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Saif Ali Sukhera

Macalester College, ssukhera@macalester.edu

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13TH: ONE ERA CALLING OUT TO ANOTHER

Saif Ali Sukh

Chaining black people benefited white people for a very long time. It still does. Only now, slavery exists under a different name: imprisonment.

Directed with calm passion and controlled outrage, Ava DuVernay's *13th* explores how the United States government and corporate giants collaborated to meet their economic needs through the mass incarceration of black people.

DuVernay's harrowing showcase of institutional racism will leave you exasperated and frustrated. Before watching the film, you may want to consider some pivotal questions to help you conceptualize the greater narrative of bigotry and racism. How does elaborate racism exist in a country celebrated as "the land of opportunity?" What different forms has racism taken? How has racism been continuously condoned? Most importantly, how has racism been incorporated into the fabric of the US legal and judicial system?

To find the answers, *13th* takes us on a 150+ year journey from the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation on Capitol Hill to the 2016 shooting of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Unlike many informational documentaries which merely present a chronological chain of events, *13th* aims to explore the dynamics of the whole problem by tapping into facts, historic footage and short interviews.

Over the course of the film, DuVernay interviews notable scholars, politicians, and activists ranging from Angela Davis to the rather surprising Newt Gingrich, adding a wide array of insightful perspectives. DuVernay adds cinematic effects to interviews and incorporates tidbits of speeches and audio throughout the film to both capture the audience's attention and help the viewer understand key political figures' positions on and contributions to this intractable crisis.

Through juxtapositions of short clips, *13th* links the most publicized elements of US history's gruesome racism. Emmett Till's open casket funeral is contrasted with a KKK parade.

Footage of a black man being shoved around at a Trump rally plays concurrent with archival footage of civil rights-era water hoses, attack dogs, and beatings. One era calls out to another.

It's terrifying.

Many believe that the United States has cut off the chains of racism, bigotry and violence, but when DuVernay plays the Trump rally clip, everything becomes recent and relevant.

That's shocking.

To explain how contemporary racism has seeped into different aspects of the American life, *13th* necessarily covers vast ground fast. The flood of information can be exhausting (as it is exhaustive). But DuVernay keeps her message chugging and churning along, propelled by the force of her montage and the sheer volume of its damning, gripping material. While *13th* lacks divergent opinions, DuVernay, to some extent, compensates for this by arguing that the opposing side has had an overpowering voice for too long.

Films like *13th* should be compulsory for every American citizen to watch because, in illustrating a disgusting part of American history, *13th* tangibly connects the dots between the past and present. After watching *13th*, you will be passionate about being an ally in this time of despair.