph 205). Hence, more than only an individual or collective victory, Barack Obama winning the 2008 presidential elections was an historical moment in the democracy of the country.

Regarding the White House, it is important to highlight that during Obama’s administration the number of black people working there increased and some newspapers like *Essence* or *Miami Herald* wrote about that. Lewis writes that twenty nine black women worked in the White House for the 44th president of the United States. All of these women, who were between twenty and sixty years old, were very proud to have this opportunity. In fact, some of their testimonies are as Dominique Mann, the Press assistant, said “It hit me that little girls would grow up in a world where seeing a black world leader was exception, but not unattainable” (qtd. in Lewis) or Valerie Jarrett, the Senior Advisor to the President, stated “When women succeed, America succeed”

(qtd. in Lewis). If it was difficult to believe that a black man was going to end up becoming the president of the United States, it was even less probable than a black woman would get a chance to work for the president. That is why all of these women feel proud of having higher-up positions in which they can change to make their country better for black people.

Besides, Allam wrote in 2017 that there were “more than 400 African Americans selected as presidential appointees over the past eight years”, in other words during Obama’s administration. By having a large number of black people working at the presidential palace, “they brought expertise and ideas, but also a deep sense of the historical weight of the moment. Beyond service to country, they embraced a personal mission: ensuring the success of the nation’s first black president”, Allam writes. It was of great significance that finally black people was able to access better jobs inside the White House after so many decades of only been offered to work as a butler, cleaner or cook. This was a victory for the whole community who finally felt that they had could have the influence to make lives better for everyone, and mostly to eliminate the racist differences that existed between black and white people in the White House.

Obama’s presence in remembering the Civil Rights Movement and their attendance to different memorials such as the trip they made to Selma in 2015 to commemorate the fifty years anniversary of the Bloody Sunday proves that his administration was committed to civil rights. Actually, as Jarrett writes, the White House has always “highlighted the importance of recognizing America’s past, no matter how dark, and how it helped to shape our future” and they organized cinema debates and screenings of movies which are important in the

history of the black movement, among other activities to help the community learn from their past. Hence, on September 2016, the former president Obama was responsible for a White House reception in which he delivered a speech for the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

It's a story that it's full of tragedy and set-backs but also great joy and great victors. And it is a story that it is not just part of the past but it is alive and well today in every corner of America. ("Museum of African American History Reception" 00:03:06-00:03:31)

Although it is very idealistic to believe that all forms of racism and violence were erased when Barack Obama was elected president, that is very far from the truth and those issues, as Obama writes, "are not simply technical problems in search of the perfect ten point plan. They are also rooted in a societal indifference and individual callousness- the desire among those at the top of the social ladder to maintain their wealth and status whatever the cost" (*The Audacity of Hope* 254). The racism and the feeling of white superiority are rooted in many people's lives in the country and eradicating them is not something easy to do. Moreover, Obama writes that "solving these problems will require changes in government policy; it will also require changes in hearts and minds" (*The Audacity of Hope* 254) and while changing laws can be very viable, changing someone's beliefs is something much difficult to do. What takes to end racism and discrimination is the society's commitment with this issues and the ability to accept that race in American is a subject that should always be on discussion. To not repeat the same mistakes in the future Obama explains that it is essential "to acknowledge the sins in our past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair"

(*The Audacity of Hope* 276) and being able to create new strategies to deal with it in the best way possible.

Furthermore, the former 44th president reflects on “not the number of minorities who have failed to climb into the middle class but the number who succeeded against the odds” (*The Audacity of Hope* 295), the ones who have overcome difficulties while fighting for their rights in marches and protests. One of the most representative sentences that Obama writes in his book is: “America is big enough to accommodate all their dreams” (*The Audacity of Hope* 319) In fact the United States is geographically one of the biggest countries in the world and it should be big enough for everyone who wants to live there. However, it is still is one of the most racist countries in the world in which white supremacy can still be felt daily when it should be an example to other nations due to the diversity of cultures that live there.

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama addressed all this issues in his inaugural address to the whole nation after officially becoming the 44th president. Although this speech was not as powerful as his previous one on the night that the democrats won the elections, there are some words that sums up Obama’s administration spirit that are worth mentioning:

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can be join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served in a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most scared oath. (“Barack Obama Inaugural Address: Jan. 20, 2009” 00:16:26-00:16:48)

In the end, Obama's rise to presidency was the representation of a new era, a new mind set for an America who had lived trapped in a society who partly still believes in white supremacy. Black people finally felt that a new future could be possible for everyone in which race, color or nationality were just a randomly fact given by birth and not something that would determine your life, opportunities and future.

9. Conclusion

There will be separate conclusions dealing with the methodology, the use of films as a historical source, the relation between cinema and society, the representation of the Africa-Americans on the screen, and the complexity of the history of The Civil Rights Movement, because they all contribute to the analysis of Lee Daniels' *The Butler* to finally refer to Barack Obama's administration and the impact his presidency has made in the history of the United States. Given the unprecedented and disturbing events that have recently occurred in the Capitol caused by the pro-Trump mob, some considerations about the current situation in the nation will be included.

When trying to find a sole methodology to apply to this Ph. Dissertation many problems arose as there still exist a great deal of preconceptions when it comes to study movies as a historical source. Although, as it has been shown, the study of movies has rapidly grown and the majority of its advancements have occurred during the last century. In the beginning, scholars tended to perceive movies just as a form of entertainment. With the passing of time, critics and scholars started to believe that feature films could become a fair and honest representation of reality and, in fact, a new way of transmitting people's history to the future generations. Nowadays, scholars around the world, both black and white, are much more open-minded to the fact that a film can successfully transmit the same information about a particular historical event than a book, at the same time that it reaches a larger audience in the shortest period of time. Moreover, nowadays, it is unquestionable that cinema is part of our daily lives and it is about time to finally appreciate how much it has

contributed to transmitting the most relevant and touching moments in the history of the world.

Besides, it is essential to mention that thanks to the advances in the history of cinema together with the contributions of a new generation of black directors the representation of the African-American community in movies has been steadily growing. Thus, despite the odds, it is undeniable that there exist more and more black cinematic professionals working in the field such as actors, actresses, directors, screenwriters and musician, just to name a few. Also, black women directors, scriptwriters, and actresses are successfully making their way.

Notwithstanding, there is still an ongoing debate about who should or should not write or direct movies that deal with specific communities, the black community in this case and what type of people should be working in these movies. As it has been discussed previously, this has been an on-going hot topic of discussion given the multifarious opinions. Despite the controversy most black directors tend to agree that what really matters is to show respect for the black history that it is being dealt with.

The empirical reality shows that movies are the basis of one of the most relevant social phenomena that has occurred in the last century. Thus, going to the cinema is above everything a social practice which brings people together and opens conversations within society. Apart from telling different kinds of stories—whether they are fictional or non-fiction—it should not be denied that going to the cinema encourages cohesion among human beings who are drawn to enjoy listening to and visualizing stories that help to promote debates with

other people. Currently, this exchange of ideas has resulted profoundly positive when it comes to the production and viewing of movies dealing with historical events such as the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' *The Butler*. Movies like Daniels' raises awareness of past events so that new generations might get informed. It also includes all sorts of people who are still ignorant of important historical events. Therefore, as it has been proved, watching historical films not only increases the viewers' knowledge but they also promote a more empathetic attitude on the part of the spectators.

Moreover, movies should be always taken into consideration as a fantastic learning tool. They are the cheapest and fastest way to travel to different countries, cultures or even periods of time. As a matter of fact, we live in a world surrounded by online video streaming services which provide instant infinite opportunities to improve our knowledge about incalculable and varied fields. Thankfully, we live in an era where almost everything is at our fingertips and we should take advantage of that. Without any doubt, this digital era offers a limitless number of stories for self-education, thus making this world a better place for everyone and we should not miss it out.

Furthermore, the impact that stories have within society should never be undervalued as stories shape ourselves and the world that we live in. Throughout this Ph. Dissertation and while quoting from Michelle and Barack Obama, I have tried to show how relevant stories are for all kinds of cultures. More specifically, stories have the power to influence, teach, unite and inspire the world. In fact, stories exist in every culture and they are one of the strongest and most effective ways to transmit people's history and traditions. For many centuries stories have been used to communicate and keep alive all sorts of

cultures and ancient values around the world. Some of those stories have now entered the cinema. To sum up, cinema is nothing but oral stories that have evolved into images — Allens' powerful unheard of and powerful story has moved from the oral interview with a historian and journalist to Daniel's visual images.

Obviously, the complexity of the whole historical context that surrounds *The Butler* is irrefutable and must be dealt with as well as the key events that knock into shape the Civil Rights Movement and that are present or represented in Daniels' movie. Therefore, the most important happenings for the understanding of the historical moments represented in the movie have been tackled throughout the historical context which has also helped tremendously when analyzing the movie itself. It has also been emphasized the way Daniels makes use of and represents the fight for the civil rights in the United States. While revising such pivotal moments in the American history such as the Freedom Rides, Kennedy's assassination or the creation of the Black Panther Party, among many others, it was more than clear how much attention to detail the whole team working in *The Butler* show. Although, some of the historical events dealt with throughout the Chapter 5 of this Ph. Dissertation are assumed to be well known, but they are sometimes used unfairly and I considered it necessary to refer to them.

It goes without saying that this Ph. Dissertation needed to have a whole chapter devoted to the making of *The Butler*—from the real history behind the movie's plot to the summary, awards received or reviews published. More than anything, though, special attention has been devoted to the figure of Eugene Allen and what was it like to work at the White House for a person with an

African-American background and for such a long time—from the Civil Rights time to the present . Truthfully, all of this information was thought to be required to better understand the magnitude of Daniels' project regarding both his innovative cinematic ways and the worldwide positive reception together with the repercussion that *The Butler* has had on its audience. Writing this chapter, made the author understand why Daniel's movie was so momentous and why it started so many conversations within both the cinema business and the cinema enthusiasts.

Without any trace of doubt, the heart of this investigation is the analysis of Lee Daniels' movie *The Butler*. However, it would not have been possible to do so without all the previous research work as wanting to analyze the representation on movies of certain historical events require some specific in-depth study and meticulous research. After analyzing every relevant historical fact represented in the movie, I can affirm that *The Butler* not only gives a fair and accurate representation of the Civil Rights Movement era but it can also be tremendously helpful for anybody interested in that period in American history. Surely, Daniels' use of real footage makes the movie much closer to reality and helps people understand the cruelty of the events shown. Even though the central plot of the movie revolves around the Gaines' family, the historical data is present throughout the narration and it is never forgotten. Furthermore, the historical background works as a lead character all through the movie to such an extent that the movie would have lacked meaning had the historical events represented in the movie been deleted. I personally think that Daniels' movie works so well because the director found the way to unite both "the power" within Eugene Allen's real story together with the real events of the civil rights

fight. Moreover, Daniels makes use of the cinematic language to both educate and entertain the audience.

