

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta filozofická**

**Bakalářská práce**

**The emancipation struggle of African-Americans  
in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its portrayal in the contemporary  
film industry**

**Barbora Šeborová**

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**Barbora Šeborová**

*Vedoucí práce:*

PhDr. Ivona Mišterová, Ph.D.

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

*Odborný konzultant:*

Mgr. Tomáš Hostýnek

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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.....

Ráda bych poděkovala panu Mgr. Tomáši Hostýnkovi za ochotu a vstřícný přístup během zpracování mé bakalářské práce, stejně jako za cenné rady, které mi v průběhu poskytl.

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## **Introduction**

This bachelor's thesis observes the emancipation struggle of African-Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its portrayal in the contemporary film industry. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose a particular movie, *The Butler*, which serves as a time-lapse picture of the civil rights movement and therefore offers a unique perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. as a whole. The objective of this thesis is to document the long journey towards the emancipation of African-Americans and the obstacles African-Americans had to overcome in order to enforce equal rights. Furthermore, I shall judge the events of *The Butler* in comparison to factual, historical events. I will therefore focus solely on this particular movie and compare its events to the events of the civil rights movement. As the movie is not a documentary but rather a dramatical picture, factual inconsistencies may occur.

The thesis consists of a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part is covered by the first two chapters. The first chapter of the thesis is focused on the history of the United States of America and mainly on the role of black slaves during its development. I feel that discussing the abusive treatment of black slaves leading up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century is crucial in order to make sense of the racist behaviour of white Americans. The second chapter is focused on the emancipation of African-Americans as well as the civil rights movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The third and last chapter is the practical part of the thesis. It is focused on the correlation between African-Americans and the film industry and mainly on the 2013 motion picture *The Butler*. I discuss not only the concrete events of the movie but also several technical aspects of its production. As the movie was loosely inspired by the life story of Eugene Allen, a former White House worker of 34 years, I also inspect the accuracy of the main characters to their real-life counterparts.

This thesis is written on the basis of various printed as well as electronical sources. The main source of the practical part was not only the film *The Butler*, but also several works by Wil Haygood who documented much of Eugene Allen's life.

# **1. Historical context of the United States of America until the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In this part I intend to summarize the history of the United States of America to provide the reader with context for the following chapters. I plan not to focus much on the history of settling the North American continent, but rather the colonisation on the continent by European civilisations, the establishment of the United States of America and most importantly, the role that African-American slaves played in the development of the country.

## **1.1. Discovery of the North American continent**

There are several theories as to who were the first settlers on the North American continent, though none is entirely conclusive. New theories emerge with every archaeological finding predating the previous ones. However, it is safe to assume that the continent was first discovered at least 15,000 years ago by settlers from North-East Asia, who would become Native Americans. They became quite advanced, even though they were no match for the highly developed civilizations further South: the Mayan civilization, the Aztec Empire and the Inca Empire.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.2. Settlement of the New World**

Christopher Columbus discovered the North American continent while attempting to find a route to Asia for the benefit of the Spanish. He anchored his ship Santa Maria in the Bahamas and returned home, thinking himself successful. Columbus left a few Spanish men in the New World who became the first Europeans to settle North America.<sup>2</sup>

When Columbus returned with more men, he found chaos in the camp. The men that had stayed tormented the Native American tribes, which they called the 'Indians'. After a dispute with the tribes, 530 Native Americans were captured and taken to Spain as slaves. The first mention of slavery, therefore, is in relation to exported slaves, not imported. The Native Americans on the continent that were close to their settlement were enslaved as well. The main focus of New World settlers was the extraction of precious metals and their export to Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MONTAIGNE, Fen. The fertile shore: How humans came to the Americas. Smithsonian Magazine [online]. TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 9–10.

<sup>3</sup> BUDIL, Ivo T. *Úsvit rasismu*. pp. 279–280.

TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. p. 10.



## **1.3. Slavery in the New World**

### **1.3.1. Non-English colonies**

The first African slaves were brought to North America by the Spanish and the Portuguese in the early 1500s and were meant to help build their colonies. The first international slave port in the New World was Santo Domingo.<sup>4</sup>

From their first encounter with an unknown race, European settlers took it upon themselves to uncover the reasons for the difference in physical appearance as well as the difference in thinking, strength and health related issues. Subsequently, their verdict was that this new race was weak due to the warm climate they lived in and therefore inferior to the white Europeans. Native Americans faced prejudice from the very beginning and these stereotypes were later transferred to African slaves.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3.2. English colonies**

After the Spanish, the English, the Dutch and the French also began to settle the continent. The first attempt of the English to establish a colony in North America was the island of Roanoke, North Carolina in 1587. When other Englishmen arrived in 1590, the colony was gone. Their first successful colony was Jamestown, Virginia established in 1607. Other royal colonies began appearing close by in the following 30 years.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to mention that even then, the attitude of the English colonists towards the natives was significantly different from the Spanish and the Portuguese. While the Spanish and the Portuguese took many native women as wives and created a new ethnical identity, the English avoided any relations with the natives.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the other colonies, the colony of Plymouth was not established by decision of the king. It was established by English puritans in 1620 after they fled England wanting to freely profess their religion. The story of these puritans is well known in the United States of America (USA) and is also the basis for one of their most popular holidays, the Thanksgiving Day, which is celebrated annually on the fourth Thursday in November. Plymouth later became part of the Massachusetts colony.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> BUDIL, Ivo T. *Úsvit rasismu*. p. 595.

<sup>6</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 15–21.

<sup>7</sup> BUDIL, Ivo T. *Úsvit rasismu*. p. 285.

<sup>8</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 21–23.

In 1619, the first 20 ‘negro’ slaves were brought to an English colony, Jamestown, as a gift to the colonists from the Dutch. Along with black African slaves, European colonists relied on the labour of Native American slaves. Enslaved ‘Indians’ were later exported from the Americas along with harvested materials.<sup>9</sup>

The settlers often used servants, mostly of European descent, as a cheap labour source. They found, however, the use of slaves to be a cheaper and, for them, a more convenient way. The Transatlantic slave trade started making impact on the English colonies in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

It was quite common for slaves to be freed once their service ended or their debt had been paid. This, however, changed in 1641, when slavery was legalized by the first legal code established by European Colonists in North America (The Massachusetts Body of Liberties).<sup>11</sup> “*From that time forward, colonial slave laws became more restrictive, further codifying the institution.*”<sup>12</sup>

In the 1600s, a series of laws were put into place, one of them being an anti-miscegenation law, which prohibited interracial marriage. This means of segregation was meant to ensure the dominance of the whites. By the 1960s, these laws were still effective in 21 states. The last state to rescind this law was Alabama in the year 2000.<sup>13</sup>

Another one was hereditary slavery, which was decreed by Virginia law in the 1650s and signified that every child born to a slave mother would also be a slave.<sup>14</sup>

The first attempts to end slavery in the territory of the USA were protests held by Quakers<sup>15</sup> in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1688. They believed that people should treat others as they would want to be treated and that slavery was wrong and immoral. Quakers in Philadelphia played an important role in the abolition of slavery.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 20–23.

SHAH, Khushbu, ADOLPHE, Juweek. 400 since slavery: a timeline of American history. The Guardian [online].

<sup>10</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 38–40.

<sup>11</sup> The Journey to Emancipation: the Germantown Protest, 1688. National Museum of African American History and Culture [online].

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> SHAH, Khushbu, ADOLPHE, Juweek. 400 since slavery: a timeline of American history. The Guardian [online].

<sup>14</sup> DEETZ, Dr. Kelley Fanto. Stolen from Africa, enslaved people first arrived in colonial Virginia in 1619. National Geographic [online].

<sup>15</sup> A religious group also known as the ‘Religious Society of Friends’.

<sup>16</sup> The Journey to Emancipation: the Germantown Protest, 1688. National Museum of African American History and Culture [online].

## 1.4. Bloom of the English colonists

As the English colonists continued to overcome obstacles, such as the hostility of Native tribes and becoming accustomed to a new climate, their numbers started growing. In the year 1700, the population of the colonies was approximately 250,000. After that, the population doubled at least every 20 years. In the year 1750, they surpassed 1 million and 25 years after that, in 1775, the population was more than 2.5 million. At the time of the American Revolution, the population of England was only 3 times larger than that of the American colonists.<sup>17</sup>

The population of the blacks also grew and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their annual increase was almost equal to white Americans. In fact, ‘negro’ women bore more children than white women but their mortality was higher. After the first American census, the blacks accounted for 20 % of the overall population. In some states, like South Carolina, they even outnumbered the whites.<sup>18</sup>

The southern regions benefited from a warmer climate, allowing them to profit from agriculture. The first main plant they grew was tobacco. Along with corn and rice, tobacco was shipped to Europe where it became considerably popular. This created a high demand for the produce, earning the colonists much money. The plantations were in need of labour, and so while in Europe slavery was in decline, it became very popular in the colonies after the year 1619.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.5. Transatlantic slave trade

Great Britain was the leader in slave trade. The direction of the individual trades formed a triangle, hence the name ‘Triangular trade’. Slaves were brought to the Americas from Africa, materials harvested in the Americas transported to Europe and manufactured goods were transported from Europe to Africa. A more detailed scheme can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Triangular trade



Source: <https://quizlet.com/253993250/triangular-trade-diagram/>

<sup>17</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 34–36.

<sup>18</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 39–41.

WELLS, Robert. The Population of England's Colonies in America: Old English or New Americans?

<sup>19</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 37–39.

What is missing from the diagram is that the colonists relied heavily on the import of manufactured goods from Europe, the reason being that they could not make their own.<sup>20</sup>

Even though the origins of slaves were diverse and they spoke different languages, the whites saw them as one ethnicity – the blacks. Conditions on the ships which transported slaves were truly bad, 30 % of all captives did not survive the 4-6-week long journey. Those that survived were treated like animals.<sup>21</sup>

According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, approximately 12.5 million African slaves were exported from Africa between the years 1501 and 1866. Out of these 12.5 million, however, only 305,326 were shipped to the English colonies in North America. A more detailed division is available in Table 1. The transportation of slaves from Africa to North America was known as the Middle Passage.

*Table 1 – Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade between the years 1501 and 1866; number of slaves imported to each region*

50-year periods	Spain / Uruguay	Portugal / Brazil	Great Britain	Netherlands	USA	France	Denmark / Baltic	Totals
1501-1550	31,738	32,387	0	0	0	0	0	64,125
1551-1600	88,223	121,804	1,922	1,365	0	66	0	213,38
1601-1650	127,809	469,128	33,695	33,558	824	1,827	1,053	667,894
1651-1700	18,461	542,064	394,567	186,373	3,327	36,608	26,338	1,207,738
1701-1750	0	1,011,143	964,639	156,911	37,281	380,034	10,626	2,560,634
1751-1800	10,654	1,201,860	1,580,658	173,103	152,023	758,978	56,708	3,933,984
1801-1850	568,815	2,460,570	283,959	3,026	111,395	203,89	16,316	3,647,971
1851-1900	215,824	9,309	0	0	476	0	0	225,609
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,061,524</b>	<b>5,848,265</b>	<b>3,259,440</b>	<b>554,336</b>	<b>305,326</b>	<b>1,381,403</b>	<b>111,041</b>	<b>12,521,335</b>

Source: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>

While the South profited from their crops, the northern colonies of New England found their livelihood in the sea. Aside from fishing, they hunted whales and were furthermore the most important maritime centre in America. Be that as it may, they were continuously disadvantaged in comparison with the South because they did not have an attractive article to trade for English goods. New York and New England were buying more than they were selling, which created an uneven balance.<sup>22</sup>

## 1.7. Colonial wars and its impact on the colonies

English colonies and French colonies were evolving separately during the 17<sup>th</sup> century while their home countries maintained piece. When that piece ended, the conflicts spread overseas to

<sup>20</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 43–44.

<sup>21</sup> DEETZ, Dr. Kelley Fanto. Stolen from Africa, enslaved people first arrived in colonial Virginia in 1619. National Geographic [online].

<sup>22</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 43–44.

