



**Dr Cary
Edwards**

12 YEARS A SLAVE

Dir. Steve McQueen,
2013, Fox Searchlight
Pcitures

SECTION B SPECTATORSHIP

Popular Film and Emotional
Response

FM4 - VARIETIES OF FILM EXPERIENCE

Issues and Debates

12 YEARS A SLAVE





CONTEXT

An adaptation of the 1853 slave narrative memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup.

The film won Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress and Best Adapted Screenplay at the 2014 Oscars. It made \$187.7 million at the Box-Office.

RACE & VIOLENCE

1. How does this film handle the representation of race in ways that are similar and different to *Django Unchained*?
2. How does the use of language compare to *Django Unchained*?
3. Does this film relate to your understanding of the Slave Trade? What aspects surprise/shock you?
4. Do you have any sympathy for the Slave Owners? If so, why?
5. How is violence represented in the film? Does it have a high or low modality?
6. *12 Years a Slave* was rated 15 in the UK (*Django Unchained* was 18). Is this fair? What factors mean that this is a 15 not an 18?





HISTORY

7. Although based on a true story not all the events in the film happened. Should film makers be allowed to add elements drama to the real events?
8. Does the fact that the film is based on an autobiographical account effect the emotional response to the film?
9. How does the character of Solomon Northup compare to Django?
10. This film was less successful at the box-office than *Django Unchained*. Why?

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

11. Which scenes are especially effective in manipulating your emotions?
12. Which techniques does the director (McQueen) use to focus your identification with different characters?
13. Music plays a big role in this film – how?
14. Despite the subject matter some reviews described part of this film as beautiful. Do you agree?
15. Is the narrative of 12 Years a Slave unsatisfying?

Steve McQueen: a lot of people didn't want 12 Years A Slave to be made

The British film-maker Steve McQueen has said a lot of people did not want his award-winning movie *12 Years A Slave* to be made.

McQueen, who has said previously that becoming the first black director to win a best picture Oscar was "of no consequence", said people "want to close their eyes" on certain matters.

His story of a free New Yorker, Solomon Northup, kidnapped and sold into slavery in the deep south of the US also won Oscars for its screenplay and supporting actress Lupita Nyong'o.

In an interview with the FT Weekend magazine, McQueen said: "A lot of people didn't want the movie made."

Asked whether he was able to understand that, he said: "Yes, because people want to close their eyes on some subjects. They want to keep on going, they don't want to look behind them."

The Londoner, who now lives and works in Amsterdam, told the magazine he would like to return to the subject matter of male sexuality, which he explored in his film *Shame*.

"That is unfinished business. I really want to come back to that," he said.

"So many important decisions in the world are connected with the sexual appetites of important men. Whether it is JFK or Clinton or Martin Luther King. That is what we are. That is part of us. But sometimes people are embarrassed by their pleasures."

- From <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/05/steve-mcqueen-12-years-a-slave-opposition>