Besides, the scenes which are made to represent real events are perfectly structured and created to the extent that every little detail is quite similar, if not identical, to what happened in real life. Nonetheless, some parts of the plot have been exaggerated or made up when it comes to tell Eugene Allen's life to make the movie more dramatic or to be able to touch on different events that happened during the Civil Rights Movement era, such as Louis Gaines being part of every political movement of the era which is impossible and did not happen in real life. However, it is obvious how much the whole team of this movie have worked to reach a common interest: to educate people from all over the world about the African-American's fight for civil rights in the United States in an entertaining and true method.

Along the analysis it has been proved that all the scenes that involve real events, whether they are real footage or recreations of specific events, are factual. Both the order of the happenings and the information that it is transmitted are authenticated. Notwithstanding, some scenes are easier to identify than others depending on the knowledge the viewers have on the subject. Certainly, the majority of the real events present in the plot can be easily identified and understood. That is why after working for such a long time in the representation of the Civil Rights Movement in Lee Daniels' movie, I can affirm that movies can and should be a valid option when wanting to teach history whether at educational centers or in someone's living room. Thus, historical movies are a magnificent tool that should be used in our advantage.

What makes this dissertation close the circle is the fact that it basically deals with the years that run from the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement to the time when the first Africa-American man was elected president of the United States. Therefore, in some way, there is a full circle and the fact that Obama became president is the perfect representation of how much the nation has evolved since President Eisenhower's administration. It goes without saying that there are still many things that need to be taken care of and improved regarding the situation of the black community in the United States. However, Daniels' decision to end *The Butler* when Barack Obama is in power leaves an open door to an infinite number of possibilities regardless of what actually happened during his presidency.

Albeit briefly, it was important to mention the recent disturbances that happened the year 2020 in the United States with respect to the new presidential elections, the current situation of the African-American community, and the Black Lives Matter movement as they are all closely related to the events that have been dealt with in this dissertation. By adding this last chapter on Trump's my intention has been to remember that even though Daniels' *The Butler* has a happy ending, Americans' social and political lives have been deadly threatened recently. As a consequence, both the politicians and the citizens need to keep working hand in hand to achieve a better society where everybody might feel safe and respected which is quite far away from what it has been happening in the country for the time being. In fact, most people in the nation seem hopeful once again as the Democrat Joe Biden will become the next President of the United States after next January 20. But, once again, life

is unpredictable and nobody knows exactly how this new administration is going to work regarding discriminatory issues.

In conclusion, apart from all the different abilities that I have obtained through working on this dissertation related to academy matters such as learning more about the past and present history of the United States—and the Civil Rights Movement, in particular—the study of cinema with educational purposes or the ability to study and analyze *The Butler* in depth while understanding every detail of its construction, what will stay with me forever is how resilient human beings can be when believing in a cause. Without disregarding of how difficult the odds are, human beings will always find the way to fight for inequality and have the strength to fight for a better future.

Please keep raising the flag if something is not fair for someone, keep opening conversations about topics that still need to be changed, keep talking about inspirational people and events to honor them, do not stay silent about topics that matter and most of all, treat every person equally. We are all equal.

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¹⁴⁰ This book is so relevant for the Civil Rights Movement that Daniels decided to include it in *The Butler* and the audience can see it when Cecil is looking through some Louis' boxes (01:45:34-01:45:43).

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Appendix:

The Black Lives Matter Movement and Trump's Administration

On May 25th 2020, the wrongful death of a black man at the hands of some white police men in Minneapolis, Minnesota united the whole American population to protest against the racism that still exists in the country. This event crossed borders and oceans and, fifteen days later, the majority of the most important countries across the globe organized protests to support the black people of America to end racism once and for all. This event brought back the Black Lives Matter international human rights movement that had first appeared in 2013 within the black community.

The black man was named George Floyd and he died at Hennepin County Medical Center after the altercation with the police in the 38th Street and Chicago Avenue South in Minneapolis. The police officers held him down while one of the officer's knees pressed Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes for allegedly wanting to pay at a store with a false twenty-dollar bill. Moreover, KSTP News wrote that "the 911 caller also reportedly mentioned the suspect was still in a nearby parking lot and seemed to be under the influence" ("This Is the Right Call: Officers Involved in Fatal Minneapolis Incident Fired, Mayor Says"). Although Floyd not only kept repeating that he could not breathe but also he did not fight back at any point of the event, the police officer did not remove his leg from Floyd's neck. Floyd was pronounced dead by asphyxiation . The whole world watched this brutal assault because Darnella Frazier who was present at the scene recorded the whole encounter and posted it on the

internet which set off a never-ending chain of worldwide messages from people who were horrified by the video that they have just watched.

Nevertheless, this was not the first time that a black person had died at the hands of a policeman. Floyd brutal and tragic event reminds of Eric Garner's, Michael Brown's or Breonna Taylor's, among others, who have also died as a result of police brutality. African American director Ava DuVernay claims that one of the reasons why this particular death affected the whole nation so much was because everyone was able to clearly see what was going on at that particular moment between George Floyd and the policeman:

“We actually watch both parties’ faces perfectly framed. It wasn’t a body cam footage where you saw the black person be shot and you did not see the officer. It wasn’t grainy footage from a security camera across the street. It was both men right in your face, right to the lens, one begging for his life and one taking his life” (00:01:54-00:02:20)

More than anything, Floyd's death shocked the whole world due to: 1) the use of disproportionate violence on the part of the Minneapolis policemen; and 2) the fact that the video was available for everyone to watch on the internet. That was the trigger for the revolution. In fact, the FBI started an investigation concurrently to the federal civil rights investigation after making the following statement: “The FBI’s investigation will focus on whether the Minneapolis Police Department officers involved willfully deprived the individual of a right or privilege protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States” (“This Is the Right Call: Officers Involved in Fatal Minneapolis Incident Fired, Mayor Says”). On June 2, 2020, a private autopsy determined that the cause of his Floyd's

death has been mechanical asphyxia and the manner of death was homicide, therefore Floyd's heart stopped beating and his lungs stopped working while he was being held down by law enforcement (Robles and Burch).

In the next twenty four hours the only decision made towards the policemen, as FOX News published on May 26, was that "four Minneapolis officers have been fired following the death of an unarmed man in police custody" (4 Minneapolis Police Officers Fired Following Death of George Floyd in Police Custody"). These four officers names were Derek Chauvin, Thomas Lane, Tou Thao and J. Alexander Kueng. The first two were the ones who appear in the video while the other two were also there to help with the 911 call.

From then on, daily news about George Floyd's death and the uprising of the black community against the racist and dateless laws that existed in the country ran like fire. All of this happened at the same time that the United States, together with the rest of the world, were facing the infectious COVID-19 pandemic that had killed more than 400.000 people by June 10, 2020 in the United States only. Although people were told to stay at home to help prevent the spreading of the virus, on May 27, protests irruped in the city of Minneapolis and thousands of angry protesters gathered around the Third Precinct Police Station to ask for the end of black people dying at the hands of law enforcement ("How US Police Responded Differently to Protesters Demanding Justice for George Floyd and Anti-Lockdown Rallies"). Soon, the police officers created a barrier outside the police station as a form of protection because demonstrators had started throwing items at the windows (Jimenez, Omar et al.). Actually, there exist some videos of the first day of protests in which police officers are wearing their riot equipment. They are firing tear gas,

rubber bullets and smoke bombs at people who were protesting. (“How US Police Responded Differently to Protesters Demanding Justice for George Floyd and Anti-Lockdown Rallies”).

Following, Jacob Frey, the Minneapolis Mayor, declared that same day that he was asking for criminal charges against the police officer who caused Floyd’s death (Jimenez, Omar et al.). Also, Mayor Frey stated that “George Floyd deserves justice. His family deserves justice. The black community deserves justice and our city deserves justice” (qtd. in Jimenez, Omar et al.). Obviously, this whole situation shocked national and international communities. President 45th Donald J. Trump was not an exception as he published a tweet, on May 29, 2020, to inform that he was not supporting the demonstrators whom he called “thugs,” and to make sure that violence would be used against them:

These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won’t let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!
(@realDonaldTrump)

Not everybody agreed on President Trump’s way of addressing what was happening in the country as they considered that his words were not only disproportionate but that they would also create more violence.

Former president Barack Obama used his social media to express his opinion when he uploaded a twenty four line statement about George Floyd’s death in which he addressed both Floyd’s death and the social inequalities that still existed in the country. One of the most representative lines from this

statement is the following: “This shouldn’t be normal in 2020 America. It can’t be normal (. . .) we can and must be better” (@BarackObama). Obama’s presidential speeches, as this statement, were to make people think about the whole situation and inspire his citizens to do something in order to change the *status quo*. As it could not be otherwise, Obama’s tweet was much better received than President Trump’s because the majority of the readers felt that while Trump was only attacking the people who were not behaving in the best way possible, Obama was trying to focus on what needed to be change for the purpose of a better and more inclusive society.

In fact, the protests in the streets had been happening for three days at this point and more than five hundred security guards from the Minnesota National Guard were mobilized to different locations in the area because of the violence exerted against some local businesses (Sullivan and Zeleny). On this same day, some discontent protesters have also arrive to the nation’s capital at Pennsylvania Avenue on their way towards the White House which has been under a lockdown for security reasons, Behrmann writes. Finally, Derek Chauvin was arrested on Friday May 29, he was charged with the murder of Floyd’s, a verdict that pleased the black community (Behrmann).

Nevertheless, the country was in such a state of disarray that even a CNN television crew (including its reporter Omar Jimenez, producer and photojournalist) were reported and arrested in Minnesota while they were live on air at one of the demonstrations because the police officers were allegedly “clearing the streets and restoring order” (Sullivan and Forliti). The quick answer on behalf of CNN was to say that those arrests had no sense and that they were “a clear violation of their First Amendment rights” (Sullivan and Forliti).

People in New York were also taking the streets in spite of the COVID-19's prohibition of public gatherings and there were clashes with the police, Some protesters blocked the traffic in cities like Denver, Colorado and Columbus (Sullivan and Forliti).

Besides, on May 30, 2020, the majority of the largest cities in the country such as Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Denver, Seattle and Miami, imposed a curfew on all civilians who were obligated to stay home from 8pm to 6am on average. The curfews were instituted for the citizens's security and violating the curfew was punishable by up to a \$1000 fine and 90 days in jail (Kessler). Although the major part of the curfews were respected, thirty-four people were arrested in two different nights in Denver, multiple police cars were set on fire in the city of Los Angeles and a police cruiser was set on fire in Philadelphia's City Center (Kessler). Consequently, the governors of Minnesota and other states called up the National Guard troops to help stop some protests that have started to be violent as nearly 1,400 people were arrested across the country ("National Guard Called up in 11 States to Handle Protests"). However, New York's mayor Bill de Blasio did not call up the Nation Guard troops because he believed that the New York Police Department was the right organization to deal with this situation ("National Guard Called up in 11 States to Handle Protests"). On that same Saturday, the protests that were taking place outside the White House in Washington D.C. became violent when some protesters set off fireworks and threw bottles at the police who defended themselves by using pepper spray. Later the D.C. National Guard was called to protect the White House ("National Guard Called up in 11 States to Handle Protests"), and President Trump was taken into a White House bunker to

guarantee his security even though some officials told that they did not believe that the president was in danger (Relman).