North America which led to the French and Indian War (1754-1763), a war between English and French colonies in America, which coincided with the 7-year War in Europe (1756-1763). Despite their victory, England and its colonies were agitated by the wars and the effects were especially devastating for the colonies of New England, which were the closest to the French colonies in the North. Development of the New England colonies stagnated and the people grew poorer.<sup>23</sup>

American nationalism was on the rise while Britain was drowning in debt from the wars. One of the ways they planned to collect funds was to increase taxes and customs duty in the colonies, even though the colonies themselves struggled financially after the wars. As most colonial laws at the time were passed by the English parliament, the colonists were upset that they had no say in such important matters. Americans demanded to be represented in the parliament, but the British government would not allow it. As a result, Americans decided to ban imported English goods, such as tea and clothes, and instead started making their own.<sup>24</sup>

Another issue that caused unrest was the presence of the British army in the colonies. Their official duty was to protect the territory from possible attacks by the French or Native Americans, but in reality, they were meant to keep the colonists under control. The colonists did not want to share their food and houses with these soldiers, who, at the same time, were financed from the high taxes which the colonists were forced to pay. The first bloody conflict between soldiers and colonists happened in Boston in 1770: the Boston Massacre. Several colonists were killed and the pressure kept building, until the British parliament was forced to revoke almost all customs duty. The only one that remained was the customs duty for tea. Things escalated on December 16, 1773, when a group of colonists disguised as Mohawk Indians raided three merchant ships and threw their cargo (342 chests of tea) into the sea. This event is known as The Boston Tea Party and was one of the most important events leading up to the American Revolution. The English authorities had had enough and gave the colonists an ultimatum – to give up or to prevail. While England kept trying to coerce obedience, the colonists chose to fight for their independence.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> BUDIL, Ivo T. *Úsvit rasismu*. pp. 542–546.

TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 69–77.

<sup>24</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 74–77.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 81–86.

## 1.8. Fighting for independence and the American revolution

On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1774, the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia. It comprised 55 delegates from almost all English colonies and their goal was to join forces for joint action, not to rebel or rule. The Congress sent a list of demands to the King, some of which were that the Parliament could only make decisions regarding business and imperial matters, not in the matter of their internal affairs. The King was furious and demanded action from the Parliament, whose response was to forbid business relations with anyone outside the Empire and to prohibit New England from fishing in the North Atlantic.<sup>26</sup>

On July 4, 1776, the Congress accepted Thomas Jefferson's United States Declaration of Independence, declaring the 13 united colonies free and independent. The conflict continued for seven years, but the United States of America came out victorious. Each state had their own constitution, laws and government on top of the United States Constitution. The individual states were federated into an overarching state and lead by the federal government, which was established by the Articles of Confederation. As a republic, the Americans had no king, but an elected president, the first being George Washington.<sup>27</sup>

After the Revolutionary War in the 1770s, where many black slaves fought alongside Americans, "*the new U.S. Constitution tacitly acknowledged the institution of slavery, counting each enslaved individual s three-fifths of a person for the purposes of taxation and representation in Congress and guaranteeing the right to repossess any 'person held to service or labor' (an obvious euphemism for slavery).*"<sup>28</sup>

## 1.9. 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Industrial Revolution

Over the decades following the American revolution, the United States (U.S.) continued to progress, but not all states were focused on the same matters. While the North became more industrialized and focused on business, the South continued to focus on agriculture, mostly growing and selling corn, tobacco, rice, sugar cane and newly cotton, which quickly dominated over other crops and became the most exported article of the USA. Even though the South relied on the labour of black slaves directly, the North was in charge of the business, meaning that they profited from slave labour as well.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 86–87.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. pp. 88–111.

<sup>28</sup> Slavery in America. The History Channel website [online].

<sup>29</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 119–123.

The Gradual Emancipation Act was adopted in Pennsylvania in 1780, freeing local slaves, but failing to make slavery illegal. Even so, by 1850, all Pennsylvanian African-Americans were free unless they were fugitives from the South, making Philadelphia the cultural and population centre for African-Americans.<sup>30</sup>

The abolition of slavery and racial equality became a hot topic nationwide in the 1820s and the adoption of a new Constitution in 1838 coincided with the growing hostility towards these issues. Pennsylvanians were strongly opposed to slavery practices in the Southern states and in an attempt to fight these practices, along with other issues, the Republican party was created in 1854, opposing the Democratic party, which had been established in 1792.<sup>31, 32</sup>

Slavery practices were being spread to the new territories annexed to the USA (Louisiana, Texas, Kansas and Nebraska). Meanwhile the Afro-American community in Pennsylvania advanced significantly. They were educating themselves and contributing to politics. 'Negro' women contributed not only in the fight for racial equality, but also in the fight for gender equality.<sup>33</sup>

By the 1860s, factory manufacturing was on the rise in several sectors, revolutionizing the industry, with Pennsylvania leading the way in processing iron and producing steel. While the South remained focused on agriculture, the North continued to become more modernised and urbanised and it invested heavily in various transportation systems including canals, roads and railroads.<sup>34</sup>

At that time, Europeans of several countries proceeded to relocate to the New England, which meant that almost half of the workforce consisted of immigrants. The trade union movement had spread to the USA, with labourers demanding higher pay and better work conditions. These immigrants stayed mostly in the North, meaning that the population of the South remained influenced mainly by the black culture.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 1776-1861: Independence to the Civil War. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission [online].

<sup>31</sup> The first political parties were established in the 1790's, one of them being the Democratic-Republican Party, which later became the Democratic Party, and the other one being the Federalist Party, which eventually perished.

<sup>32</sup> Slavery in America. HISTORY.com [online].

1776-1861: Independence to the Civil War. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission [online].

<sup>33</sup> 1776-1861: Independence to the Civil War. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission [online].

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

During their lives in slavery, the blacks created a new identity as African-Americans. They brought a lot of their African heritage into the American culture, introduced new words (such as ‘yam’ or ‘banana’) and significantly influenced music, folklore and religious practices.<sup>36</sup>

Black slaves had very strong family bonds. Whilst marriage between ‘negros’ was not legal, the masters had realised that the slaves worked harder when they had families. Still, couples were often separated when one of the pair was sold. Female slaves were given a more equal treatment in comparison to white women. While they were still mothers who took care of the household, they also worked in the fields with their men.<sup>37</sup>

### **1.10. Cotton and the abolition of slavery**

The South was almost self-sufficient, but it lagged behind the North in the level of technological development, despite the fact several factories were built in the South. The South relied heavily on the import of manufactured goods, similarly to how the colonies once relied on the imported goods from England. Cotton, at the time, was at a high demand and its export made the South very rich compared to the rest of the World, even though it still ranked second behind the North.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly to the British class system, the white American population was divided into classes by their own standards. White plantation owners were considered the Southern elite, almost royalty. They were very wealthy and influential and often interchanged the interests of their class and the interests of the entire South. The middle class consisted of wardens, who were in charge of supervising ‘negro’ slaves, and white farmers, who may have grown the same produce and bred the same domestic animals, but they were not focused on export, instead they traded with their neighbours. The lowest class of whites was known was mostly forced to live in the mountains, where they survived on fishing or by eating wild animals.<sup>39</sup>

The blacks were living in the worst conditions in the South and were ranked the lowest. The vast majority of the blacks in the South was enslaved and forced to work on plantations for minimal or no wage. Not only was slavery a means for the whites to use the ‘negros’ for labour, they were also making sure that the blacks would stay subordinate. Those blacks that were free had an uncertain position in society. They had more rights than slaves, but fewer rights than the

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<sup>36</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 39–41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. pp. 39–41.

<sup>38</sup> GATES, Henry Louis Jr. What Was the Second Middle Passage? Public Broadcasting Station [online].

TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 217–228.

<sup>39</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 275–282.



whites. 'Negros' could become free from slavery if their master decided to give them freedom, in return for military service or they could buy their freedom, had they the opportunity to make money. Free blacks often worked as smiths, carpenters, shoemakers or farmers.<sup>40</sup>

The import of slaves from Africa was prohibited in the year 1808. Some believed that this would bring an end to slavery, but in reality, the growing demand for labour on mostly cotton plantations resulted in the growing price of slaves and the bloom of domestic slave trade. Even though international slave trade had been prohibited, it continued illegally for several more years. It is estimated that thousands more were imported to the U.S. from Africa after the year 1808.<sup>41</sup>

The South was divided into Upper South and Lower South. When the demand for slaves in the Upper South lowered in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the soil no longer being fertile, several millions of slaves were sold to the Lower South, where the climate was even warmer and the demand for labour grew. Domestic slave trade had become a common practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, separating millions of families. These slaves were also commonly marched hundreds of miles on foot and in chains.<sup>42</sup>

More than a half of 'negro' slaves worked at plantations. While most of these slaves worked outside on the fields, there were some that worked inside the house as craftsmen or servants and took care of the masters and their families. Those slaves that worked outside mostly lived in plain wooden shacks, while the 'house negros' were sometimes allowed to sleep in the house. Even though there were many laws regarding slavery, they focused on the privileges given to the slave masters. For example, they were allowed to use a whip to punish or discipline their slaves.<sup>43</sup>

Even though there were several attempts of rebellion, they were all suppressed, often resulting in deaths on both sides. Some slaves rebelled against their masters by sabotaging their work, but they were often cruelly punished. The masters and their slaves lived in a symbiosis, each relying on the other. When the slaves worked well, their plantation prospered and they were well fed; when the masters motivated the slaves with rewards, they worked better and the plantation thrived<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 280–286.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> GATES, Henry Louis Jr. What Was the Second Middle Passage? Public Broadcasting Station [online].

<sup>43</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 282–285.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 282–285.

Beginning in the 1820s, the blacks, along with white citizens of the U.S. (mostly in the North and Upper South) began calling for the abolition of slavery. A prominent figure in this movement was William Lloyd Garrison, a white Bostonian and the publisher of *The Liberator*, an anti-slavery newspaper. Garrison and his supporters founded the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 and continued to publish *The Liberator* until the year 1865. Along with the problematic of slavery, these radicals fought for the over-all reform of the American society.<sup>45</sup>

Even though slavery was not as widespread in the North, many blacks faced the same type of discrimination and segregation as they did in the South. In the 1830s, the abolition movement became a political matter, with petitions flooding the Congress. In every presidential election from then forward, at least one candidate's agenda was the abolition of slavery, even though the first president focused on abolition elected into office was Abraham Lincoln of the Republican Party in 1860.<sup>46</sup>

### **1.11. The American Civil War**

While the Northern abolitionists were calling for the abolition of slavery, the Southerners were trying to implement slavery in all the states to preserve their culture. The conflict kept escalating between the North and the South, which were growing apart rapidly. The price of cotton kept climbing and so did the value of slaves, making the Southerners far richer than the Northerners. After the USA won the Mexican-American war in 1848, they gained 1.3 million square kilometres of new territory, which lacked sovereignty and were under the control of other states. While the Southerners wanted to use this area to grow more cotton, the Northerners wished to keep it slave-free. After Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election in 1860, the Southern states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America, as can be seen in Figure 2. They were led by Confederate president; Jefferson Davis.<sup>47</sup>

On April 12, 1861, the first fires were open on Fort Sumter, highlighted in Figure 2. President Lincoln did not acknowledge the sovereignty of the Confederacy, but instead considered them to be rebel states. The free states, also called the Union, were in a seeming advantage. Not only did they own the majority of all factories, which began manufacturing fire arms, their population was also 21 million, compared to the Confederacy's 9 million, out of which 4 million were slaves. The advantage of the South however was that a majority of the fights took place

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<sup>45</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 285–291.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pp. 285–317.

<sup>47</sup> BUDIL, Ivo T. *Triumf rasismu: rasová imaginace a zrození moderní doby*. pp. 346–391.  
TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 292–317.

in their territory. They were also heavily motivated, wanting to establish an independent country based on Southern norms and traditions.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 2 – Map of the United States of America in 1861



Source: <https://usmedia.buzz/2013/01/05/quotes-from-the-un-civil-war-the-battle-for-historical-truth/>

The conflict ended on May 5, 1865, when the South surrendered. The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict of the USA, as historians estimate that between 600,000 to 800,000 lives were lost on both sides. It is important to mention that the North was not fighting for the abolition of slavery, but rather to preserve the unity of the U.S.<sup>49</sup>

Slavery, however, was abolished in the Union and as a result, in the USA. During the war, in 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which was codified into law as the Thirteenth Amendment after the war ended.<sup>50</sup>

## 1.12. Life after the war

Black soldiers helped the Union troops significantly; 200,000 of ‘negros’ joined the forces in hopes to defeat the South and its practices. Once the Civil War ended, the Union ratified the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution, abolishing slavery in the United States (U.S.) and freeing more than 4 million slaves. The Fourteenth Amendment granted African-Americans citizenship and the Fifteenth Amendment gave black men a right to vote.<sup>51</sup>

Even though the blacks were free, in the South, most of them lived in poverty and faced prejudice and discrimination from the whites. The Southerners could not express their

<sup>48</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 318–347. The Civil War era (1844–1877). Khan Academy [online].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> WILLIS, Deborah, KRAUTHAMER, Barbara. *Envisioning emancipation: Black Americans at the End of Slavery*. p. xiii.

<sup>51</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 348–360. FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie*. pp. 85–86.

frustration from losing the war towards the North, which was too powerful, so they used the former slaves as a scapegoat. The blacks had not been paid as slaves and did not receive any compensation for enslavement, therefore they could not buy land to provide a living and were forced to rent land from their former masters. Many continued to work on plantation as if nothing had changed, due to the lack of work opportunities.<sup>52</sup>

In the years following the war, known as the Reconstruction, African-Americans made use of their citizenship and newly acquired rights. “*During Reconstruction, seven hundred African American men served in elected public office, among them two United States Senators, and fourteen members of the United States House of Representatives. Another thirteen hundred African American men and women held appointed government jobs.*”<sup>53</sup>

Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a group of white supremacists started terrorizing African-Americans during the 1860s, in the pursuit of preserving white superiority. They wore white robes and hoods with horns to conceal their identities. They also sabotaged Republican candidates in the South, ensuring the dominance of the Democratic Party. In 1877, at the end of the Reconstruction period, the American troops left the South where they oversaw the adherence of the African-American rights. Afterwards, new laws began being disseminated in the South, suppressing and segregating the blacks. The KKK continued to torture African-Americans throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in the 1920s and 1950s, with more than 4 million members nationwide. The organization is still active today. Figure 3 is a photo of Ku Klux Klan members during the prohibition of the 1920s.<sup>54</sup>

Figure 3 – KKK members in New York City (1920s)



Source: <https://www.history.com/news/kkk-terror-during-prohibition>

<sup>52</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie*. pp. 85–86.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> The Civil War era (1844–1877). Khan Academy [online].

TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 361–362.

## **2. The USA and the racism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The South of the USA, for the majority of its existence, was an openly racist regime, which differed from an ethnically mixed society, where racial prejudice affects social order. An openly racist regime is defined by several criteria: first, an openly racist ideology is set in place, meaning that the inferiority of a certain group is considered to be permanent and insurmountable, furthermore, not agreeing with this ideology can be dangerous and lead to legal or extrajudicial repressions. Second, laws are put in place prohibiting interracial marriage to preserve the 'pureness' of one's race. Third, the social segregation is enforced by the state, not only by individuals; the aim of this to prevent any contact which could suggest that the two races are in any way equal. Fourth, if the political establishment is democratic, the individuals of the oppressed group are not allowed to hold public office or vote. Fifth, they have such limited resources that most of them lives in poverty. All of these applied to the American South after the Civil War. There were two other openly racist regimes in the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Nazi Germany and South Africa. Even though the American North discriminated against the blacks in some ways, it was never an openly racist regime.<sup>55</sup>

### **2.1. Racial segregation in the South**

#### **2.1.1. Segregation as a part of everyday life**

Even though the newly ratified amendments were supposed to ensure racial equality, many Southern states began looking for ways around them. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though African-Americans were legally allowed to vote, certain Southern states, e.g., Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Oklahoma and Alabama, legally adopted conditions that men had to meet in order to be able to vote; they had to have lived in the same place for at least 2 years, they must not have had a criminal record, no matter how grave, and they must have been literate. These conditions eliminated not only most of the black voters, but some whites as well. In case of the white voters, however, exceptions could have been made and often were.<sup>56</sup>

The general idea was that even though all people were supposed to be equal, they should be 'equal, but separated'. The whites were of the opinion that 'negros' were inferior by nature and could never measure up to the white population. One of the first public places where segregation of African-Americans occurred was the train. Because the railway cars were already divided

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<sup>55</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie*. pp. 81–83.

<sup>56</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 374–376.

into First and Second class according to the price of the ticket, the whites purposely travelled in First class, while the poor blacks could only afford the Second class. Trains soon became separated into 'white' and 'black' railway cars.<sup>57</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment had established that no state could deny anyone equal rights, but the Southerners found a loophole; it did not apply to individuals. On top of that, segregation laws were established in individual states. The segregation of African-Americans quickly spread to other areas of everyday life, including other means of public transportation, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, sport or workplace. It also spread into the rest of Southern states, drawing a line between the whites and the blacks.<sup>58</sup>

The blacks were often lynched, beaten or murdered by white supremacists. These hate crimes were always vindicated by the whites, who were playing into one of the many stereotypes held against the blacks; that they were sexual predators who lusted for white women. Black men could be killed for merely looking at white women.<sup>59</sup>

White Southerners did not completely keep the blacks from education, they, however, made sure their education remained inferior and took place separately from the whites. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, several all-black universities were established in the U.S., e.g., Fisk University in Tennessee or North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro.<sup>60</sup>

### **2.1.2. Jim Crow**

The expression 'Jim Crow' is often used as a synonym to racial segregation in the American South. The name originated from the theatre character Jim Crow created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jim Crow was often played by white actors in blackface makeup, imitating stereotypical behaviour linked to African-Americans. The expression became known as a mockery of African-Americans and when segregation laws started appearing in the 1870s, they acquired the name 'Jim Crow' laws. According to these laws, African-Americans were not allowed to sit in front of white passengers on public transportation, they were not allowed to dine in 'whites only' restaurants and were left to use 'coloured' restrooms and water fountains. In general, African-Americans in the South were expected to show their inferior status to white Americans

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<sup>57</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických.*, pp. 376–378.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. pp. 375–378.

<sup>59</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie.* pp. 75–85.

<sup>60</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie.* pp. 89–90.

TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických.* p. 377.

ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice.* p. 3.

at all times. If they violated these laws, they would be beaten and arrested, sometimes even prosecuted.<sup>61</sup>

### **2.1.3. The World is watching**

World War I affected the American society in many ways. As for the blacks, many of them migrated from the South to the more modern Northern states. European migration to the USA slowed down during and after the war and there was a shortage of labour, so black workers were suddenly given new work opportunities. Many African-Americans fought in the war; when they returned home from Europe, however, they were not greeted with respect for the role they had played in the victory of the U.S., instead, they were met with worsening conditions and the reinforcement of the Ku Klux Klan. As many of the blacks moved up North, their living conditions improved significantly. The North was not flooded with segregation laws; therefore, they were allowed to vote and being numerous enough, they could influence local politics.<sup>62</sup>

The situation remained largely the same until World War II (WWII). Black Americans who fought overseas were constantly exposed to the U.S. propaganda stressing justice and equality, even though the reality back home was contrary. The Nazi regime in Germany and the attack against Jews were condemned by the majority of World countries and given that the USA fought against Germany in WWII, the American government realized that they could not tolerate the segregation of African-Americans, which was comparable to the segregation of Jews in Germany before WWII. The South, however, was not keen on letting go of their ways.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1950s, scientists confirmed with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization that science does not support the idea that individuals of different races had different innate predispositions simply due to the colour of their skin. Another statement was that the idea that mixing of races would have negative effects was untrue.<sup>64</sup>

One other incentive to support racial reform in the USA was the ongoing Cold War against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Communists did not discriminate against individuals of any race; people from other parts of Europe, Asia or Africa were all treated equally in the USSR, which became part of the Communist propaganda. They seemed more humane compared to the U.S., which segregated and discriminated against the blacks for no real reason. It was solely due to the outside pressure of the USSR and other countries in conflict

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<sup>61</sup> The Gilded Age (1865 – 1898). Khan Academy [online].

<sup>62</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie*. pp. 91–93.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. pp. 99–102.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

with the U.S. that the government began contemplating whether not allowing African-Americans equal rights was worth the trouble.<sup>65</sup>

The situation was improving for African-Americans throughout the country, but because it already had in the past and then things took turn for the worst, the blacks knew that if they did not act, things could fast return to how they used to be. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that many prominent movements for racial equality began emerging.

## **2.2. Civil rights movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

### **2.2.1. NAACP**

One of the first and notably the biggest organization dedicated to racial uplift was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was established in the year 1909 to fight Jim Crow laws in court.<sup>66</sup>

Even though many segregation laws were put in place, the one that cause most uproar in the black community was the segregation law regarding separated seating in public transportation, namely the Jim Crow transit law of 1930, as it was an everyday reminder of the blacks' low-class status. The NAACP fought actively against all types of segregation. One of the issues in connection with public transportation was whether or not segregation laws were valid in interstate travel, which became the focus of many black activists at that time.<sup>67</sup>

### **2.2.2. Irene Morgan**

The Freedom Rides had been in the public eye since the 1950s, notably the story of Rosa Parks of 1955. Eleven years prior, however, in 1944, Irene Morgan from Baltimore was one of the first African-Americans to cause an uproar by refusing to give up her seat on the bus when she travelled in Virginia, where segregation laws were put in place.<sup>68</sup> Irene was not an activist woman prior to her arrest, but she was enraged by the injustice and decided to stand up for herself in court.<sup>69</sup>

During the 1940s, the NAACP was searching for a court case they could stand behind and support, and Irene Morgan was that case. She was young, attractive, literate and not afraid to fight for her rights. Together they managed to bring their case to the Supreme Court of the U.S.

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<sup>65</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Racism: stručná historie*. pp. 101–102.

<sup>66</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Irene was sitting in the 'coloured' section, but was asked to forfeit her seat to a white couple that had boarded the bus.

<sup>69</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 11–17



in 1946 and they won. The Court sustained their appeal that there was no federal law which would separate people based on their race and therefore segregating interstate passengers violated the constitution. This victory did not desegregate interstate travel, although it should have, but it gave basis to other attempts of segregating the American society. The NAACP continued fighting against Southern segregation in court and their activism inspired many blacks who took the fight from the courtroom to the streets.<sup>70</sup>

### **2.2.3. Journey of Reconciliation**

One of the most well-known movements for racial equality all throughout the U.S. were the Freedom Rides. The idea was taken after the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) project known as the Journey of Reconciliation (1947).<sup>71</sup>

The Journey of Reconciliation was an interracial event and the first Freedom Ride through the American South, which was meant to provoke the American society. It was part of the CORE's Gandhian<sup>72</sup> non-violence mission. The Journey was planned months in advance and was meant to test the compliance with the Morgan case ruling. It was also meant to spread the gospel of non-violence to the segregated South. The Journey began in Washington, D.C. and was intended to end in New Orleans, Louisiana, but out of fear that provoking white supremacists in the Deep South would cause much violence, it was decided that the Journey would take place in the Upper South only. 16 volunteers stepped up for the two-week long journey, eight whites and eight blacks. They would board different buses throughout the journey, staying in varying cities overnight. They did not all travel together to avoid getting arrested at once, instead, only a few would travel on the same bus. When they stopped in different cities, the members would hold gatherings with the locals. When a member was arrested, he was instructed to get out on bail as fast as possible and re-join the Journey. Throughout their Journey, the members were repeatedly arrested and beaten and the lower they travelled, the more violent the response was. Surprisingly for them, the violent response did not come only from the whites, but from local blacks as well, who feared that this provocation would reflect badly on them in the long run and therefore make things harder for them in the future. Some bus drivers would refuse to take off unless the members yielded, which would agitate the rest of the passengers.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 16–22.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 2–3

<sup>72</sup> Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who led the non-violent campaign for the independence of India

<sup>73</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 27–51.

In general, the Journey did not attract much attention nationwide and after it ended and the members returned back to Washington, D.C., the public quickly forgot them. The black community, however, celebrated their bravery and even though the Journey alone was not enough to end segregation, it highlighted its absurdity. Overall, the Journey resulted in 12 arrests and minor violence, but the members managed to retain their non-violent approach.<sup>74</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Brown v. Board**

The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka conflict of 1952 was one of the many legal conflicts regarding segregation in education. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the ‘equal, but separated’ theory had no place in education, as it was unconstitutional, and that public education especially had to be integrated. Southern states, however, did not respect the decision of the court and president Eisenhower’s administration would not enforce the ruling, which led to huge conflicts in the South, one of them being the conflict in Little Rock, Arkansas, of 1957 (further described in chapter 3.2.4).<sup>75</sup>

The Brown case was a big step in the civil rights movement, but as it only applied to public education, many areas of life remained segregated.

#### **2.2.5. Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott**

Situation in the U.S. remained mostly calm until December of 1955, when a black activist woman Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Even though she was sitting in the ‘coloured’ section in the back, the law dictated that in case the ‘white’ section was full, people in the ‘coloured’ section had to give up their seat in favour of the white. Parks’ arrest resulted in bus boycotts all throughout the South, as black Americans refused to ride the city’s buses. One of the leaders of these boycotts was a twenty-six-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK), a black minister from Montgomery. When several of the leaders were arrested in the early 1956, along with MLK, the boycotts gained national news coverage and became a closely watched topic.<sup>76</sup>

The boycott was a success, as in 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, once again, that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional. This ruling, alongside the Brown case, became the groundwork to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 51–53.

<sup>75</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 677–678.

ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 3–4.

<sup>76</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 56–67.

<sup>77</sup> The Post-war Era (1945–1980). Khan Academy [online].

### 2.2.6. Martin Luther King Jr. and the 1960s

After the Montgomery bus boycotts, MLK became the face of non-violent protesting. He preached the necessity to fight hatred with love which combined with his charisma, intelligence, determination and gift of speech made him a great spokesperson in the field of racial injustice.