And it has been mentioned above, this movement also reached other countries such as the United Kingdom. Thus, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman said that people should be allowed to protest peacefully because of George Floyd's death. Besides, the whole world was grieving with the United States. A state broadcaster from China said that racism is "the darkest shadow on American history is the scar that will not heal"; In New Zealand where protesters marched the streets there were banners that said "I can't breathe" or "The real virus is racism" ("The World Reacts as American Cities Erupt in Anger over George Floyd's Death").

In a similar thread of thought, the music industry was instrumental in creating a Social Media movement to support the Black Lives Movement and the Floyd's family. On Monday June 1, 2020, some brands like Spotify and Apple, among many others, communicated that they would stop working the next day in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Actually, Coscarelli writes that Columbia Records declared that "this is a day to reflect and figure out ways to move forward in solidarity," This movement was started by two black women Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang who believed that there was something that had to be done because music is "an industry that has profited predominantly from Black art" (qtd. in Coscarelli). Thus, on Tuesday June 2, 2020, millions of people across social media started uploading black squares on their social media feeds and proclaiming that this day was specifically devoted to promote black culture and educate others to promote the ending of racism while using the #BlackOutTuesday hash tag. As Coscarelli

writes, some vowed to mute themselves while skeptics worried that silence was not the answer. However, the reality was that social media was flooded with information about the black community—thus, opening new debates at the same time people engaged in helping organization as much as they could. In the end, this Black Out Tuesday was something positive as new conversations were open and new systematic problems were identified such as the lack of diversity among employees and at executive levels (Coscarelli).

Besides, due to the social impact of Floyd's assassination, old cases of black population who died at the hands of white police officers brutality were reopened and investigated again such as Ahmaud Arbery's and Breonna Taylor's deaths. The unarmed black man Arbery died on February 23, 2020 in Brunswick, Georgia. However, it has only recently been made public thanks to some footage that was leaked online. One of the men who were accused of murdering him used a racial word after shooting him ("Ahmaud Arbery: White Man Used Racial Slur after Shooting Black Jogger"). Also, investigators found some racially derogatory texts on the defendant's phone, therefore the case has been opened again and the three defendants who were charged with Arbery's murder can advance to the trial court ("Three Defendants in Arbery Killing Cleared for Trial"). Consequently, Willingham confirms that Breonna Taylor's case, who was killed back in March when police broke down into her apartment and shot her eight times during a sting operation, was reopened because charges were not still filled ("Breonna Taylor Would Have Been 27 Today. Here's where Her Case Stands"). Taylor's murder is back at the courts as the three officers involved in her death are only on administrative leave and they have not been charged with any crime. Therefore, Willingham assures that

protesters are bringing Taylor's case back during the George Floyd demonstrations so the family can find some closure and justice for her too. ("Breonna Taylor Would Have Been 27 Today. Here's where Her Case Stands")

While all these changes were taken place in the USA, the former Defense secretary Jim Mattis sustained that the country was a mess because "Donald Trump is the first president in the lifetime who does not try to unite the American people. Instead he tries to divide us"—which obviously only helped to aggravate the situation . On his part, Barack Obama also spoke about the Black Lives Matter movement when he mentioned how much this movement reminded him of the Civil Rights Movement: "We have seen in the last several weeks, last few months the kind of epic changes and events in our country that are profound as I've seen in my lifetime" ("Watch Barack Obama's full speech on the George Floyd protests in the United States" 00:00:12-00:00:31). Besides, Obama mentioned that the United States had to finally face "a long story of (. . .) institutionalized racism that too often has been the plague and original sin of our society" ("Watch Barack Obama's full speech on the George Floyd protests in the United States" 00:02:52-00:03:06) and try to find a solution to end all of this once and for all. Moreover, what made the former president felt so "hopeful is to see so many young people have been galvanized and activated and motivated and mobilized" (Obama's full speech on the George Floyd protests in the United States" 00:03:50-00:03:56) and that shows that the young American population is willing to work in favor of a better country.

While all this was happening, a George Floyd Memorial Service was held in Minneapolis on June 4, 2020 where Floyd's family was joined by several civil rights leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King III, or the well-known

black actor Kevin Hart to honor Floyd's persona (Chavez and Jones). A day after, the city council of Minneapolis voted unanimously that police officers in the city will not be allowed to use choke holds or neck restrains anymore and that officers who witness any unauthorized force against people have to report the action and must intervene regardless their rank (Mayerle). This change in the Minneapolis laws, as the Minneapolis Governor Tim Walz highlighted, was thanks to the peaceful protests that had took place during the whole week (qtd. in Mayerle). In contrast, LeBlanc writes that on June 5, president Donald Trump also shared a letter on Twitter in which he referred to the demonstrators as "terrorists using idle hate which filled students to burn and destroy," which once again left part of the nation feeling that the president was not even close to understand what the Black Lives Matter movement was about.

It should be bear in mind that during this social movement Trump has been focused to campaign by crediting his administration's efforts to boost the economy and turning a blind eye on what was happening in the country—to this end, Trump signed the PPP Flexibility Act Bill while giving a press conference because, as Vazquez writes. What president Trump said, while signing a new piece of legislating devoted to small business and citing George Floyd's death in passing, left nobody indifferent. It proves, thought, how little the president cared about the whole systemic racism and police brutality that the black community were demanding changes about: "We all saw what happened last week. We can't let that happen. Hopefully George is looking down and saying this is a great thing that's happening for our country. It's a great day for him. It's a great day for everybody" (Vazquez).

On June 6, 2020, probably as a response to the president's passive behavior towards the Black Lives Matter movement, the 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the street that leads to the White House, was covered with big yellow letters all the way down the avenue with the message: Black Lives Matter (Willingham "Washington, DC Paints a Giant Black Lives Matter Message on the Road to the White House"). After more than a week of protests in the capital, the mayor of Washington D.C. decided to support the black community by commissioning the painting that has been attracting people and cameras during the whole day (Willingham Washington, DC Paints a Giant Black Lives Matter Message on the Road to the White House"). This whole painting has made an impact on American society as it represents the difference between what is happening on the streets and the White House refusal to help the movement.

In fact, the different manifestations and protests in favor of the Black Lives Matter did not stopped in the following days across the country and the situation got worse when on June 12, 2020 another black man was killed at the hands of two white police officers in Atlanta. Allegedly, as Andone narrates, Rayshard Brooks was asleep inside his vehicle in the drive-thru of the American fast food restaurant *Wendy's* when the police officers arrived. Brooks was a bit disoriented when he woke up and he explained to the officers that he had been drinking at his daughter's birthday party. Andone writes that the police officers told Brooks he should not be driving in that state and when they were about to arrest Brooks, he started running and one of the police officers used a taser to immobilize him. Eventually, one of the officers fired at Brooks who was taken to the hospital where he died. The next day, Keisha Lance Bottoms, the mayor of

Atlanta, declared: “I do not believe that his was a justified use of deadly force,” thus, joining Brooks’ black community feelings. (qtd.in “Atlanta Officer Fired after Fatal Shooting of Black Man.”).

Actually, the death of Rayshard Brooks has triggered new waves of demonstrations for the very same reasons than the previous ones: the fact that white police brutality against black people exists and each new death proves it. On June 14, 2020, some protesters cut off one of the biggest highways in Atlanta where the demonstrators marched and the *Wendy’s* restaurant where Brooks had been shot was burned down in an arson attack. (Brooks and Whitcomb). Moreover, as Brooks and Whitcomb write, “a black man was shot dead by police as he tried to escape arrest an incident likely to fuel more nationwide tensions over race and police tactics” which will not be stopping in the following days. However, the Atlanta police department had already fired the police officer who allegedly shot Rayshard Brooks, and the other officer who was at the scene had been put on administrative leave (Brooks and Whitcomb). As a consequence, the Atlanta Mayor, announced that “there is a need for us to take an immediate look at our training policies” and to guarantee that any police action is not ruled by disproportionate violence in any case. Some days later, in June 18, 2020, the “ex-Atlanta Police Officer who killed Rayshard Brooks [was] charged with felony murder” (Young et al.).¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Apart from that, there were also some very mysterious happenings that occurred in the United States in that time, such as when two black, Robert Fuller and Malcolm Harsch, men were found hanging in Southern California. As Blankstein and Hesel narrate, “federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, are reviewing investigations into the deaths of two black men who were recently found hanging in Southern California”. Even though chief medical for Los Angeles county Dr. Jonathan Lucas declared “the initial reports appeared to be considered with a suicide” (qtd. in Blankstein and Hesel), Dr Lucas then added that they “felt prudent to roll that back and continue to look deeper” as they did not want to give a final resolution before investigation the case in depth.

Due to all these racist events that have been taken place throughout the last few months in USA, a new conversation about making *Juneteenth*¹⁴² a federal nationwide celebration has started. Although it is true that *Juneteenth* has been celebrated among black Americans since the beginning of the last century, Bouie adds that “the holiday gives us an occasion to reflect on the profound contributions of enslaved black Americans to the cause of human freedom.” Furthermore, the respective senators from Oklahoma and Wisconsin “are proposing to replace the federal observance of Columbus Day with Juneteenth” as a way of honoring the day and give the whole nation the opportunity to see how important that day was both for the American history and for the whole black community.

Although for the most part the cases already mentioned are still ongoing and their corresponding crimes are being investigated, news about them are present in the daily news. This visibility is good. However, it is important to remember that racist violence still exists and it happens every day in the United States—albeit in more or less subtle ways. What makes the previous cases mentioned here so alarming is that all the deaths of African Americans were caused by police officers—whites, for the most part—who are the ones supposed to take care of civilians disregarding their ethnicity or nationality. In the end, racism and racist attitudes permeate contemporary societies and it is extremely hard to fully eradicate it. However, it what angers the most that racism conducts still exist within the US police forces.

¹⁴² Bouie explains that the *Juneteenth* day “commemorates June 19, 1965 when Gen. Gordon Granger entered Galveston (Texas) to lead the Union Occupation force and delivered the news of the Emancipation Proclamation to enslaved people in the region”.

USA Presidential Elections of 2020

As it could not be otherwise, the celebration of the presidential elections of 2020 had not been free from controversy. As a matter of fact, the election of the 46th President of the United States has been the most controversial election in the history of the country. After a campaign full of very divergent opinions from the two respective candidates, the Republican and 45th President Donald Trump and the Democrat Joe Biden, the official voting started on November 3, 2020. However, the counting of the votes took several days and it was not until November 7 that Biden was able to declare its victory after the key states in the country have turned blue—which meant that the Democratic Party had obtained the majority of votes needed to win the presidential elections. Without any doubt, these have been a life changing elections and, as it happened with Barack Obama’s presidential elections in 2008, it has been due to: 1) the massive participation, and 2) the breath of hope that the democratic candidate emitted. Throughout the whole process of voting and counting the votes, the President Donald Trump has been demanding for the votes to be re-counted as he did not agree with the results. The final results of the 2020 presidential elections were confirmed on November 17, 2020—to President Donald Trump’s shock, despair and disbelief—thus, Trump kept asking for the recount.