The non-violent protests that he led were meant to provoke society in such a way that those who acted as if the problem did not concern them would be forced to take a stance.<sup>78</sup>

The civil rights movement culminated on August 28, 1963, when more than 250,000 black and white protesters took to the streets of Washington, D.C. It was the biggest civil rights protest in history of the U.S. and it was where MLK delivered his famous speech, "I Have a Dream." The main focus of the protest were the issues surrounding economic injustice in relation to African-Americans, e.g., housing, access to public facilities and jobs. After the protest, president Kennedy, who sympathised with the protesters, attempted to pass a bill which would ensure equal human rights to all Americans, but the conservatives blocked this bill in Congress. As a tribute to Kennedy, after he was assassinated in November of 1963, president Johnson pushed through a rather radical bill prohibiting segregation in establishments, such as hotels, restaurants, and private schools. This new legislation was also supposed to ensure equal employment opportunities.<sup>79</sup>

That same year, MLK lead a series of demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. Police used extreme violence against the protesters, including water cannons, electric poles, tear gas and dogs. MLK was arrested and during his imprisonment, he wrote the 'Letters from Birmingham prison', which became a classical literature piece in the human rights movement.<sup>80</sup>

In 1965, after having received the Nobel Prize for peace the previous year, MLK lead a campaign to register 3 million black voters in the South. At a protest in Alabama regarding the same issue, the protesters were dispersed by the police. President Johnson provided federal protection to these protesters and even appeared in front of the Congress to plead for the legalization of voting rights in the South. As a result, the measures which were adopted to prevent African-Americans from voting had to be revoked and that same year, more than 250,000 black voters registered in the South.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 692–701.

<sup>79</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 692–695. The Post-war Era (1945–1980). Khan Academy [online].

<sup>80</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. p. 692.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 701–702.

Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Both the black and the white community were deeply affected by his murder, which resulted in rallies all over the country. The year 1968 was the most tumultuous year of an already very tense decade.<sup>82</sup>

### **2.2.7. Sit-in movement**

The sit-in movement began on February 2, 1960, when four black university students sat in the ‘white only’ section of the Woolworth restaurant in Greensboro, North Carolina. They demanded to be served and even though their demands were not met, they refused to leave their seats. They were beaten by the whites, but within a month, the movement spread to six other Southern states and launched the first national racial equality movement in the history of the USA. In April of 1960, hundreds of Greensboro students, both black and white, founded the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), which worked closely with Dr. King’s movement and contributed to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The sit-in movement spread from restaurants to churches (kneel-in movement) and public swimming pools (wade-in movement). The general idea remained the same; the protesters ignored signs putting people ‘in their place’. Many of these protesters were arrested, but as the restaurants were often paralysed by these protesters, they were forced to integrate their establishments.<sup>83</sup>

### **2.2.8. Freedom Riders**

The Freedom Riders, who were inspired by the Journey of Reconciliation, launched their movement in May of 1961. The first 13 members were trained by CORE’s national staff and by summer, the movement involved hundreds of members representing several other organizations. The members were all volunteers, comprising male, female, black, white, young, old, Northerners and Southerners. The Riders were empowered by the U.S. Supreme Court decisions mandating the desegregation of the South and interstate travel. Well aware of the danger that they would face from the militant white supremacists, they put their lives on the line.<sup>84</sup>

The Riders travelled by bus throughout several Southern states, testing the compliance with the rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court. When the buses stopped in cities, they would visit establishments and demand to be served in the ‘white’ sectors. They were meant to provoke the people around them, so that they would get used to seeing the blacks break down these barriers and to reflect on their way of life. They were beaten and arrested as a result of their actions, but

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<sup>82</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 701–702.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 690–691.

<sup>84</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 2–3.

that did not discourage them, on the contrary, it made them stiffen their resolve. Media attention surrounding the Riders grew, providing exposure to their cause. This meant that the entire nation would watch this fight, not only those whom it concerned directly.<sup>85</sup>

*“After marauding Alabama Klansmen<sup>86</sup> used bombs and mob violence to disrupt and disband the original CORE Freedom Ride, student activists from Nashville stepped forward to organize a Ride of their own, eventually forcing federal officials to intervene on their behalf. Later, when Mississippi officials placed hundreds of Freedom Riders in prison and imposed bond payments that threatened the financial solvency of CORE, the net effect was to strengthen rather than to weaken the nonviolent movement.”<sup>87</sup>*

With their non-violent activism, the Riders managed to stir up a national civil rights crisis in the USA. Majority of the Americans agreed that segregation, namely in public transportation, must end. Only a small part, however, was in favour of direct action towards this goal. According to a Gallup Poll conducted in May and June of 1961, 66 percent of Americans agreed with the Supreme Court’s rulings regarding segregation, only 24 percent, however, approved of the actions of the Riders. When asked whether they thought these efforts would reap success, only 27 percent of the respondents said that they thought it would bring change.<sup>88</sup>

Few Americans acknowledged that the Freedom Rides and other disruptive tactics were necessary in order to invoke social change. The Riders had negative public image, which was caused mainly by the bad timing with the backdrop of the ongoing Cold War and the rooted suspicion of the Southerners, who recalled the Radical Reconstruction of the Confederate South post-Civil War.<sup>89</sup>

### **2.2.9. Black Power movement**

Even though the movement for civil rights was succeeding, the situation in the North and in the West was escalating, as violent protests began appearing in cities. Over 70 % of all African-Americans lived in cities and even though legal segregation did not play a role in those areas, the minority was suffering greatly in the cities and the newly adopted laws would not change that. The new Black Power movement was the opposite of MLK’s non-violence policy and often criticized his collaborating with the whites. It presented itself as a militant movement as

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<sup>85</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Ku Klux Klan members.

<sup>87</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5–6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

well as a community centre. Even the most prominent organizations, such as CORE or SNCC, turned toward the Black Power movement.<sup>90</sup>

Even more radical and violent was the Black Panther Party established in 1966 in Oakland, California. The Panthers felt that the blacks and the whites should not be equal, but that the blacks should be superior. They terrorized the public with guns; sometimes provoked, sometimes not. They eventually split up in 1982.<sup>91</sup>

One of the most prominent spokespersons for the Black Power movement was Malcolm X (né Malcolm Little), who was also one of its founders. Malcolm X was a supporter of Islam and believed that Christianity was a religion for the white folk and the blacks and all non-white people from around the World had to unite under Islam. He was assassinated in 1965. The public condemned the violent movement, but some people still recognized that it was a result of despair.<sup>92</sup>

#### **2.2.10. Civil Rights Act of 1968**

Situation in the U.S. after King's assassination spiralled out of control and on April 10, less than a week after King's murder, the House of Representatives passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act. This act had been in the works for over a year, but got held up, as some members of the government were against it. As the situation was getting out of hand, the Act resurfaced and was voted into effect and president Johnson signed it on April 11. This act prohibited discrimination in relation to purchasing real estate or renting housing. This was the last in the series of many Acts adopted in the 1960s.<sup>93</sup>

Even though legal segregation of African-Americans ended in the 1960s, white prejudice persisted for decades, and for some, has persisted until today.

Concurrently, it was not until the 1960s when the laws forbidding interracial marriage were repealed, even though some states took longer to repeal these laws than others, the last one being Alabama in the year 2000. Laws prohibiting racial segregation are as valid today as laws which abolished slavery in 1865.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 702–703. The Post-war Era (1945–1980). Khan Academy [online].

<sup>91</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 702–703.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. pp. 703–704.

<sup>93</sup> The Post-war Era (1945–1980). Khan Academy [online].

<sup>94</sup> FREDRICKSON, George M. *Rasismus: stručná historie*. pp. 102–104.

### 3. Popular culture and cinematography

Popular culture (or ‘pop culture’) is a modern society phenomenon which has been evolving since the 1920s as a more wild and carefree form of entertainment. It can be defined as a culture by the people and for the people. A paradox of pop culture as well as its power lies in the facts that “*although most of its products are designed to have a short shelf life, some gain permanency as so-called great works of art.*”<sup>95</sup> The levels of culture itself are mostly devised into three categories; low (e.g., tabloids), mid (e.g., newspapers) and high (e.g., Time magazine). An occurrence typical for pop culture is that it often combines all of these levels, an example being the animated sitcom *The Simpsons*.<sup>96</sup>

Both cinema and the filmmaking industry play a key part in pop culture, which in turn influences much of people’s lives. For that reason, it is crucial that the information presented in movies, especially those that focus on important issues as well as historical events, is accurate.

#### 3.1. African-Americans and their involvement in the film industry

The creation of motion picture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century has been one of the most significant milestones of modern society. Since then, the movie industry has changed and developed drastically and so has the role of African-Americans in it.

In the beginning of motion picture, African-Americans tended to be mostly excluded from Hollywood; when included in ‘white’ movies, they were portrayed as happy and lazy plantation workers and served as comic figures to be laughed at. Movies at that time were made to fit the then tastes and values of American people. During the era of silent film, black Americans were in a disadvantage compared to the whites. Much of ‘negro’ entertainment relied on musical element as well as on the participation of the audience. As a result, black Americans would continuously try to make their way to Hollywood. Several companies continued making ‘race movies’<sup>97</sup>, but those were mostly very unrealistic and poorly received by the black community.<sup>98</sup>

In the 1940s especially, the NAACP played a significant role in the change of treatment towards black Americans in the film industry. “*The 1942 agreement accomplished far more than allowing a few blacks to appear in roles that were not overtly racist. It changed the whole tune*

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<sup>95</sup> DANESI, Marcel. *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. pp. 1–35.

<sup>97</sup> Early movies produced by African-Americans for black audience.

<sup>98</sup> CRIPPS, Thomas. *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942*. pp. 3–7.

*and nature of Hollywood's response to the Afro-American's role in film and, by extension, in American life as well.*"<sup>99</sup>

Lee Daniels, the director of *The Butler* is an African-American movie director well established in the film industry. However, it was not until 1990 that the industry took black directors seriously. That year, three movies by African-American directors<sup>100</sup> won top prizes at the US Film Festival<sup>101</sup>. The media coverage on such a milestone was quite significant, which led to an increase in work opportunities for black filmmakers. At that time, the blacks had comprised a notable portion of moviegoers and the industry, since the 1970s, continuously tried to appeal to this audience. A change happened in the 1990s when the industry began to realize that even white Americans would spend money to see movies made by or starring African-Americans.<sup>102</sup>

Even though black films boomed in the 1970s, their beneficial effect to the black community was questionable. On one hand, they offered work opportunity to African-Americans in casting, despite rarely being directed by African-Americans. On the other hand, even so these films depicted the lives of black Americans, this portrayal was rarely germane.<sup>103</sup> It seems as though by romanticizing the reality of the lives of African-Americans, white Americans avoided facing the struggles that they had put them through.

With the incorporation of black filmmakers in the industry, African-Americans could make their voices be heard and by revealing the reality of their lives, they could aid in further emancipating American society.

### **3.2. The Butler and its historical accuracy**

*The Butler* is a dramatic movie which premiered in the year 2013. It was directed by Lee Daniels and written by Danny Strong and Wil Haygood. The movie's events are loosely based on the life of Eugene Allen, who served as a butler in the White House for 34 years. The following are the summary of the movie as well as a comparison to the real life of Eugene Allen. Furthermore, I will assess the accuracy of the environment and behaviour towards African-Americans portrayed in the movie, as the main purpose of the movie is to portray the racial struggle of African-Americans throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> CRIPPS, Thomas. *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942*. p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> *Chameleon Street* by Wendell Harris, *To Sleep with Anger* by Charles Burnett and *House Party* by the Hudlin brothers.

<sup>101</sup> Renamed to the Sundance Film Festival in the year 1991.

<sup>102</sup> KRÄMER, Peter. *Black is In: Race and Genre in Early 1990s American Cinema*. ILLUMINACE. pp. 13–30.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 13–30.

<sup>104</sup> Lee Daniel's *The Butler*. International Movie Database [online].



### 3.2.1. Plot

In the opening scene, there are two black boys who have been hanged on a tree. A quote appears on the screen: *"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that."*<sup>105</sup>

Cecil Gaines is sitting at the White House at an old age and starts reminiscing about his life:

In 1926, when he was a young boy, he worked on a cotton plantation with his parents in Macon, Georgia. The three of them are in the fields and they have another child take their photograph. Shortly after, one of the white masters comes and takes Cecil's mother into a nearby shed to have sex with her. This seems to be a common practice for the masters. Cecil runs after them; even though he does not understand the situation, he feels that his mother is in danger. His father stops him and he warns him not to lose his temper with the master. *"It's his world, we're just living in it,"*<sup>106</sup> he says.