Nevertheless, on November 7, 2020, both the future vice-president Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden delivered their respective victory speeches in front of a nation divided between people who wanted to look forward and give the Democratic Party the chance to rule again, and people who believed President Trump’s words—and, as expected, they did not want to accept the result of the presidential elections. Note that the election of Kamala

Harris as the vice-president has made a major impact on American history as Harris is the first woman to become the vice-president of the country—plus she identifies as mixed-race and proud of it. Harris was born in Oakland in 1964 to a Jamaican father and Indian mother, and has always worked for the equality and inclusion of minorities. Highly critical of the Trump Administration, Harris' whole speech was hopeful for the future, reminded how hard the past had been, and highlighted how much the American nation had prospered. In particular, Harris payed attention to how women had walked a long and difficult road to gain the same rights as men, thus, paving the way for new generations. Thanks to their relentless efforts, Harris concluded, women can now be anything they want:

The generations of women. Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native-American, women who throughout our nation's history have paved the way for this moment tonight. Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality and liberty and justice for all, including the black women who are often overlooked but so often proved that they are the back bone of our democracy. (00:50:47-00:51:26¹⁴³)

One of the most significant moments occurred when Harris acknowledged that she was the first woman to occupy the position of vice-president in the history of the United States: "But while I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last," thus, challenging the new waves of young multi-ethnic politicians (00:52:43-00:52:49). Besides, Harris took some time to refer to the next elected president of the nation, Joe Biden, whom she

¹⁴³ All the video references from the 2020 Victory Speech in this chapter are from: "Joe Biden and Kamala Harris Address the Nation after Election Win – Watch Live". The full reference can be found in the Works Cited section.

considered as someone very supportive of the minorities. As Harris declared, “[Biden] had the audacity to break one of the most substantial barriers that exist in our country and select a woman as his vice-president,” which made the crowd broke into applauses (00:52:23-00:52:33).

The Democrat Joe Biden who had been chosen as the 46th President of the United States already had a great deal of experience working in the White House as he had been Barack Obama’s vice-president during both of his terms. In his victory speech, Joe Biden focused on the utmost relevance of the union of the whole nation; how important it was for the American history to have Kamala Harris in the administration; the importance of the African-American community and that it was essential to keep working in favor of racial justice. Firstly, Biden declared that he “pledged to be a president who seeks to not divide but unify” (00:58:05-00:58:10) which clashed with the previous presidential administration whose ideas and actions had only separated and confronted the American society. Then, the president elected also used some of his minutes to praise his vice-president and emphasize the idea of everything being possible in the United States, as well as making it clear that any person disregarding his background or ethnicity was welcomed in his administration and the country he will be leading:

And I have the honor of serving with a fantastic vice-president (. . .) Kamala Harris who makes history as the first woman, first black woman and the first woman from South-Asian descent, the first daughter of immigrants ever elected in this country. Don’t tell it’s not possible in the United States. (01:00:10-01:00:35)

Moreover, Joe Biden also highlighted the importance of the African-American community and how much they had helped during the 2020 Democratic presidential campaign—"especially in those moments when this campaign was at its lowest, the African-American community stood up again for many" (01:02:03-01:02:11). Without any doubt, the most touching moments in the speech happened towards the end when Biden's made it clear that his administration's most important goal was to create a country which would be real and fair for everybody without making any differences between origin, religion or orientation: "Too many dreams have been deferred for too long. We must make a promise to the country which is real for everybody. No matter their race, their ethnicity, their faith, their identity or their disability." (01:06:47-01:07:03).

In essence, what makes both of these speeches memorable is the fact that they remind that a brighter future is still possible after four hopeless years. Harris' and Biden's words are a reminder of how powerful the United States might be when and if they come together to fight for things that matter. Obviously, there is still a lot of work to be done in the next years, but it is inspiring for most American citizens to find that their future president and vice president might shed some light after the dark times when the minorities around the nation still feel oppressed and racial violence is still present.

2021's USA - A Work in Progress

Related to the previous presidential elections, on January 6, 2021 the whole world was watching Washington D.C. which is the representation of the American's democracy because it was about to be threatened when a big mob made of Donald Trump's supporters gathered at the Capitol doors since they did not agree with the results of the 46th presidential elections. Encouraged by, at that current time, president Donald Trump, the violent protestors' intention was to break into the Capitol to interrupt the Elector College Vote that was taking place inside of the building. It should be said that this violent manifestation was a direct result of a rally organized by Donald Trump the morning of that very same day where he kept on denouncing that the presidential elections were a lie and preaching: "We will stop the steal" ("President Trump Speaks at 'Save America' Rally" 01:07:55-01:07:58). And just like he has been doing for months, Trump kept planting the seed of violence and lies within his supporters who blindly believe him when he says that part of the votes have been manipulated: "Does anyone believe that Joe had eighty million votes?" ("President Trump Speaks at 'Save America' Rally" 01:09:06-01:09:12).

De facto, President Donald Trump even dares to compare the American presidential elections to other countries while devaluing their power and credibility when referring to them as "third world countries" in the following quotation from his rally: "It's a disgrace (. . .) You could take a... third world countries, just take a look, their elections are more honest than what we are going through in this country" ("President Trump Speaks at 'Save America'

Rally” 01:09:20-01:09:31). Therefore, Trump is not only insulting the country he is leading by claiming that the presidential elections had been manipulated, of what there are no proof of that happening at all, but he is also being racist by positioning one country and culture over another just for his own sake. Even Utah’s Republican senator Mitt Romney declared later that president Donald Trump was the only culprit of what had happened in Washington D.C in his Twitter account: “What happened at the U.S. Capitol today was an insurrection, incited by the President of the United States”.

Although this situation was insulting to the whole nation and even to people watching around the globe, it did not quite take by surprise as the president had been supporting and spreading this message of the voting process being a fraud since the celebration of the presidential elections in past November. Although several security perimeters where placed around the capitol to guarantee the security of the politicians and reporters working inside of the building, the pro-Trump supporters were able to enter the Capitol after having confrontations with the federal police. Because of the turbulent atmosphere, everyone who was in the House Chamber and the Senate Chamber as well as everyone who was working inside of the building were evacuated to guarantee their security. Later, some of those protesters were inside those chambers taking photos, breaking things or even stealing documents from the offices. The whole world watched astonished how a mob of Trump supporters where making fun of what is the foundation of the United States, its democracy. It is fair to say that the feelings shared among everyone watching this news were incredulity and despair. Regular citizens, celebrities, news reporters, people from all over the world and even politics disregarding

their political orientation were shocked because of what was happening in the nation's capital. This event has been nothing but shocking and insulting to everyone who believes in democracy.

Besides, what infuriated everyone around the world was the fact that the response from the police was nothing compared to what had previously happened in peaceful demonstrations in favor of the Black Lives Movement. If those people who broke into the Capitol happened to be from the black community, there would have been more violence and reprisals. There was a common sentiment that the white pro-Trump supporters were not treated as harshly as any other community would have been treated in that same situation of even in a peaceful protest.

While this was happening even Kevin McCarthy, Republican politician and House Minority Leader in the House of Representatives since 2019, declared that President Trump should address the situation as it was getting out of control. While the protesters were inside the Capitol, one of them was shot and six others were taken to the hospital but later that day it was known that four pro-Trump supporters had died and more than fifty people had been injured. Consequently, the vice-president Mike Pence quickly addressed the situation and published a couple of tweets denouncing the violence that was part of this attack:

The violence and destruction taking place at the US Capitol Must Stop and it Must Stop Now. Anyone involved must respect Law Enforcement officers and immediately leave the building. Peaceful protest is the right

of every American but this attack on our Capitol will not be tolerated and those involved will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

What was shocking for the whole nation was that while everything was happening, President Donald Trump was secluded in the White House. The country that he was leading was in serious trouble but the president was nowhere to be seen and that infuriated people across the nation. However the person who did address the problem in a very rapid way was Joe Biden who gave a national televised speech in which he talked about how profoundly worried he was about the situation of the country and that what was happening in Washington D.C. was far from representing the true America: “The scenes of chaos at the Capitol do not reflect a true America, do not represent who we are” (00:01:18-00:01:26). In fact, Biden’s biggest concern was the image of America that was being shown on television news all around the world. As the future president of the United States it was very important for him to make clear it that America was nothing but a democratic and respectable country. Following, Biden mentioned how important the figure of a president is for a country because he did not comprehend how President Trump hadn’t have said anything yet: “The words of a president matter, no matter how good or bad the president is” (00:01:59-00:02:05). Besides, the future president also took the chance to talk about the danger that some of President Trump’s declarations have created in the American society: “At their best, the words of a president can inspire, at their worst, they can incite” (00:02:07-00:02:17). However, Biden did not end the speech without directly addressing the president of the United States and telling him to go on national television and address the problem as well as assuming the consequences of his own acts: “Therefore I call on

President Trump to go on national television now, to fulfill his oath and defend the Constitution and demand an end to this siege” (00:02:20-00:02:35).

Within minutes, President Trump shared a video on his official Twitter account where he addressed the whole situation but the fact that it was a very short video and not a live speech caused widespread discontent. To make things worse, in the video message, Trump once again treated the violent protestors as heroes and openly supported them by saying “I know your pain, I know you’re hurt, we had an election that was stolen from us” (“President Donald Trump: 'I know how you feel, but go home” 00:00:01-00:00:07. Finally, President Trump told them to go home as there was nothing else to do there “You have to go home now, we have to have peace, (. . .) We don’t want anybody hurt, it’s a very tight period of time”(“President Donald Trump: 'I know how you feel, but go home” 00:00:14-00:00:27). Moreover, throughout the video, he kept repeating that presidential elections were manipulated but that peace needed to be maintained at all costs and that he appreciated their support: “This was a fraudulent election (. . .) We have to have peace (. . .) Go home, we love you, you’re very special” (“President Donald Trump: 'I know how you feel, but go home” 00:00:37-00:00:50). Truthfully, the address to the nation on behalf of the President felt like a joke for the majority of the population as the President was mostly thanking his violent supporters than denouncing this act of insurrection. As a result, not many hours later *Twitter* banned Donald J. Trump from using his twitter account during the next twelve hours because his tweets were considered to incite to violence and they violated several rules of the platform.

Washington D.C.'s Police Chief gave a press conference on national television to inform on how the situation was developing and although the situation was now under control, they were still alert for anything that could happen in the area or other cities across the country. Therefore, because of "the violent behavior towards the police officers there (. . .) a riot was declared" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 05:47:29-05:47:38) the Police Chief added. De facto, it was announced that Washington D.C.'s mayor, Muriel Bowser, has announced a curfew as the Police Chief explained "As you have heard from the mayor, a 6pm curfew has been emplaced tonight and will be in effect until 6am tomorrow January 7" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 05:48:23-05:48:30). Therefore after announcing the curfew, he highlighted the importance of going home because arrests will happen to everyone who might be on the streets when the curfew started as it would be understood that that person has had some type of relationship with the mob that took place earlier that day: "We are advising everyone, everyone that is not engaged in this activity to get off the streets" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 05:48:31-05:48:37).