There are many workers in the field and they all hear Cecil's mother scream from the shed. Cecil wants his father to do something, so the father calls after the master who came out of the shed. The master turns around and shoots Cecil's father in the head. An older woman, Miss Annabeth, who saw the incident and is visibly upset comes up to them from the house and orders the other workers to dig a grave for Cecil's father. Her behaviour is empathetic and considering the situation, she is being kind towards Cecil. She tells him that she is going to take him into the house and make him a 'house nigger'. The lady and several other house workers teach Cecil how to behave around the whites, most importantly that he must be invisible and cannot make his presence known. As the narrator, Cecil says that working in the house was much nicer than working in the fields.

When Cecil is older, he decides to leave the plantation. He leaves freely, no one is stopping him. His mother stays behind, having broken down mentally after her husband was killed. Cecil has no money and nobody wants to employ him or give him food or a place to sleep. *"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."*<sup>107</sup>

Cecil walks by the two hanged young blacks that were shown in the opening scene. He has made his way to North Carolina and is so hungry that he breaks into a hotel to steal some food. A black butler comes to see what the noise was and finds Cecil. He is kind to him and says he

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<sup>105</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:01:01.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 0:02:43.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 0:07:50.

will lie to his boss as to how the window was broken. When he finds out the details of his situation, he offers to give him some food and send him on his way, but Cecil convinces him to let him stay and work at the hotel. From him, Cecil learns how to be a proper butler. When the senior butler is offered a job as a butler in the luxurious hotel Excelsior in Washington, D.C., he suggests Cecil in his place.

Cecil takes the job and by 1957, he is a well-known butler in the hotel, very popular with the high-profile guests. He lives in his own house with his wife Gloria and their two sons, Louis and Charlie. When Cecil comes home from work one morning, his wife and older son Louis are having a discussion regarding a black woman Mamie Till, whose son was killed 3 years prior after having looked at a white woman. Mamie has been giving speeches on the topic of racial inequality ever since. Gloria says how much better they have in D.C. than those in the South, but Cecil objects that they are still being treated badly. Louis is of the opinion that the blacks should not let the whites treat them the way they do, but is scolded for this.

Thanks to the great job he has done in the Excelsior, Cecil is offered to work as a butler in the White House after an interview with the White House maître d' Freddie Fallows. He is once again getting used to a new environment and learning new skills to serve the President and the Cabinet members along the rest of the staff. The year is still 1957 and the president of the United States is Dwight D. Eisenhower. Cecil first meets the President when he serves him tea during a meeting discussing the South not being compliant with the law regarding black Americans, specifically the Governor of Arkansas, Mr. Faubus, blocking 'negro' children from attending school with white children.

When Cecil comes home from work, he has an argument with Louis over the speech of Mamie Till, which Louis wants to attend. Cecil forbids him from going, telling him that he had left the South to avoid these problems. Back at the White House, president Eisenhower continues to deal with governor Faubus, who despite promising black children protection, once again blocked them from going to a 'white' school. The president feels forced to issue an executive order directing the use of troops under federal authority to aid in the execution of federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas.

After graduating from high school, Louis decides to enrol in Fisk University, Tennessee. Cecil is concerned that his son is willingly moving to the South.

When Cecil and two other butlers are in the kitchen, vice president Nixon comes in to give them an election badge for his 1960 presidential campaign, where he is going to run against John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK).

When Louis is at Fisk University, he attends the Lawson workshop, nicknamed the 'school of love', which was the main reason why he decided to study at Fisk. The workshop appears to be an underground course held in a remote warehouse. During his initiation speech, Reverend Lawson namely mentions Gandhi and his methods. The workshop is attended by both black and white students who want to fight against segregation in the South. These members provoke the whites by sitting at the 'whites only' seats in diners and asking to be served. While their form of protest is calm, they are being attacked by the white folk, who use violence towards them and throw food at them to make them leave. The students roleplay these situations beforehand to prepare for the violent situations, so that they can resist the brutalities. These students are eventually arrested and while the arrest is being broadcasted, Cecil sees his son getting in a police car on the television. The students are all sentenced to 30 days in the county jail. Cecil is angry with Louis for rebelling against the society, worrying he might be killed, but Louis tells him that if he could not sit at any lunch counter he wanted, he might as well be dead. While Cecil tells him to stop with the rebellion, Louis is determined to continue fighting for the rights of African-Americans.

When the Gaines' neighbours are visiting, Gloria talks to them about Louis and how he has joined the Freedom Riders. While Gloria wants to see her son, Cecil is strongly against it and wants to keep their distance from the protests.

After JFK's presidential inauguration in 1961, he and his family are moving into the White House and are meeting the staff for the first time. President Kennedy is very friendly towards the black staff.

Cecil is working long hours at the White House and it is taking a toll on his marriage. Gloria is upset that Cecil had not yet taken her to see the White House and that his work schedule is so busy. She starts drinking heavily and ends up having an affair with their neighbour.

While taking the Freedom Bus in Alabama, the Riders are attacked by white extremists from the KKK, dressed in white capes and hoods. They surround the bus with torches, breaking the windows and eventually setting the bus on fire. Cecil and Gloria are watching a news report covering the attack, not knowing if their son is alive or dead. Louis calls them from the jail in Mississippi, where the Riders have been moved after spending two weeks in a jail in Alabama.

The parents want him to come back home, but Louis is determined to continue with the protests, even though he knows he is going to spend three months in jail. The situation keeps escalating as more and more blacks get attacked with water hoses and arrested. JFK is disgusted by the situation in the country as he watches a news report touching on a protest in Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1963, JFK has a conversation with Cecil in connection with his son being in prison in Birmingham with MLK. He continues to discuss how the Freedom Riders have touched his and his brother's heart. Afterwards, the president addresses the nation via television, as he is concerned by the uprisings both in the North and in the South and demands Congress to accept a law which would give all Americans the right to be served in all establishments open for the public, including hotels, restaurants, theatres and stores. Later, the president is shot in the head when leaving Dallas Airport. His wife Jackie Kennedy, who was with him when he was shot and held him until he was taken to the hospital, refuses to change out of her bloody clothes, so that everyone could see what was done to her husband.

After the assassination of JFK, vice president Lyndon B. Johnson takes the Office. At this time, Cecil has gotten two presents from different presidents: a tie from Kennedy and a tie pin from Johnson. The situation at the Gaines house has gotten better and during a party with two other butlers and their wives, the lot discuss MLK's statement to the president that the blacks would be going to the streets in the South to protest for their right to vote. Gloria says that 'three kids' got killed in the South for trying to get African-Americans registered to vote and the president sent the Federal Bureau of Investigation to investigate these killings, to which the host objects that he's only done so because two of the killed 'kids' were white. Apparently, she read this in 'one of them coloured newspapers from Baltimore'. As the conversation concerning voting rights continues, Cecil remarks that president Johnson has passed "*the greatest piece of civil rights legislation since Lincoln freed the slaves*"<sup>108</sup>, therefore passing another bill any time soon would be difficult. The last information they exchange is that the Gaines' neighbour Howard, Gloria's lover, was shot by a man whose wife he had been having an affair with.

In 1965, Louis and a group of Freedom Riders discuss the current situation as well as Malcolm X. While Louis has some doubts, his girlfriend, another member of the Riders, claims his plan is better than doctor King's. In Washington D.C., a black church raises money to help the young rebels in Selma, who got beaten once again, but this time so badly, the press called it 'Bloody

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<sup>108</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 1:09:23.

Sunday'. President Johnson makes an appearance on the television to address the nation in regards to these struggles, saying that every American must have a right to vote, standing behind the protesters.

The racial struggle is outshined by the War in Vietnam, with Americans protesting all over the country. In 1968, several activists along with MLK are watching the news reports covering the war, while discussing the role that black butlers and maids have played in breaking the stereotypes the whites have against the blacks. Cecil goes to see his boss, expressing some injustices taking place in the White House, including the underpaying of the black staff as well as the inability of the black staff to be promoted, as no African-American has ever been promoted to the engineer's office. The superior dismisses his remark.

MLK is shot to death in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, resulting in extremely violent uprisings all over the country. Sometime later, Louis comes home with his girlfriend to visit his parents. Over dinner, they discuss John Lewis and what the next step should be. Louis says that doctor King's philosophy worked in the beginning, but now it is time to take the next step, which is politics. They have started their own political movement, 'The Black Panther Party'. They have been providing free breakfast for children, free medical clinics, free clothing and self-defence classes, as they are not going to let the police beat them anymore. The parents then have a conversation on the subject of Sidney Poitier, who has been breaking down barriers in the film industry, including having just won the Academy Award, but Louis is critical of him. He even says: "*Sidney Poitier is nothing but a rich uncle Tom.*"<sup>109</sup> The family has a fight and Louis and his girlfriend leave.

After a fight with the police, Louis is arrested again, this time for fighting back. His brother Charlie helps bail him out of jail and tells him that he is going to Vietnam to fight, even though Louis tries to convince him not to go. In 1969, the Nixon Administration discusses how to best deal with the rising Black Power movement, coming out with a plan to support black businesses in order to secure black votes. While doing this, Nixon wants to distance himself from the Black Panthers, expressing hostility towards them and ignorance towards their fate, all while Cecil stands still in the room. The Black Panther movement is growing more violent, as they discuss the use of guns and killing in response to violence towards them. This is too much for Louis and he leaves the Panthers and his girlfriend. The conflict between the Panthers and the police grows more and more violent, 26 of the Panthers die in the span of two years.

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<sup>109</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 1:23:12.

Gloria and Cecil celebrate Cecil's birthday at home but are interrupted by two soldiers who have come to tell them that Charlie was killed in the war. A year later, in 1974, during president Nixon's second term, the president talks to Cecil in the Oval Office. The president looks shabby and tells Cecil that many people want him to resign, but he will not. Louis comes to the White House to see his father; he has finished his master's degree and wants to make up, but Cecil sends him away.

Many years pass as they keep their distance. Louis has occupied himself with politics and is running for Congress, but loses. Gloria wants Cecil to call him and console him, but he does not. Ronald Raegan resides in the White House in 1986 and Cecil once again pays a visit to his boss, expressing his disapproval of the treatment the black staff has been receiving. He tells his boss that he is either going to be paid the same as the white staff, or he will quit. As Cecil is turned down again and told to quit, he tells his boss that the president has been informed of these injustices and is planning to take matters into his own hands.

Nancy Raegan, the first lady, is very impressed that Cecil has managed to secure every black staff a raise and a promotion and she invites Cecil and his wife to the State dinner. They attend and Gloria is ecstatic, but as Cecil sits among the other guests and observes the black staff serving them, he reflects on the years he has spent as a butler.

President Raegan is having a meeting with two senators at the White House dealing with the problem of South Africa and Apartheid. The senators are trying to persuade him that the U.S. need to stand on the right side of history regarding racial issues, but the president refuses to cooperate with them. Cecil is feeling uneasy following the State dinner and keeps reflecting on his life, especially his son Louis, realising he was never a criminal, but a hero. His job no longer brings him joy and he feels lost. Cecil and Gloria visit the plantation where he grew up, paying respect to his parents. Cecil decides to quit his job at the White House, even though president Raegan persuades him to stay.

After Cecil leaves, he attends a protest held by Louis for the release of Nelson Mandela and the liberation of the people in South Africa. Louis criticizes president Raegan, who dismantled every civil rights program put in place. When Louis sees Cecil approaching the crowd, he is shocked. He warns his father that if he is caught at a protest, he could be arrested and lose his job, to which Cecil replies that he had lost his son and he is sorry for that.

Many years later, in 2008, Louis was elected to Congress and the Gaines' family is proud to see an African-American presidential candidate, Barack Obama. After Gloria dies, Obama is

elected the first black president of the USA. Cecil is later invited to the White House to meet with president Obama. He wears the tie gifted to him by president JFK and the tie pin he got from president Johnson. He stops reminiscing on his life as he gets up from the chair, ready to meet the first African-American president of the United States.

### **3.2.2. The life of Eugene Allen**

Eugene Charles Allen, whose life inspired the movie *The Butler*, spent 34 years working as a butler in the White House, during 8 presidential administrations. According to Mr. Allen, he never missed a day of work.