The whole situation was quite unbelievable for the whole nation as the last time that there had been problems regarding the result of the presidential elections had taken place more than a century ago. Some minutes later, the republican and Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse also wrote about his feelings through a short text in his official Twitter profile that said: "Lies have consequences. This violence was the inevitable and ugly outcome of the

President's addiction to constantly stoking division". What made this situation much more shocking is that even politicians from the same political party than the President Trump were really disappointed by the actions of the President and the majority of them confronted the president. In this vein, the first African-American elected democratic Senator for the estate of Georgia, Reverend Raphael Warnock said the following words on national television to show his displeasure with the situation that his country was going through: "This is what happens when you have leaders that don't have a moral compliance who are willing to do anything to stay in power" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 07:47:56-07:48:03).

Luckily, some hours later it was possible for the whole senate to go back to work and resume their voting and comments at the House Chamber and Senate Chamber to officially sign Joe Biden's as the next president of the country. Before resuming the ceremony, the vice-president Mike Pence gave a short speech to make it clear that what had happened in Washington D.C. that day was inexcusable and that democracy should always be respected: "Violence never wins. Freedom wins and this is still the people's house" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 09:05:42-09:05:49). Those words were really well received by the whole nation and the whole room broke in a round of applause to what Mike Pence added with a very firm tone "Let's go back to work" ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 09:06:44-09:06:45). As it might be expected, vice-president Mike Pence was not the only one who addressed the attack that was

perpetrated against democracy that day. The democratic leader of the senate, Chuck Schumer said that this day will never be forgotten because it marked a new beginning for the history of the United States: “Unfortunately we can now add January 6, 2021 to that very short list of dates in American history that will live forever in infamy” (“WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol” 09:11:19-09:11:31). However, Schumer added that “Today’s events did not happen spontaneously. The president promoted conspiracy theories that motivated these things. The president exhorted them to come to our nation’s Capitol” (“WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol” 09:14:26-09:14:38) and highlighted that his was the President’s fault who has been feeding the seed of violence and hate for many months. Moreover, this feeling of exasperation towards the president was common in the whole room as Oklahoma Republican senator James Lankford said that “while we disagree on things and disagree strongly at times, we do not encourage what happened today” (“WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol” 09:18:12-09:18:20).

Continuously, the whole chamber started to vote whether they supported the winning of Joe Biden to be the next president of the country or not. What surprised the nation was that the majority of people who supported President Trump’s defamations of the presidential elections being a fraud changed their minds. While there were originally thirteen senators from the Republican party who were going to vote against Joe Biden, only six of them finally voted against the democratic politician. Nevertheless, the joint sessions of Congress, with ninety-three “yes” and six “nay”, formalized President-elect Joe Biden’s victory

over Donald J. Trump and confirmed that Joe Biden would be 46th President of the United States.

Obviously, even relevant people from the world of television and culture made their opinions public when their respective television shows aired that very same evening and night. For example Stephen Colbert dedicated fourteen minutes before starting his show *The Late Show*, to talk about what had happened earlier that day in Washington D.C. and to denounce everything that has been insulting about the situation. Regarding President Trump's video message, Colbert said "For the record, if I said that, I would be arrested for inciting a riot" (00:04:44-00:04:47) and then he added "We don't decide elections on who's most upset. We decided them by who gets the most votes" (00:11:56-00:12:02). Coinciding with him is another television host James Corden who also addressed the violent events in his show *The Late Late Show* and after denouncing the violence and hate that the whole nation witnessed that day, Corden added that the nation must have hope that this will end very soon and that this last term had just been a parenthesis of a brighter future: "It was just hijacked by a lunatic and his crazy army for the last four years" (00:02:34-00:02:42). In the same thread of thought, in *Late Night*, Seth Meyers also used his platform to condemn all the unprecedented events that the United States experienced on January 6, 2021. Meyers believes that "No one who aided and embedded today's actions should ever be allowed to serve in a democracy they so clearly detest" (00:03:50-00:04:01). He also added that people working in favor of the country must always respect the most important part of their society, their democracy.

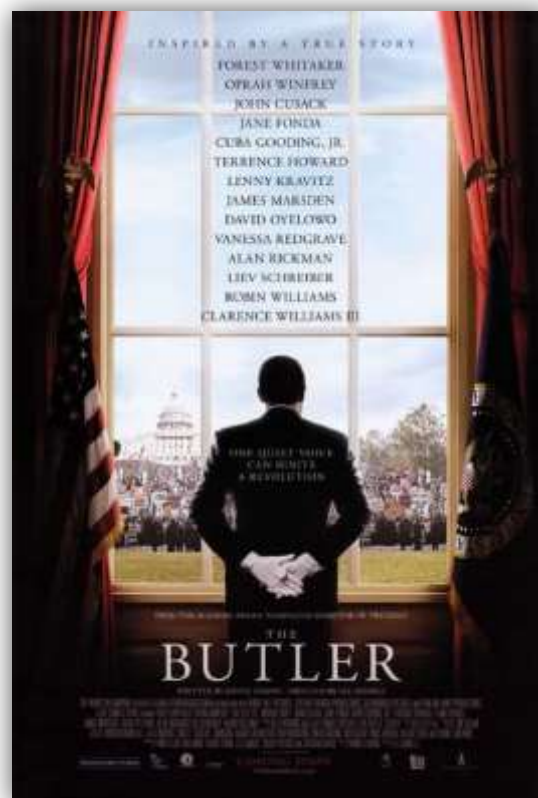
In conclusion, what needs to be highlighted because it is closely related to the basis of this Ph. dissertation are the words that democratic senator Cory Book from New Jersey pronounced in Congress:

I pray that we remember a Georgian and his words (. . .) like those Georgians on a bridge called the Edmund Pettus who joined hands who were called 'threats to our democracy', who were called 'outrageous epithets' when they exhorted to expand our democracy, to save it, to heal it when they joined arm in arm and said what we should say now, and commit ourselves to that ideal that together – we shall overcome. ("WATCH LIVE: Congress reconvenes to count electoral votes after pro-Trump mob breaches U.S. Capitol" 09:45:43-09:46:28)

Undoubtedly, Book's words perfectly reflect how much the American society needs to keep working on but at the same time they should never forget their past to avoid repeat the same mistakes. Moreover, democracy should always be respected and defended against any threats as it is the basis of the United States. Everything that the American society have nowadays has been built on the basis of democracy which means to give the whole nation the opportunity to speak out for themselves irrespective of their own and different opinions. In conclusion, democracy must be the basis of American daily life. Democracy must always be protected because democracy is ultimately what helps the American society progress and fight for the equality of all the citizens in the whole nation. Democracy is the basis of equality and the glue that helps put the United States of America together.

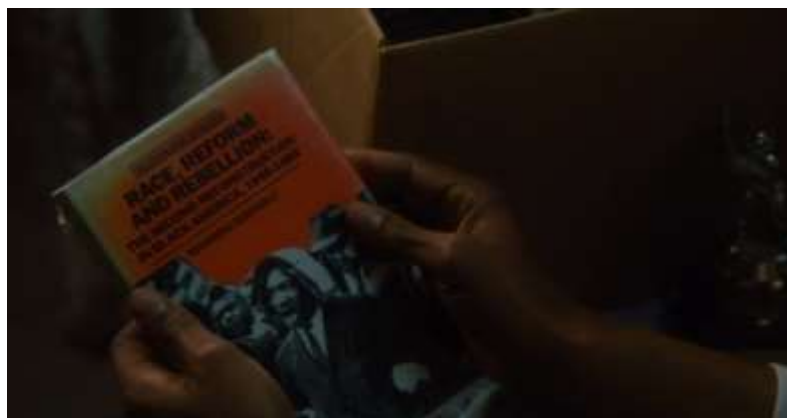
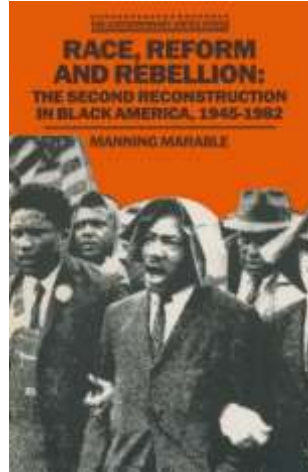
Lee Daniels' *The Butler* through Pictures

a) The Theatrical Poster (2013)



b) The Representation of the Civil Rights Movement in *The Butler*

- Manning Marable's real book in the Movie



Cecil Gaines (Forest Whitaker) at his son Louis' room when he comes across the books that had influenced him to become an activist. Director Lee Daniels' might have chosen to offer the close up above as a way to honor the figure of Martin Luther King Jr. and all the people who fought in favor of the Civil Rights Movement in *The Butler*.

- 1957 – Little Rock High School (Arkansas)

On racial segregation in public schools and the fight for integration.

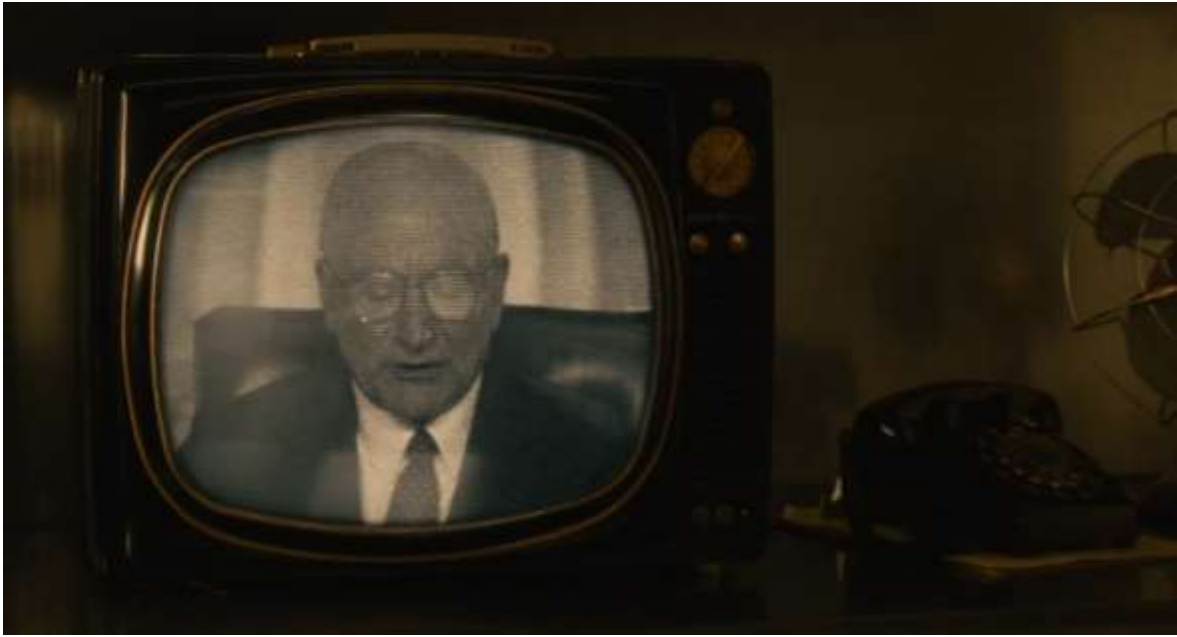


Melba Pattillo dares to walk to high school in Little Rock while being harassed by angry white parents and students. Used in *The Butler*.

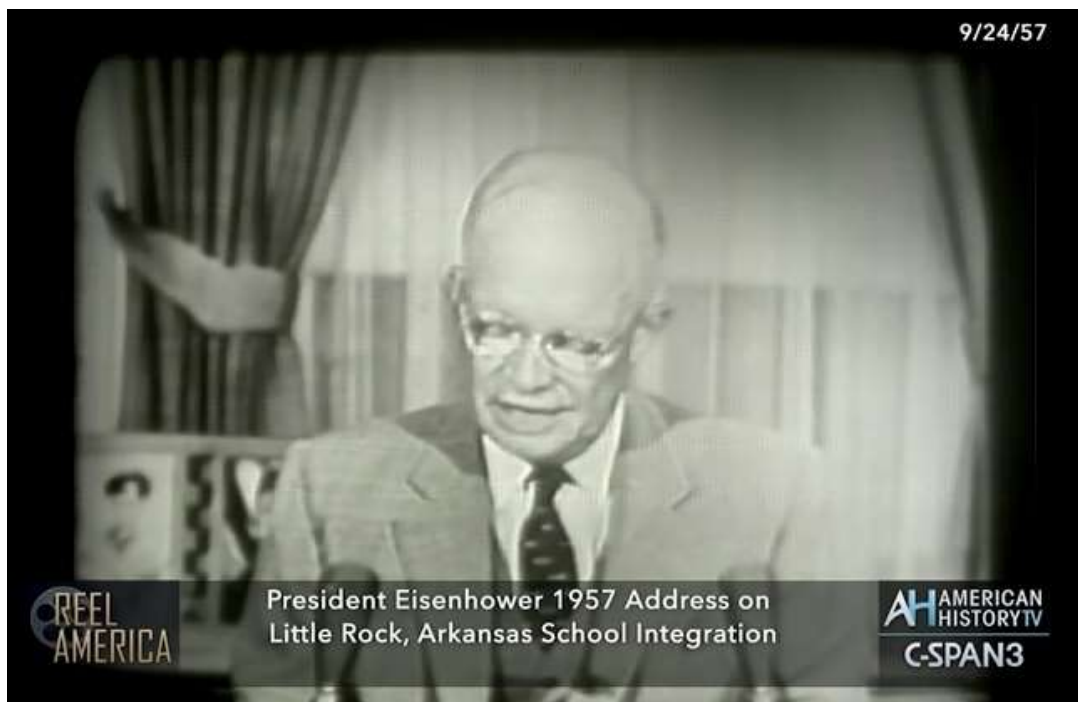


A medium shot of Melba Pattillo from the series *The Eyes on the Prize*.

- 1957- President Eisenhower Speech



Recreation of President Eisenhower's 1957 Speech by actor Robin Williams in *The Butler*.



Screenshot from the real speech delivered by President Eisenhower in 1957.

- 1960 – James Lawson and the Army of Love



James Lawson, played by Jesse Williams, teaching a class to black and white volunteer students. It deals with non-violent resistance.
*The Army of Love in *The Butler*.*



James Lawson, the creator of "The Army of Love," is teaching a class in 1960.
*A screenshot from *The Eyes on the Prize*.*

- 1960 – Sit-ins & Non-Violent Resistance



Representation of the Army of Love students sat at an only-white counter during the first sit-ins waves, in 1960, in *The Butler*.



Screenshot from an original video of a sit-in in 1960 from *The Eyes on the Prize*.



Representation of the violence exerted on the black students during the sit-ins (*The Butler*).



Screenshots from archival footage. They show whites' brutal violence while black students remain passive. These scenes took place at the store in Greensboro (North Carolina) from *The Eyes on the Prize* documentary.



Sequence of screenshots from *The Butler* where the police arrested white and black students after the sit-in incidents in Greensboro.



Original footage of black students being arrested after the sit-in used in scenes in *The Butler*. It is taken from *The Eyes of the Prize* documentary.

- 1961 – Freedom Bus Attack



Black and White students and activists in the interior of the Freedom Bus on their way to Birmingham (*The Butler*).



Original photos from the interior of the Freedom Bus where mixed students travel to Birmingham (from *The Eyes on the Prize* and *Freedom Riders*).



Recreation of the attack that the activist students or Freedom Riders suffered on their way to the South in 1961 (*The Butler*).



Original photo included in *The Butler*. It shows the effects of the virulent assault and the state of the freedom bus after the attack. Note that the real attack took place during the day, but director Lee Daniels chose to shoot it at night.



Original photos. Freedom Bus burning after being hit by Molotov cocktails.
From *The Eyes on the Prize* documentary.

- 1963 – Fire Hoses in Birmingham and Police Brutality



Original footage on television. Students are brutally attacked by the police and firemen use fire hoses on pacifist protesters (*The Butler*).



Recreation of black youth being hosed down by high pressure water
in *The Butler*. Recreation of real images.



Original footage of police dogs attacking black people (*The Butler*).



Original footage. Black students are being arrested after the encounter. (*The Butler*)

- 1963 – President Kennedy’s Speech



James Marsden’s recreation of President Kennedy’s speech of 1963 in *The Butler*.



Screenshot of the real speech delivered by President Kennedy in 1963.

- 1963 – President Kennedy’s Assassination in the CBS Bulletin by Walter Cronkite



Original footage from the CBS Special News Bulletin broadcasted some minutes after President Kennedy’s assassination. Anchored by journalist Walter Cronkite. It is included in *The Butler*.

- 1964 – The March on Selma – The Edmund Pettus Bridge



Original footage of the riots that occurred in the Edmund Pettus Bridge during the March on Selma and Bloody Sunday, in 1964, which are included in *The Butler*.

- 1964 – President Johnson’s Speech on African-Americans’ Right to Vote



Liev Schreiber playing President Johnson and delivering the speech on the right to vote of 1964 in *The Butler*.



Screenshot of the original video of President Johnson addressing the nation in 1964. The right to vote speech.

- 1968- Martin Luther King Jr.'s Assassination

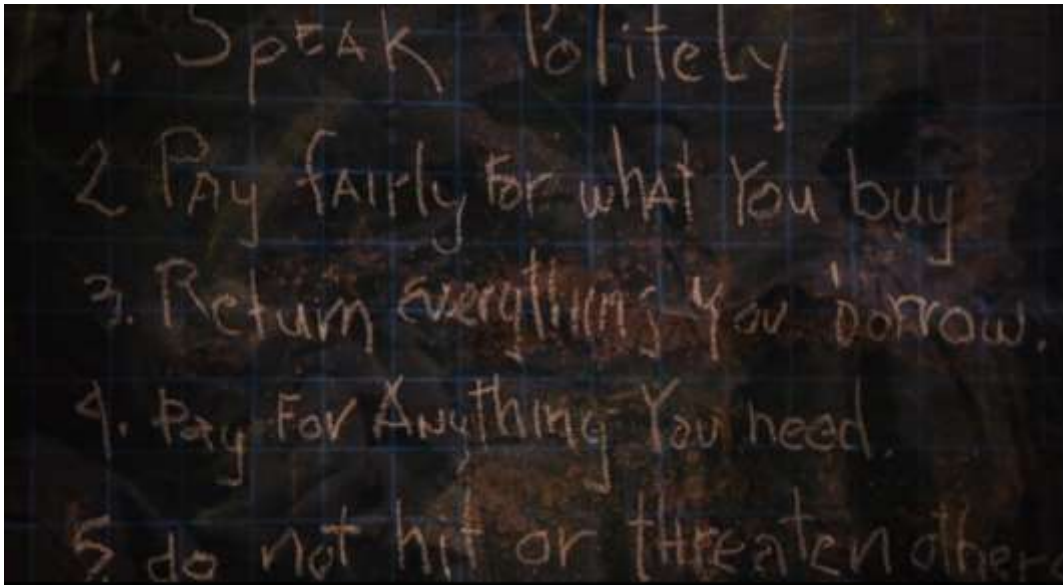


Recreation of the Lorraine Motel, and balcony of Room 306, where Dr. King was assassinated in *The Butler*. It is located at 450 Mulberry Street (Memphis).



Original photo of the Lorraine Motel from *The Eyes on the Prize* documentary.

- 1969 – Black Panthers Party



A screenshot from *The Butler* where some of the original Black Panther rules are written on a blackboard in their headquarters.

(1. Speak Politely; 2. Pay fairly for what you buy; 3. Return everything you borrow; 4. Pay for anything you need; 5) Do not hit or threaten other people).



An original photo of a group of Black Panthers included in *The Butler*.
Close up of little black boy wearing a black beret hat.



A screenshot from *The Butler* where Louis, his girl-friend Carol and other black members are listening to the leader of the Oakland's Black Panther Party leader. They are wearing the black berets, afro-hairstyle and leather jackets which are some of the traits of clothing used by the Black Panthers members.



Original photos of the Black Panther members from the VH1 documentary *Lords of the Revolution*.

- 2008 – Obama’s Run to Presidency



The Gaines' family (Forest Whitaker/Cecil Gaines, Oprah Winfrey/Helene Gaines and David Oyelowo/Louis Gaines) together with some friends celebrating the candidacy of Barack Obama as the next president of the United States in *The Butler*.

Eugene Allen's Life through Pictures



Eugene Allen with his wife Helene and his son Charles at home in 1948. ¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ All the pictures in this chapter are from Wil Haygood's *The Butler. A Witness to History* (2013).



Picture taken in 1952 during Eugene Allen's first year working at the White House.



Eugene Allen serving in a business meeting at the White House.



Eugene Allen standing next to the chef while preparing for a service.



Eugene Allen taking a photo of Martin Luther King Sr. (also known as Daddy King) during a meeting in the White House.



A photo from 1955 where Eugene Allen is serving while a meeting is taking place in the President Eisenhower administration.



Eugene Allen serving at a White House party for the Kennedy's children one day after President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963.



Eugene Allen working for President Ford's on his birthday which coincided with the butler's birthday.



Eugene Allen with First Lady Rosalynn Carter and President Jimmy Carter in 1977.



Eugene Allen and one of his colleagues talking with Presidents Ford and Carter.



Eugene and Helene Allen with the First Lady Nancy Reagan and President Reagan in 1986 in a State Dinner at the White House. Allen was the first butler to ever be invited to a state dinner.



Eugene Allen with First Lady Nancy Reagan.



Photo of Eugene Allen's last day of work at the White House during President Reagan's administration.



Eugene Allen on the porch of his residence in Washington D.C after his retirement. He had served at the White House for thirty-four years.



In 2001, Eugene Allen was able to meet President George W. Bush at the White House.



Eugene Allen was often invited to different activities at the White House. Here he is sitting next to Hillary Clinton at a conference.



On January 20, 2009, Eugene Allen was invited to the historical inauguration of Barack Obama's administration ceremony in Washington D.C.

Resumen

De la realidad a la pantalla: la representación del movimiento por los derechos civiles en *El mayordomo* de Lee Daniels

A lo largo de la historia se encuentran numerosas representaciones de ficción sobre el Movimiento de Derechos Civiles en los Estados Unidos en la pantalla grande y los hechos más relevantes de ese período. Así mismo, las figuras más importantes de ese movimiento histórico han aparecido en películas como *Arde Mississippi* (1988), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Locos en Alabama* (1999), *Hairspray* (2007), *Selma* (2015) o *Criadas y señoras* (2011), entre otras. Todas estas diferentes adaptaciones, que van desde una película dramática como *Arde Mississippi* hasta una película musical para adolescentes como *Hairspray*, han contribuido a crear una representación más o menos real de la comunidad afroamericana en el cine.