Eugene Allen was born on July 14, 1919, in Buckingham County, Virginia, to mother Kate Allen Tapscott. He was raised by his aunt and uncle, Charles and Susie Brown, along with his brother Geater and their first cousins. They lived on a plantation in Virginia, near the town of Scottsville. Later in life, Mr. Allen adopted the middle name Charles in honour of his uncle. The farm where the family lived was owned by the Moon family. Eugene first started to learn the art of attending to a house and serving the table. His relationship with the Moon family was quite amicable; the youngest son, Cary Moon, became Eugene's life-long friend.<sup>110</sup>

In school, Eugene completed 11 grades before starting a seasonal waiter job in the resort in Homestead, Virginia. When in Homestead, Eugene further studied the craft of service. During the off-season, he was offered a job in Washington, D.C., by Cory Moon's brother-in-law, Dr. Shannon Butts. He worked in-house for the doctor's family and often accompanied them during their errands. When with the Butts family, he oftentimes encountered racist behaviour from white Americans, even in the capital. Nevertheless, Eugene was very close with the family.<sup>111</sup>

In 1941, Eugene accepted a position at the Kenwood Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland. He worked as the golf clubhouse manager; tending the bar, maintaining the locker rooms and cleaning the members' equipment. While at the clubhouse, Eugene developed a passion for the game, which he would utilize later in his life, as golf was a usual topic of conversation between himself and president Ford, whom he shared a birthday with.<sup>112</sup>

In 1942, when his childhood friend introduced him to Helene Lee from North Carolina. Eugene and Helene fell in love and got married that same year. Mr. Allen was very protective of Helene;

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<sup>110</sup> Capturing our heritage: Eugene Charles Allen. Scottsville Museum [online].

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Capturing our heritage: Eugene Charles Allen. Scottsville Museum [online].

HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. *The Washington Post* [online].

he always took care of her and she spent her life at home as a housewife. Their only son Charles, named after Eugene's uncle, was born in 1946. Shortly after the birth of their son, the family had saved enough money and moved to a house in northwest Washington, which became their family home.<sup>113</sup>

By 1952, Eugene still worked at the Kenwood, but at the suggestion of his co-worker, he interviewed for a pantryman position at the White House with the maître d' of the White House, which at the time was Alonso Fields. He was accepted, starting his White House career in 1952, and in the following few years, he advanced through the ranks from Pantryman, Butler, 2<sup>nd</sup> Butler and 1<sup>st</sup> Butler all the way to the maître d' in 1981, during Ronald Reagan's administration. After being promoted to a butler, he was able to secure a job for his brother-in-law, who worked with Eugene for more than 30 years. Mr. Allen even met MLK when he visited the White House. MLK insisted on meeting the black staff. Eugene was a very discreet man and he never discussed the matters of the White House outside of work. He was a trusted member of staff who shared a close bond with all of the presidents he encountered. He retired in 1986 after 34 years of service and lived out his years with his family.<sup>114</sup>

Eugene and Helene were very sociable and often threw parties at their house for neighbour, friends and Eugene's colleagues from the White House.<sup>115</sup>

In 2008, Eugene and Helene were excited to vote for an African-American presidential candidate, Barack Obama. They planned to go cast the ballot together on November 3; Helene, unfortunately, passed that same day, and so Eugene cast his vote alone. In 2008, after The Washington Post wrote an article touching on his years in the White House, Barack Obama personally invited him to witness his inauguration.<sup>116</sup>

All the presidential families he served continued to send him Christmas and birthday cards every year. They were very fond of Allen.<sup>117</sup>

Eugene Charles Allen died two years later, on March 31, 2010.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Capturing our heritage: Eugene Charles Allen. Scottsville Museum [online].

<sup>114</sup> Capturing our heritage: Eugene Charles Allen. Scottsville Museum [online].

HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. The Washington Post [online].

<sup>115</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. *The Butler: A Witness to History*.

<sup>116</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. The Washington Post [online].

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.



### **3.2.3. Comparing the personal lives of Eugene Charles Allen and Cecil Gaines**

The character of Cecil Gaines was loosely based on Eugene Allen and the time he spent working as a butler at the White House.

The background of Cecil Gaines is entirely made-up. Eugene Allen may have grown up at a plantation, but he was surrounded by his family and the relationship between them and the family they worked for was very amicable. Eugene attended school until the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, before he set out to make a living. He met his wife Helene through a mutual friend and began working at the White House after applying for a pantryman position in 1952. The early life of Cecil Gaines was very different and quite tragic. Cecil's father was killed and so he had to take care of himself from a young age, never attending school. He was not close with the masters he worked for, but after leaving the plantation, he managed to secure a position at a prestigious hotel in Washington, D.C. Cecil met his wife Gloria at said hotel and was approached by the White House to come interview for the position of a butler in 1957.

Even though the background of Cecil Gaines is different to the one of Eugene Allen, it does represent the way many blacks lived in the South for decades following the Emancipation Proclamation.

Both Eugene and Cecil leave their jobs at the White House in the year 1986. At that time, Eugene was working as a maître d' since 1981. Nowhere is it mentioned that Eugene Allen played any role in securing equal working positions for the black staff. Cecil worked as a butler until his retirement and played a major role in the emancipation of the black staff in the White House. Cecil retires his position after he realizes that he no longer loves to serve, while Eugene retired solely due to his old age.

One of the main premises of the movie is the conflict between the father, a proud butler serving the most powerful men in the country, and the son, a fighter for racial equality. Eugene and Helene only had one son, Charles, meaning that Cecil's second son Louis was fictionalized. Eugene's son Charles was not involved in the civil rights movement nor did he ever run for a public office. Charles Allen did serve in the Vietnam War, but came back alive and eventually began working as an investigator with the State Department. He never ran for a public office.

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<sup>119</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. *The Butler: A Witness to History*.

Even if the only things the children of Cecil have in common with Eugene's son Charles is the name of one of the brothers and the fact that both Charlie Gaines and Charles Allen fought in the War in Vietnam, their lives represent the lives of countless African-Americans during the civil rights movement. Furthermore, Louis reflects the lives of those who fought for the emancipation and equal rights of African-Americans, while Charlie is representative of all those that died during the War in Vietnam.

In the movie, Cecil is highly valued among the staff as well as among the presidents and their families. Eugene was in fact quite close with the presidents and their families and he kept in touch with many of them even after they left the White House. As Eugene said, the staff were as close as a family; they saw each other every day and worked together for many years.<sup>120</sup>

The film portrays that Gloria died before Barack Obama was elected president, but no specific date is shown. In reality, Helene died on the exact day of the election.

### **3.2.4. The 20<sup>th</sup> century struggle of African-Americans v. The Butler**

As is mentioned in chapter 3.2.3., the backgrounds of Allen and Gaines are substantially different.

Eugene began working at the White House in 1952 under president Truman's administration. Cecil, however, does not start working at the White House until 1957, therefore the first president he meets is Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The maître d' at the time of Cecil's commencement at the White House is Freddie Fallows. Supposing that his full name is Alfred Fallows, the name of this character could be an homage to Alonso Fields, the maître d' under which Eugene started.

The struggle of 1957 which president Eisenhower faced was the result of the 1955 school desegregation fight following the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus called up national guards to prevent black children from entering a high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. In response, president Eisenhower, who proclaimed that he could not imagine a situation where he would feel the need to use the army, dispatched troops in Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce a court order regarding African-American children attending 'white' schools. Even though the events were closely watched by the public, president Eisenhower's decisions were not as radical as to invoke a conflict on a national level.<sup>121</sup> Allen

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<sup>120</sup> White House Workers: Traditions and Memories [film].

<sup>121</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 3–4.  
TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. p. 679.

did indeed witness president Eisenhower argue with Orwell Fabus over the phone regarding the conflict.<sup>122</sup>

At home, the Gaines family discuss Mamie Till and her son, who they say was murdered 3 years prior (i.e., 1954). According to the conversation, Mamie has been going around the country, giving speeches in relation to the treatment of African-Americans.

Emmett Till was a 14-year-old boy from Chicago who while visiting family in Mississippi in 1955 was brutally murdered by two white men. The wife of one of the murderers claimed that Emmett sexually harassed her, for which her husband and his brother decided to take revenge. The two men brutally beat the young boy, murdered him and mutilated his body – he was recognizable only by his ring. Emmett’s mother Mamie caused an uproar by holding an open-casket funeral, so that everyone could see what was done to her son. Over 100,000 people attended Emmett’s funeral back in Chicago and the pictures of his mutilated corpse shook the country. Emmett’s murderers were arrested and tried, but eventually got acquitted. Even though they walked free, it was the first time in history that a white man was arrested for lynching a ‘negro’. It became a rallying point in the history of the civil rights movement. Mamie became an activist for the civil rights movement and fought for racial equality.<sup>123</sup> The information on Mamie Till is mostly accurate, except for the year when the murder took place, which was 1955, not 1954. The event signifies the beginning of the civil rights movement, which only escalated from that point forward.

The result of the 1960 presidential election was surprising for many; Nixon had been Eisenhower’s vice-president for 8 years and was a well-known politician, whereas JFK may have been young and charming, but had not yet made a name for himself as a politician. Even so, JFK won the election and was sworn into office in 1961, with Lyndon B. Johnson as his VP. Both presidential candidates seemed keen on continuing the ‘calm’ politics of the 1950s. Throughout his presidency, however, JFK was deeply touched by the civil rights movement as well as by the struggle of African-Americans and was determined to help.<sup>124</sup>

Fisk University in Tennessee was one of the ‘black’ universities in the South. The Lawson workshop which Louis attends did in fact exist and was established by Reverend James M. Lawson. Reverend Lawson introduced the idea of non-violent protesting among young students. These would later become the founders of the SNCC, an organization which stood

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<sup>122</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. *The Butler: A Witness to History*.

<sup>123</sup> Emmett Till. Khan Academy [online].

<sup>124</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 687–699.

behind the sit-in movement, as is showed in the movie. Even though it is not namely mentioned in the movie, it is likely that Louis is in fact meant to be a member of the SNCC.<sup>125</sup>

On May 14, 1961, during a Freedom Ride in Alabama, a bus full of Riders was attacked by white supremacists of the KKK and set on fire. Nobody was killed, but the hate and cruelty of the supremacists scared many of the Riders and they no longer wished to participate in the Freedom Rides.<sup>126</sup>

A quote in chapter 2.8. states that after the original Freedom Rides had been disbanded, activist students from Nashville stepped forward to organize a Ride of their own. Louis is seen to take a Freedom Ride in Alabama as they are attacked by the KKK and their bus is set on fire. The photograph shown on the screen confirms that the bus burning is supposed to represent the incident of May 14, 1961 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – May 14, 1961, after a Freedom bus had been set on fire by white supremacists



Source: ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice.*, p. 147.

It seems highly unlikely that Louis would be present at this ride, as the SNCC took over the rides after the attack in Alabama.<sup>127</sup> This is the first example of Louis being present at several of the most important milestones of the civil rights movement, which offers a unique perspective to the struggle.

<sup>125</sup> Jim Lawson Conducts Nonviolence Workshops in Nashville. SNCC Digital Gateway [online].

<sup>126</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických.* p. 691.

ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice.* pp. 140– 176.

<sup>127</sup> Freedom Riders [film].

The SNCC cooperated with King's movement, so if Louis were a member of the SNCC, it would be possible for him to have met MLK. In reality, Eugene was the member of the Allen family who met MLK in person, when MLK visited the White House in the 1960s.<sup>128</sup>

When Gloria speaks with Louis on the phone, she says "They're gonna lynch you and then they're gonna throw your ass in the river," which is an obvious reference to Emmett Till.

As the scene changes, JFK and the First Lady are watching a news report about the protests in Birmingham, where Louis is present as well. The protesters are then seen to be attacked by the police, who use water cannons and dogs. This is an accurate representation of the protest in Birmingham in 1963. As Gloria watches the news report at home, we see a historical shot of MLK marching with the protestors. Later, JFK talks about Louis being in prison in Birmingham with MLK. King was in prison in Birmingham after the protest, and it was where he wrote Letters from prison.<sup>129</sup>

JFK says that the protesters changed his brother's heart as well as his own. The Kennedy brothers became vocal supporters for the civil rights movement in the 1960s.<sup>130</sup>

After publicly endorsing the civil rights movement and having attempted to ensure equal human rights to all Americans, JFK was assassinated on November 22, 1963. He was shot in the head and to this day, his assassination is surrounded by conspiracy theories, as it was never fully solved<sup>131</sup>. Lyndon B. Johnson became president after the assassination; for his inauguration the day of the murder, Jackie Kennedy wore her famous pink Chanel suit cover in her husband's blood.<sup>132</sup>

After JFK's assassination, Eugene was invited to the funeral, but he decided to stay in the White House to take care of those coming back from the funeral. Jackie Kennedy gave Eugene one of JFK's ties, which became one of the many presents he received from different presidents throughout the years. In the movie, it is mentioned that the tie was given to Cecil by the President himself.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. The Washington Post [online].

<sup>129</sup> KING Jr., Martin Luther. *Odkaz naděje: vybrané články a projevy*.

<sup>130</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 690–694.

<sup>131</sup> The alleged assassin was murder two days after his arrest.

<sup>132</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 696–697.

<sup>133</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. The Washington Post [online].

When president Johnson talks to his advisors, he namely mentions the NAACP and CORE, who were two of the key organizations during the movement, when discussing the necessary means of negotiation regarding black protestors.