El objetivo de esta tesis doctoral es analizar hasta qué punto la representación de la lucha de los derechos civiles en la película *El mayordomo* (2013) de Lee Daniels es verídica, o no, al compararla con el documental *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987), así como con otros archivos históricos de este período, y evaluar hasta qué punto transmite una representación real de la historia de los Estados Unidos. A través de la historia, la representación de la lucha afroamericana para poner fin a la discriminación y a la segregación varía de unas películas a otras pero todas son igualmente dignas de ser estudiadas. En realidad, en *El mayordomo*, Daniels ofrece una reinterpretación de los eventos del movimiento por los derechos civiles al crear una historia de ficción basada en una experiencia de la vida real. Además, Daniels utiliza imágenes

reales de archivo de la época que proporcionan autenticidad a la película. De este modo, el director atrae a todo tipo de público, tanto a quien le gusta ver películas de ficción como a quien prefiera ver películas que están basadas en hechos históricos. En general, al ver su película, Lee Daniels hace sentir a su audiencia que está aprendiendo o recordando la historia de los afroamericanos en los Estados Unidos.

En los últimos años, *El mayordomo*, cuya historia trata de los hechos históricos que ocurrieron entre 1926 y 2008, se ha convertido en un fenómeno social porque ha recuperado la narrativa de la era de los derechos civiles durante la presidencia del primer presidente afroamericano de los Estados Unidos. El hecho de que un ciudadano afroamericano como Barack Obama se convirtiera en el presidente de los Estados Unidos, justo cuando se estrenaba una película basada en la vida de un sirviente afroamericano en la Casa Blanca, hizo que personas de todo el mundo empatizaran profundamente con la película y con la historia en la que se basa. Sin duda, esta película de Lee Daniels es muy completa porque la trama cuenta los hechos verídicos de la lucha por los derechos civiles al tiempo que narra la inspiradora historia de uno de los mayordomos que trabajó en la Casa Blanca durante un periodo tan importante de la historia de Estados Unidos.

Esta tesis doctoral se sustenta en dos enfoques diferentes pero que transcurren paralelos a lo largo de la investigación: un enfoque socio-histórico y un enfoque socio-educacional. El uso de estas metodologías nos ayudará a: 1) analizar la precisión de los eventos del movimiento en favor de los derechos civiles descritos en *El mayordomo* de Lee Daniels, así como a: 2) precisar su influencia en la sociedad y, en particular, dentro de las comunidades

afroamericanas. Por tanto, a lo largo de este trabajo se utilizarán enfoques que abordan las ideas tecnológicas, sociales y sociológicas. Por supuesto, se tendrán en cuenta algunos de los autores más importantes en cuanto al estudio de la relación entre cine, historia y educación como Charles F. Altman, James Chapman, Robert A. Rosenstone o Gladstone Yearwood. Sus enfoques, así como su desarrollo a través del tiempo, son muy importantes para la comprensión de esta tesis doctoral porque la industria del cine está en constante evolución.

Por un lado, la información histórica específica sobre cada época será explicada, utilizando libros, documentales, entrevistas, artículos y revistas relevantes en el campo. Por otro lado, se analizará la representación que Daniels ofrece del Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles durante el tiempo que transcurre *El mayordomo* para demostrar que, aunque no es una transposición exacta de la realidad, el cine es un medio muy válido para mostrar y comprender hechos históricos. Así pues, gracias a la película de Lee Daniels, los espectadores se sumergen en la poderosa era del movimiento por los derechos civiles entrelazada con los acontecimientos vitales de un mayordomo afroamericano que trabaja en la Casa Blanca.

Existen innumerables fuentes escritas que se refieren a la presencia de la comunidad afroamericana en Estados Unidos pero, dado que tratamos de ver hasta qué punto la historia se puede ficcionalizar adecuadamente, se han elegido fuentes variadas para comprender mejor la experiencia vital de la comunidad afroamericana. Algunas de estas obras incluyen, *Dark Days Bright Nights* de Peniel E. Joseph, *Race Reform and Rebellion* de Manning Marable o *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* de Aldon D. Morris, entre muchas

otras. También se utilizar otros documentos que son de relevante importancia para esta tesis relativos al análisis de películas como *Film and History* de James Chapman o *History on Film Film on History* de Robert A. Rosenstone. Otra fuente que ha sido fundamental para llevar a cabo esta tesis doctoral es el manual de Clayborne Carson *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* que emplearemos junto con su correspondiente serie documental *The Eyes on the Prize*. Tanto el libro como la serie son una colección histórica de documentos, discursos y relatos sobre la lucha por la libertad de los afroamericanos que ha resultado esencial a lo largo de la redacción de esta disertación.

En cuanto a las representaciones visuales, a pesar de que *El mayordomo* (2013) es una película relativamente reciente, abundan las entrevistas y artículos que tratan sobre esta película ganadora de un Oscar y la forma particular en que retrata la historia del Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles. Una de las entrevistas más relevantes es "A Butler Well Served by this Election" de Wil Haygood en la que el autor entrevista a Eugene Allen y conoce la vida de la persona que finalmente inspirará al director Lee Daniels para hacer su película y que constituye la base de la trama de *El mayordomo*. También hay una gran variedad de críticas y entrevistas sobre la adaptación a la pantalla grande de los hechos históricos que han sido imprescindibles para el conseguir el objetivo de este trabajo de investigación.

La estructura de esta tesis doctoral se divide en nueve capítulos y la conclusión. En el Capítulo 1. "Metodología del cine como fuente histórica y aproximación a la historia del estudio del cine", trata sobre la metodología que existe en cuanto al estudio del cine como fuente histórica así como la historia del análisis de películas. En el Capítulo 2. "Conceptos cinematográficos en *El*

mayordomo de Lee Daniels", se abordarán algunos conceptos y discursos cinematográficos básicos, al mismo tiempo que se incluyen ejemplos extraídos de *El mayordomo* de Lee Daniels. El capítulo 3 titulado "Un enfoque sobre la representación de los afroamericanos en el cine" ofrece una descripción general de las diferentes formas en que la comunidad afroamericana ha sido representada en el cine a través de la historia. También se abordarán algunos temas controvertidos como qué es o no es el cine negro/afroamericano en el apartado "¿Qué se considera cine afroamericano?".

Teniendo en cuenta que esta tesis defiende la idea de que películas como *El mayordomo* pueden tener un gran impacto en la sociedad en general, en el Capítulo 4. "El cine como práctica social" hay algunas páginas dedicadas a discutir la importante función del cine como práctica social. Además, dado que la tradición oral es parte de la cultura de los afrodescendientes, la subsección 4.1. "El poder de las historias" se ha dedicado a analizar el papel y la función de las historias dentro de la sociedad, en general, y dentro de la comunidad afroamericana, en particular. Por este motivo, se ha considerado interesante incluir una entrevista con el ex presidente Barack Obama y la primera dama Michelle Obama quienes, fieles a su propia tradición oral, creen firmemente en la idea de que las historias influyen y dan forma al mundo en el que vivimos.

En el Capítulo 5. "Contextualización histórico-social", se ha introducido el trasfondo histórico-social en el que se explica detalladamente el pasado de la comunidad afroamericana como parte de la historia de los Estados Unidos. Este capítulo abarca desde el comienzo del Movimiento de los Derechos Civiles, cuando los afroamericanos comenzaban a luchar por sus derechos, y

concluye con la llegada de Barack Obama a la presidencia de los Estados Unidos. Los momentos más decisivos de esta era—como por ejemplo el movimiento de *sit-ins* en Estados Unidos, los *Freedoms Riders*, los disturbios en Selma o la aparición del Partido de las Panteras Negras, entre muchos otros—serán explicados a fondo en esta sección. Además, los cinco presidentes que están presentes en la trama de la película serán tratados en esta sección ya que todos juegan un papel fundamental en el Movimiento de los Derechos Civiles, a saber: Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon y Reagan. De hecho, analizar sus respectivos mandatos, así como las decisiones que tomaron durante sus presidencias en lo que atañe a la vida de los afroamericanos es esencial para comprender su representación en la película de Lee Daniels. Además, en aras de la claridad, he decidido seguir aquí la misma división cronológica y presidencial que utiliza el director Daniels en *The Butler*.

En el corazón de esta tesis se encuentra el capítulo 6. "*El mayordomo de Lee Daniels*". En este capítulo se tratan algunos de los aspectos más relevantes que tienen que ver con la realización de la película como son: la inspiración para la película y las razones por las que Lee Daniels comienza a trabajar en este proyecto. Así mismo, también se refieren los verdaderos hechos de la vida de Eugene Allen (1919-2010), el mayordomo que ha inspirado la historia que se cuenta en la película. Al mismo tiempo, se analiza hasta qué punto su aparente figura invisible ha resultado ser muy significativa tanto para la historia de los negros estadounidenses como para la representación de los mayordomos afroamericanos. Para concluir este capítulo, se examina la recepción crítica que se ha publicado hasta la fecha sobre *The*

Butler /El mayordomo y se discute el impacto y el éxito de la película a nivel internacional.

En el capítulo 7, "Un estudio de la representación del movimiento de los derechos civiles en *El mayordomo* de Lee Daniels", se realiza un estudio comparativo entre los hechos reales más importantes que aparecen en *El mayordomo* y los momentos históricos reales del documental *The Eyes on the Prize* y otros documentos históricos audio-visuales. El objetivo que se pretende es analizar una selección de los hechos y personajes más relevantes de la era del Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles para luego contrastar la información entre las dos fuentes, junto con las biografías, videos, discursos y documentales existentes al respecto. Analizar los personajes y las escenas más significativas de *El mayordomo* que se relacionan con el Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles es lo que se lleva a cabo en esta sección para comprobar las similitudes y/o diferencias que existen entre los hechos reales y la adaptación cinematográfica, lo cual es un objetivo principal de esta disertación. Así mismo, la trama de la película será analizada teniendo en cuenta la división que Daniels establece en la película, y que hacen referencia a las cuatro presidencias directamente relacionadas con la lucha por los derechos civiles.

De manera similar, considero relevante incluir el Capítulo 8. "Del Movimiento de Derechos Civiles a Barack Obama" que versa sobre la importancia histórica del ex presidente Barack Obama al mismo tiempo que se pone de manifiesto el largo camino que los afroamericanos han recorrido desde la época de la esclavitud hasta que un hombre afroamericano fuera elegido presidente de los Estados Unidos. En este capítulo, se analiza la exitosa carrera presidencial de Barack Obama—a—no exenta de obstáculos—su

carismática personalidad y su impacto en la población de Estados Unidos, en general y, en particular, en las comunidades afro-americanas.

Finalmente, debido a los recientes eventos violentos y alarmantes que han sucedido en el país, esta tesis doctoral concluye con un capítulo que aborda la situación socio-política actual en los Estados Unidos con respecto a los afroamericanos y al movimiento Black Lives Matter. Durante este Capítulo 9 “El movimiento Black Lives Matter y la administración de Trump” se encuentra un resumen de la turbulenta situación sociopolítica pasada y presente durante el mandato de Donald Trump que aún está vigente en el momento de la entrega de esta disertación. Sin embargo, nos gustaría pensar que el futuro parece más brillante ahora que Joe Biden será el 47º presidente electo de los Estados Unidos.

Resumo

Da realidade á pantalla: a representación da loita polos dereitos civís en *The Butler* de Lee Daniels

O obxectivo destes estudos de doutorado é analizar ata que punto a representación da loita polos dereitos civís no filme *The Butler* (2013) de Lee Daniels é axeitada ao ser comparada co documental *The Eyes on the Prize* (1987), así como con outros arquivos históricos deste período, para avaliar a representación real da historia dos Estados Unidos. A representación da loita afroamericana para poñer fin á discriminación e á segregación varía duns filmes a outros ao longo da historia, mais todas son dignas de ser analizadas e estudadas. Na realidade, en *The Butler* ofrece unha nova interpretación dos eventos do movemento polos dereitos civís creando unha historia ficticia baseada nunha experiencia da vida real. Ademais, Daniels fai uso de imaxes reais da época que lle aportan maior autenticidade ao filme. Ao facer isto, o director capta todo tipo de público, tanto a espectadores aos que lles gusta filmes de ficción como aos que lles gusta ver filmes baseados en feitos históricos. En liñas xerais, Lee Daniels fai sentir aos seus espectadores que están aprendendo ou rememorando a historia afroamericana vendo o seu filme.

Nos últimos anos *The Butler*, cuxa historia ocorre e comprende os feitos históricos comprendidos entre 1926 e 2008, converteuse nun fenómeno social xa que recuperou a narrativa da era dos dereitos civís durante a presenza do primeiro presidente afroamericano dos Estados Unidos. O feito de que un cidadán afroamericano como Barack Obama se convertera en presidente dos Estados Unidos no momento en que un filme baseado na vida dun servente afroamericano da Casa Branca se estaba estreando, fixo que persoas de todo

o mundo conectasen profundamente co filme e coa historia que presenta. Sen dúbida, este filme de Lee Daniels é moi completo xa que a trama conta feitos verídicos da loita polos dereitos civís ao tempo que fala da inspiradora historia dun dos mordomos que traballaba na Casa Branca durante este importante período da historia dos Estados Unidos.

A base desta tese doutoral componse de dous enfoques que son distintos mais que son tidos en conta de maneira conxunta ao largo da investigación: un enfoque socio-histórico e un enfoque socio-educativo. O uso destas metodoloxías axudará non só a analizar a precisión dos feitos do movemento polos dereitos civís descritos en *The Butler* de Lee Daniels, senon tamén a influencia dos devanditos feitos dentro da sociedade, particularmente das comunidades afroamericanas. Por ende, ao longo deste estudo empregaranse enfoques que abordan as ideas tecnolóxicas, sociais e sociolóxicas. Teranse en conta algúns dos autores máis importantes en canto ao estudo da relación entre cine, historia e educación tales como Charles F. Altman, James Chapman, Robert A. Rosenstone o Gladstone Yearwood. Os seus enfoques, así como o desenvolvemento a través do tempo, son moi importantes para a comprensión desta tese doutoral dado que a industria do cine nunca deixa de evolucionar e cambiar.

Por unha banda, información histórica específica sobre esa época será explicada empregando libros, documentais, entrevistas, artigos periodísticos e revistas relevantes neste campo. Por outra, analizarei a representación de Daniels do Movemento polos Dereitos Civís no mundo de *The Butler* para demostrar que, aínda que non é unha transposición exacta da realidade, o cine é un medio moi válido para ensinar en comprender feitos históricos. A través do

filme de Lee Daniels, os espectadores son somerxidos na poderosa era do movemento polos dereitos civís vinculada cos acontecementos vitais dun mordomo afroamericano que traballa na Casa Branca.

Existen innumerables fontes escritas que falan sobre a presenza da comunidade afroamericana nos Estados Unidos e xa que estamos a tratar de ver ata que punto a historia se pode facer ficción de xeito adecuado, escollín fontes variadas para comprender mellor a vida da comunidade afroamericana. Algunhas destas obras son *Dark Days Bright Nights* de Peniel E. Joseph, *Race Reform and Rebellion* de Manning Marable ou *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* de Aldon D. Morris, entre moitas outras. Tamén empregarei outros documentos moi importantes para esta tese relativas ao análise de filmes como *Film and History* de James Chapman ou *History on Film Film on History* de Robert A. Rosenstone. Outra fonte que é fundamental para estes estudos de doutorado é o manual de Clayborne Carson *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* que usarei xunto coa súa serie documental *The Eyes on the Prize*. Tanto o libro como a serie son una colección histórica de documentos, discursos e relatos sobre a loita pola liberdade dos afroamericanos que me resultou esencial no proceso de redacción deste estudo.

En canto ás representacións visuais, malia que *The Butler* (2013) é un filme relativamente recente, hai unha gran cantidade de entrevistas e artigos que tratan sobre este filme gañador dun Óscar e a forma na que retrata a historia do Movemento polos Dereitos Civís. Unhas das entrevistas máis relevantes é “A Butler Well Served by this Election” de Wil Haygood na que o autor entrevista a Eugene Allen e coñece a vida da persoa que finalmente ha

de inspirar ao director Lee Daniels para facer o seu filme e que é a base da trama de *The Butler*. Tamén hai unha gran variedade de feitos históricos que serán útiles para acadar o obxectivo deste traballo de investigación.

A estrutura desta tese doutoral divídese en nove capítulos e a conclusión. No Capítulo 1. “Metodoloxía do cine como fonte histórica e aproximación á historia do estudo do cine”, trato a metodoloxía que existe en canto ao estudo do cine como fonte histórica, así como a historia do análise de filmes. No Capítulo 2. “Termos de cine en *The Butler* de Lee Daniels”, abordarase terminoloxía e discursos cinematográficos básicos ao tempo que se inclúen exemplos sacados de *The Butler* de Lee Daniels. No Capítulo 3 titulado “Un enfoque da representación dos afroamericanos no cine”, ofrece unha descrición xeral os diferentes xeitos nos que a comunidade afroamericana foi representada no cine durante a historia. Tamén se abordan algúns temas de controversia como que é ou non é o cine negro no apartado “¿Que se considera cine afroamericano?”.

Tendo en conta que esta tese apoia a idea de que filmes como *The Butler* poden ter un grande impacto na sociedade en xeral, no Capítulo 4. “O cine como práctica social” hai algunhas páxinas adicadas a discutir o importante labor do cine como práctica social. Ademais, xa que a tradición oral é parte da cultura dos afrodescendentes, o subapartado 4.1. “O poder das historias” será adicado a analizar o papel e a función das historias dentro da sociedade, en xeral, e dentro da comunidade afroamericana, en particular. Aquí, considere interesante incluír unha entrevista co ex-presidente Barack Obama e a primeira dama Michelle Obama, quen cren firmemente na idea de que as historias inflúen e dan forma ao mundo no que vivimos.

No Capítulo 5. “Contextualización histórico-social”, presenteí o fondo histórico-social no cal explico de xeito detallado o pasado da comunidade afroamericana como parte da historia dos Estados Unidos. Este capítulo comprende abrangue desde o comezo do Movemento polos Dereitos Cívís cando os afroamericanos comezaron a loitar polos seus dereitos e finaliza coa chegada de Barack Obama á presidencia dos Estados Unidos. Os momentos máis importantes desta época como por exemplo o movemento *sit-ins* nos Estados Unidos, os *Freedoms Riders*, os disturbios en Selma ou a aparición do Partido dos Panteras Negras, entre moitos outros, serán explicados con detemento nesta sección. Ademais, os cinco presidentes que están presentes no filme serán tratados xa que todos xogan un papel moi importante no Movemento dos Dereitos Cívís, a saber: Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon e Reagan. De feito, comprender os seus respectivos mandatos e as decisións que tomaron durante as súas presidencias con respecto á vida dos afroamericanos é esencial para comprender a súa representación no filme de Lee Daniels. Ademais, decidín incluír aquí a mesma división que emprega o director Daniels no seu filme.

No corazón desta tese atópase o capítulo 6. “*The Butler* de Lee Daniels”. Neste capítulo a miña intención é cubrir os aspectos de máis relevancia que teñen que ver coa realización do filme como son: a inspiración da película e as razóns polas que Lee comezou a traballar neste proxecto. Do mesmo xeito, tamén falarei dos feitos verdadeiros da vida de Eugene Allen, o mordomo da vida real que inspirou a historia que se conta no filme. Ao mesmo tempo, analizo ata que punto o súa aparentemente figura invisible para moitos resultou ser moi significativa para a historia dos negros estadounidenses e a

representación dos mordomos afroamericanos. Para rematar este capítulo, examinarei a recepción crítica de *The Butler* publicada ata o día de hoxe e discutirei sobre o impacto e o éxito do filme ao redor do mundo.

No capítulo 7. “Un estudo da representación do movemento dos dereitos civís en *The Butler* de Lee Daniels”, encóntrase un estudo comparativo entre os feitos reais máis importantes de *The Butler* e os momentos históricos reais do documental *The Eyes on the Prize* e outros documentais históricos. O obxectivo era analizar unha selección dos feitos e personaxes máis relevantes da era do Movemento polos Dereitos Civís para logo contrastar a información entre as dúas fontes de información, xunto coas biografías, vídeos, discursos e documentais existentes ao respecto. Analizar as personaxes e escenas máis significativas de *The Butler* que se relacionan co Movemento polos Dereitos Civís é o que se leva a cabo nesta sección, para comprobar as semellanzas e/ou diferenzas que existen entre os feitos reais e a adaptación cinematográfica, o cal será o obxectivo principal deste estudo. A trama do filme será analizada tal e como está dividida no filme, coas catro presidenciais que máis relacionadas están coa loita polos dereitos civís.

De xeito semellante, paréceme moi relevante engadir no Capítulo 8. “Do Movemento dos Dereitos Civís a Barack Obama” no que explico a importancia do ex-presidente Barack Obama como un xeito de demostrar o longo camiño que os afroamericanos tiveron que percorrer, desde a época da escravitude ata que un home afroamericano foi elixido presidente dos Estados Unidos. Neste capítulo, analízase a exitosa carreira presidencial de Barack Obama, a súa carismática personalidade e a súa importancia para toda a poboación dos Estados Unidos, en particular para as comunidades afroamericanas.

Finalmente, debido aos recentes eventos de violencia e alarmantes que ocorreron no país, decidín rematar esta tese doutoral cun capítulo que trata a situación política actual nos Estados Unidos, relacionados cos afroamericanos e o movemento Black Lives Matter, que non foi turbulento no ano 2020 e a principios do 2021. Durante este Capítulo 9. “O movemento Black Lives Matter e a administración de Trump” atópase un resumo da turbulenta situación socio-política pasada e presente durante o mandato de Donald Trump, aínda en vigor no momento de entregar este estudo. Sen embargo, o futuro parece moito máis brillante agora que Joe Biden será o 47º presidente electo dos Estados Unidos.