When the Gaines family and their friends discuss the murder of three civil rights activists, they must be talking about Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Earl Chaney. These three young men disappeared in the summer of 1964 after they publicly aided in the registering of black voters in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Their disappearance was not taken seriously by the public until the discovering of their bodies, following which a murder investigation was launched. The case was then covered by the media throughout the nation, but was not solved until 41 years later, i.e., the year 2005. As is mentioned in the movie, two of the men were white and one was black. They were murdered by a Klansman, Edgar Ray Killen. It was speculated that there were several Klansmen involved, but after such a long time, Killen was the only one convicted.<sup>134</sup> Gloria also mentions a ‘coloured’ newspaper from Baltimore; such newspapers had been popular among African-Americans ever since the establishment of *The Liberator* from Boston in the late 1830s.

In 1965, Louis and his group of activists discuss the Black Power movement and Malcolm X; as was already explained, Louis was most likely meant to be a member of the SNCC, which did in fact turn to the more violent form of protesting in the name of the Black Power movement. Malcolm X was the main spokesperson for the militant Black Power movement, somewhat of a counterpart to MLK.

On March 7, 1965, a group of 600 protestors gathered in Selma with the intent to march to the Alabama capitol, Montgomery. Some SNCC members participated, even though SNCC as an organization was not involved. The marchers were confronted by the state police; they were brutally beaten and attacked with tear gas. The attack was broadcasted throughout the nation and became known as ‘Bloody Sunday’.<sup>135</sup>

Among other things, the company, including Louis and MLK, discuss president Lyndon’s Civil Rights Act of 1963, which he pushed through in honour of president Kennedy; this rather radical bill prohibited segregation in establishments, such as hotels, restaurants, and private schools. The Act was also supposed to ensure equal employment opportunities (for more, see chapter 2.2.6.).

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<sup>134</sup> DEWAN, Shaila. Former Klansman guilty of manslaughter in 1964 deaths. *The New York Times* [online].

<sup>135</sup> Bloody Sunday. SNCC Digital Gateway [online].

They also discuss president Johnson, who stood firmly behind the protesters and ensured that all Americans had the right to vote. As is discussed in chapter 2.2.6., president Johnson provided federal protection to the protesters in the South during those times.

As for the War in Vietnam, the U.S. in the 1960s were determined to not let the communists in Vietnam seize power over the country. This conflict kept escalating throughout the decade and into the next one, as American soldiers continued to pour into the country. The American society was divided in the already very tense decade due to the differing opinions regarding the War overseas.<sup>136</sup> The situation in the U.S. grew increasingly more tense after the death of JFK. President Kennedy was believed to have intended to retract American soldiers from Vietnam, but after his assassination, president Johnson sent more troops to fight in the War in Vietnam.

Cecil is depicted as a fighter for fair working conditions among all the staff, in which he is eventually successful. Throughout the several interviews Eugene Allen gave, he never mentioned any such endeavour on his part, nor was it mentioned by a third party.

Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, which caused rallies all over the country and affected both the black and white community. In an attempt to calm the situation, president Johnson managed to pass the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which would be the last of the many Acts adopted in the 1960s to ensure racial equality. That same year, Richard Nixon was elected president.

As is discussed in chapter 2.2.9., the Black Panther Party was established in Oakland, California in 1966. Louis and his activist group were students from Nashville, Tennessee and were most likely meant to represent the SNCC. Even though the SNCC did turn to the more violent form of protest in the name of Black Power, the Party would most likely not have been established by Louis and his friends. Louis is later shown at a meeting of the Black Panther Party in Oakland in 1969. Comparably to the Freedom Ride in Alabama in 1961, Louis is shown to play a part in another major event of the civil rights movement. Such depiction, however, that one person would be present during all of these steps, is highly improbable.

Louis compares Sidney Poitier to Uncle Tom, which is the main character of the 1851 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The book was inspired by the life of Josiah Henson, who was born into slavery and survived despite the horrible conditions on plantations and eventually escaped to Canada, where he became a pastor. Josiah narrated his own

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<sup>136</sup> TINDALL, George Brown, SHI, David E. *Dějiny Spojených států amerických*. pp. 705–708.

memoir<sup>137</sup>, which inspired Stowe to write a book based on Henson's real-life events. The novel, published in *The National Era*<sup>138</sup>, was an instant success and the character of Uncle Tom served as a human face of slavery, which until then was a faceless institution.<sup>139</sup>

As Nixon mentions, the Black Panthers were a violent group who fought back against the 'suppressants', which led to the death of many of them.

Charlie Gaines, Cecil's younger son, volunteers to serve in the Vietnam War and is killed in 1973. The real Charles Allen, Eugene's son, indeed served in the Vietnam War but came back alive.<sup>140</sup>

In 1974, president Nixon is seen in visible distress as he talks about his potential resigning. Even though it is not said for what reason, it is obvious that it is meant to represent the Watergate scandal, due to which Nixon did resign in 1974.

Ronald Reagan acted as president between the years 1981 and 1989. Reagan was the last president Eugene and Cecil worked for, as they both retired in 1986. Before his retiring, Cecil was the one who ensured equal employment conditions for black staff and was invited to the State Dinner by Nancy Reagan as a result. There is no mention in the sources I worked with that Eugene was in any way fighting for equal working conditions in the White House. Eugene and Helene were in fact invited to the State Dinner<sup>141</sup>, but only after Eugene had announced his resignation.

Eugene was the first butler in history to be invited to such an event as a guest and he and his wife attended the State Dinner after he had resigned his position at the White House. Mr. Allen was very proud of his job as a butler, even as the Black Power movement shook the country. After Helene died Mr. Allen received a condolence letter from president George W. Bush and his wife Laura, showing how valued he was, as he had retired more than 20 years prior. Throughout his retirement, the former presidential families remained in contact with Mr. Allen's family<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave* (1849).

<sup>138</sup> A Washington antislavery newspaper.

<sup>139</sup> BROCK, Jared. The Story of Josiah Henson, the Real Inspiration for 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. *Smithsonian Magazine* [online].

<sup>140</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. *The Washington Post* [online].

<sup>141</sup> For the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in the year 1986.

<sup>142</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. 'Humble butler' served eight American presidents. *The Washington Post* [online].

HAYGOOD, Wil. *The Butler: A Witness to History*.

White House Workers: Traditions and Memories [film].



*“He possessed a dazzling array of framed photographs with all of the presidents he had served, in addition to gifts and mementos from each of them.”*<sup>143</sup>

Wil Haygood sought out Eugene Allen and wrote an article about him, which inspired the Academy Award nominee director Lee Daniels to direct a movie inspired by his life. Even though the main character of the movie is fictional and only slightly inspired by Eugene Allen, the racial struggle which he witnesses is very real. Wil Haygood accompanied Eugene Allen and his son Charles to Barack Obama’s inauguration and later wrote a book documenting Eugene Allen’s life.<sup>144</sup>

### **3.2.5. Technical and cultural observing from the film**

During the film, the spectator may find many cultural as well as technical aspects which further depict the life of African-Americans.

#### **Voiceover**

Cecil Gaines is telling his life story and his voiceover appears throughout the entire film to deliver more information than would be possible solely through acting rendition.

#### **Repetition**

There are several phrases and shots which are repeated throughout the movie.

- Cecil is sitting on a chair at the entrance of the White House. First, when he comes to the White House for a job interview. Second, when he comes to meet Barack Obama.
- “House nigger.” This phrase is used at the plantation when Cecil starts learning the trade. Cecil is later scolded by his boss in South Carolina for talking about himself in such a manner. When he interviews for the job of a butler, the maître d’ says “You’ll make a good house nigger”, which shocks Cecil, though it seems to be included for comedic purposes.
- “The room should feel empty when you’re in it,” Miss Annabeth says this to Cecil when he is learning the trade at the plantation. When he starts working at the White House, Mr. Fallows is about to tell him the same thing, but Cecil finishes the phrase for him.
- Cecil serves cookies to the children visiting the White House; once as a new employee, second time shortly before retiring.

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<sup>143</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. ‘Humble butler’ served eight American presidents. The Washington Post [online].

<sup>144</sup> HAYGOOD, Wil. *The Butler: A Witness to History*.

- Ham sandwiches; when Cecil arrives in North Carolina and breaks into a hotel, the butler working there tells him he would make him a ham sandwich and send him on his way. When Louis leaves for Tennessee, Gloria gives him ham sandwiches for the road.
- Butlers wearing two faces; when Cecil starts working in a hotel in North Carolina, his senior tells him that butlers wear two faces: one, which is their own and the second one, which they show to white people. When Cecil attends the State Dinner, the voiceover once again mentions these two faces as Cecil observes his friends working.
- A shot where Louis polishes shoes; when working in North Carolina, Louis is seen sitting on the floor polishing a pile of shoes, smiling. Shortly before his retiring, he is seen sitting on the floor in the same manner, polishing a bunch of shoes, while the voiceover says he no longer enjoys what he does.

### **Re-enactment**

- When a president addresses the nation via television, the shots used are of the actor portraying the president. Such or similar speeches were delivered and were re-enacted for the purpose of the movie. This occurs repeatedly in the movie.
- When Louis and his fellow protesters get arrested after their first sit-in, they are seen on the television by Cecil and the staff of White House, which is a re-enactment of a news report.<sup>145</sup>
- During the Freedom Ride in Alabama when a bus is set on fire, Louis and the other Riders are ambushed during the night and on the road, while in reality, the bus was ambushed in Anniston, Tennessee, around 1 p.m. The mob followed the bus outside the town borders, where they attacked them once more and set the bus on fire. As is apparent from the photograph, the attack took place during the day; the writers must have changed the setting to the night to give a dramatic effect to the flames, which contrast better during the night.<sup>146</sup>

### **Historical shots: photos, news reports on television, quotation**

Throughout the movie, historical elements are continually used to complement the story which is being told.

- Quotation: At the beginning, a part of a quote by Martin Luther King Jr. is shown; *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.”* The rest of the quote is

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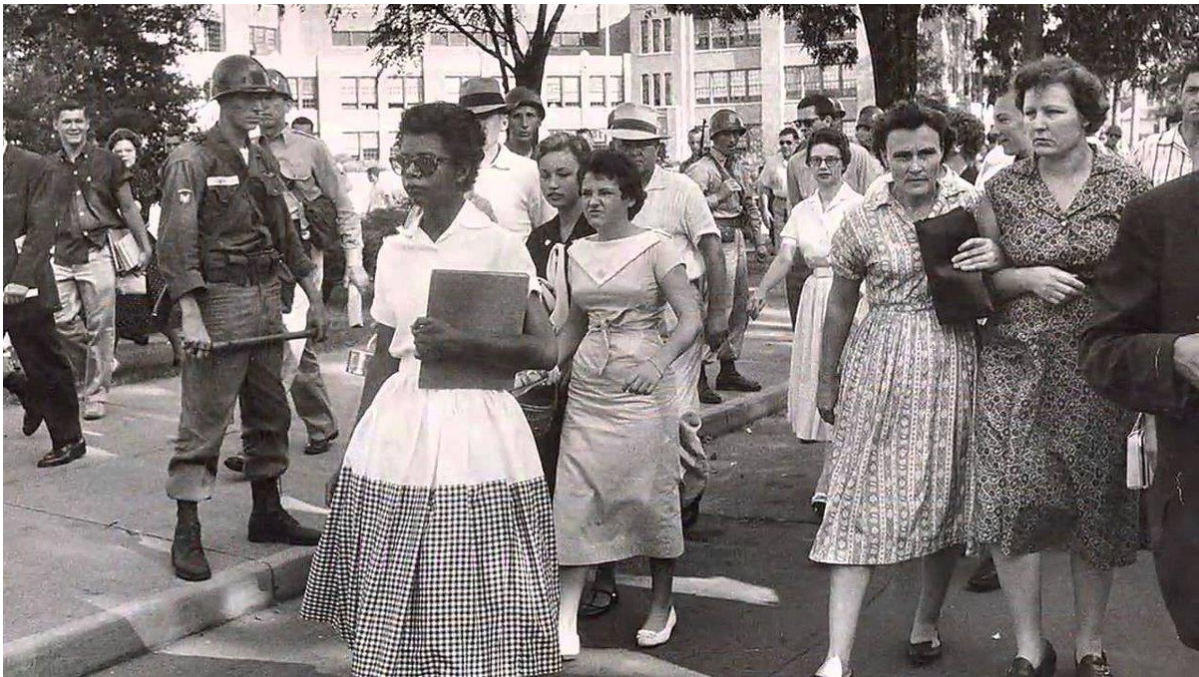
<sup>145</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:43:22.

<sup>146</sup> ARSENAULT, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. pp. 140–176.

followed by: “*Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.*” This was taken from MLK’s book *Strength to Love* published in 1963.

- Photographs: Period photographs are shown after a major event throughout the movie. These are several examples of those pictures.
  - Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957. An African-American female student Elizabeth Eckford surrounded by many white students on University Campus with the presence of the military (Figure 5).<sup>147</sup>

Figure 5 – Elizabeth Eckford in Little Rock, Arkansas (1957)



Source: <https://fyeahhistory.com/2018/10/08/life-after-little-rock-elizabeth-eckford/>

- Attack on Freedom Riders in Alabama on May 14, 1961. A historical photograph is used, confirming which event it refers to (Figure 4).<sup>148</sup>
- News reports on television:
  - After the re-enactment of an arrest of the sit-in protestors, a what seems to be a period new report of the incident follows.<sup>149</sup>
  - Cecil and Gloria watch a news report or a testimony of the bus burning in Alabama of May 14, 1961.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>147</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:30:15.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 0:54:25.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 0:43:44.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 0:55:10.

- JFK and the First Lady watch a news report of the Birmingham 1963 protests and the brutal police intervention.<sup>151</sup>
- Gloria watches a news report of MLK marching with the protestors in Birmingham. It is likely that the news report is of the protest which took place on August 28, 1963.<sup>152</sup>
- President Johnson watches several news reports covering Bloody Sunday at once.<sup>153</sup>
- When Louis comes to see his father at the White House, Cecil sends him away. After this encounter, there is a time lapse all the way to the year 1986. During the time lapse, there are several historical television shots, including the speech of president Ford, who replaced president Nixon and the inauguration of president Carter.

## Reference

- When we first encounter Cecil Gaines and his parents, they are having their photograph taken by a young black boy, similarly to how a white family would have a family picture taken, only in different surroundings. Historically, there was a strong connection between slavery and photographs. Even though taking a photograph was quite expensive in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slave masters often took pictures of their slaves. Not only could they attach the photographs to a poster when offering a slave for sale, it was concurrently a means of asserting white dominance over slaves. In this scene, the Gaines family are photographed, but not as objects, as a family, which could be an intentional ode African-Americans reclaiming power over the act of having their photograph taken.<sup>154</sup>
- When Louis leaves for university, he boards a bus to Tennessee and is seen sitting at the back of the bus. Louis is not yet an experienced activist, therefore he avoids any potential trouble regarding interstate travel by conforming to the Jim Crow laws.
- Louis is shown to disagree with the newly militant orientation of his activist group; he is meant to be the protagonist of the story and the Black Power movement is shown as 'bad', which is how it was viewed by many.

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<sup>151</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:56:36.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 0:57:33.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 1:13:03.

<sup>154</sup> WILLIS, Deborah, KRAUTHAMER, Barbara. *Envisioning emancipation: Black Americans at the End of Slavery*. pp. 3–8.

- After Louis's court hearing, Cecil steps out of the court room to drink from a water fountain. The fountains are marked either 'white' or colored'. This was a reoccurring means of segregation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century USA. It is likely that the court hearing took place in Tennessee, where the arrest would have taken place.<sup>155</sup>
- Sidney Poitier, who is discussed during a family dinner at the Gaines' home, was the first male African-American to win an Academy Award, which he received for his role in the 1963 film *Lilies of the Field*.<sup>156</sup> As is shown in the confrontation between Louis and his family, even though Poitier's award meant a great deal to the black community, some argued that the representation of African-Americans in Hollywood movies at that time was highly inaccurate (further discussed in chapter 3.2.).

### **African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)**

AAVE, also known as Ebonics, is a language derived from Standard English and spoken by the African-American community. The AAVE differs from Standard English in grammar and is heavily comprised of borrowed vocabulary. Even though the African-American characters of the movie speak in Ebonics when they are among their own, when in the company of white people, they speak Standard English.<sup>157</sup>

- Familiar addressing: black men address one another as a 'brother'.
- Omitting or changing the copula.<sup>158</sup>
  - Remote present perfect tense:
    - “You done broke our window. You done stole our food.”<sup>159</sup>
    - “They done sworn him to some kind of secret codes.”<sup>160</sup>
- Infinitive used instead of the proper form of a verb.
  - “Back in Macon I'm a house nigger.”<sup>161</sup>
  - “Sometimes it just be me and Faye up in here.”<sup>162</sup>
  - “Make a difference, don't it?”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:44:07.

<sup>156</sup> CRIPPS, Thomas. *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era*. p. 68.

<sup>157</sup> PULLUM, Geoffrey K. *African American Vernacular English is Not Standard English with Mistakes*. pp. 39–58.

<sup>158</sup> Various forms of the verb 'be'.

<sup>159</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:09:43.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 0:21:26.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 0:09:49.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 0:19:15.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 0:19:43.

- Ain't: This expression was formed from the expressions 'am not', 'are not' or 'is not'. "I ain't ready for them hot white people."<sup>164</sup>
- Double negation: "He can't tell me nothin'."<sup>165</sup>

## Soundtrack

Throughout most of the movie, the plot is accompanied by music. In general, the more serious moments are accompanied by instrumental music, while more uplifting moments are accompanied by contemporary music. In some instances, where Cecil grieves for his sons, gospel music is used. Most of the singers are African-American, but not all. Interestingly, almost all of the accompanying music used in specific scenes is not accurate, meaning it was published years after those events took place. It is, however, used to create a fitting atmosphere. There is one instance where the music the characters are listening to is out of place (Tell Him). Following is a list of some of the contemporary music used in the movie. On the whole, the music is reminiscent of the time period which it complements and fits the film well.

- I'm Determined – The Meditation Singers (1989). Gospel music; it is performed as blues, which is a music genre associated with Africa-American culture. Cecil moves to Washington, D.C.
- Ain't That a Kick in the Head – Dean Martin (1960). Cecil starts working at the White House and meets the President for the first time (1957).
- Hurts Me to My Heart – Faye Adams (1954). The Gaines family celebrate Cecil's new job and they listen to this song, even naming Faye (1957).
- Function at the Junction – Shorty Long (1965). Used in 1960 accompanying the beginning of the sit-in movement.
- Tell Him – Patti Drew (1967). Background music to when Johnson takes the Office (1964). In the next scene, the Cecil, Gloria and the butlers listen to the song on the radio during a party. That would be impossible.
- We Shall Overcome – Pete Seeger (1960). Gospel music sang in church in 1965.
- I'll Close My Eyes – Dinah Washington (1956). MLK assassinated (1968).
- Party is a Groovy Thing – The People's Choice (1975). Plays on the television during Cecil's birthday (1973).

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<sup>164</sup> The Butler [česky *Komorník*] [film]. Režie Lee Daniels. 0:11:44.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. 0:21:29.

- You and I Ain't Nothin' No More – Gladys Knight (2013). The song was written and produced for the movie; is used during a time-lapse of the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Soul food**

The African-American cuisine originated from food leftover from the masters' house. When the Gaines family celebrate Cecil's new job at the White House, the food served is typical for an African-American family. The food in this scene includes fried chicken, corn, potato salad and corn bread. When the Gaines family returns from Louis's graduation, Gloria says that she's going to make some potato salad.

### **Gospel music and the African-American church**

Gospel music is an inherent part of the African-American culture brought over from West Africa during the Transatlantic slave trade period. Music plays a big role in the black church worship, but gospel music also became a significant part of the civil rights movement, as gospel songs were used to spread its powerful message.<sup>166</sup> Not only is gospel music used as a background of the movie on occasion, there are several instances when the scene of black church is being depicted. This signifies how African-Americans would find consolation in their belief after a tragic event.

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<sup>166</sup> WILLIAMS-JONES, Pearl. Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic [online].

## Conclusion

In this bachelor's thesis, my goal was to examine the portrayal of African-Americans in the film industry. As a representation, I chose the motion picture *The Butler*, which serves as a time-lapse picture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. and the civil rights movement. I inspected the accuracy of the information presented in the film as well as the portrayal of black lives.

As for the involvement of African-Americans in the film industry, much like in other areas of life, they have been significantly disadvantaging from the beginning. Since movies used to be made to fit the then tastes of white Americans, African-Americans tended to be mostly excluded from Hollywood and when they were included in 'white' movies, they were portrayed as happy and lazy plantation workers who served as figures to be laughed at.

The 1970s saw the boom of black films, which, on one hand, offered work opportunities for African-Americans but on the other, inaccurately portrayed their lives. Since the 1970s, African-Americans have comprised a significant part of moviegoers but it was not until the 1990s that the industry began to realize that even white Americans would spend money to see movies starring African-Americans. Contemporaneously, the 1990s was an era when black directors, much like *The Butler*'s Lee Daniels, began gaining recognition.

*The Butler*'s story is loosely inspired by the life of Eugene Allen, who worked at the White House for 34 years. Thanks to the works of Wil Haygood, I was able to gather a significant amount of information on the life of Eugene Allen and compare it to the main character of this movie, Cecil Gaines. Their life stories are significantly different up until the moment they start working at the White House where Cecil, much like Eugene, bears witness to some of the most important moments of the civil rights movement. However, certain differences remain. Cecil's family differs greatly from Eugene's family. Apart from Eugene himself, much information was not available on other members of the Allen family. The older of Cecil's sons, Louis, is an entirely fabricated character which serves as a representation of all those who fought for equal rights during the civil rights movement era. Cecil's other son, Charlie, is inspired by Eugene's own son Charles Allen. Due to the lack of information available on other members of the Allen family, I was not able to compare the lives of Charlie Gaines and Charles Allen; there is, however, one great difference. In the movie, Charlie Gaines dies while serving in the Vietnam War. Charles Allen also enlisted and fought in Vietnam, but he came back alive. As the film does not claim to accurately represent the lives of the Allen family, I am of the opinion that the inconsistencies in their lives do not pose any problems for the purpose of the story.



Historical moments of the civil rights movement presented in the movies are for the most part accurate. The only inconsistency were the details regarding the murder of Emmett Till; in the movie, it is mentioned that Emmet Till was murdered 3 years prior to the year 1957, i.e., 1954. In reality, Till's murdered occurred in 1955.

There are many technical as well as cultural details which aid in the depiction of the lives of African-Americans. Even though a significant part of the music used in the movie does not fit the time frame of the movie, it does not take away from the message and does not interfere with the plot. The movie often uses period photographs and real historical footage taken from television news reports which emphasizes that such events did indeed happen. When black characters are not in the presence of the whites, they speak in Ebonics, also known as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). It is a language derived from Standard English and spoken by the African-American community. When these characters are in the presence of white Americans, they do use Standard English.

The treatment of African-Americans by white Americans, however brutal it may be, also seems accurate according to the research I concluded in the theoretical part.

In conclusion, the overall message of the film accurately translates the struggle of the civil rights and the emancipation struggle to the viewer and offers a unique perspective to the issues.

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## List of abbreviations

Congress of Racial Equality	CORE
John Fitzgerald Kennedy	JFK
Ku Klux Klan	KKK
Martin Luther King Jr.	MLK
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People	NAACP
Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee	SNCC
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	USSR
United States	U.S.
United States of America	USA
World War II	WWII

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## **Resumé**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá emancipačním bojem Afroameričanů ve 20. století a jeho zobrazením v moderním filmovém průmyslu. Cílem této práce je prozkoumat filmový snímek *Komorník* z roku 2013, který nepřímo dokumentuje emancipační boj Afroameričanů 20. století a jeho přesnost oproti historickým faktům. Teoretická část této práce je zaměřena na historii USA, a to konkrétně na roli otroků při budování současné podoby Spojených států Amerických a na hnutí za lidská práva 20. století. Praktická část zkoumá roli černochů ve filmovém průmyslu a dále porovnává film *Komorník* s historickými událostmi hnutí za lidská práva. Na závěr praktické části jsou mé postřehy z filmu týkající se technických aspektů, stejně jako kulturního zobrazení moderní Afroamerické kultury.

## **Klíčová slova**

Historie USA, kolonizace, otroctví v USA, černošská kultura, rasismus, emancipace Afroameričanů, hnutí za lidská práva, filmový průmysl, *Komorník*, Eugene Allen

## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis examines the emancipation struggle of African-Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its portrayal in the contemporary film industry. The objective of the thesis is to examine the motion picture *The Butler* released in the year 2013, which is an indirect time-lapse picture portraying the emancipation struggle of African-Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its accuracy in comparison with historical facts. The theoretical part of this thesis is focused on the history of the United States of America, concretely on the role of black slaves in the building of the present-day form of the USA and the civil rights movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The practical part inspects the role of African-Americans in the film industry and furthermore compares *The Butler* with the historical events of the civil rights movement. In the closing part, I included some of my own observations regarding the technical aspects of the production as well as the cultural depiction of modern day African-American culture.

## **Keywords**

History of the USA, colonization, slavery in the USA, black culture, racism, emancipation of African-Americans, civil rights movement, film industry, *The Butler*, Eugene Allen