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### Analyzing the Film, Selma

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is one of America's most famous laws that was passed by the 36<sup>th</sup> president, Lyndon B. Johnson. Essentially, the act legally desegregated the majority of the South. Though lawfully segregation was illegal, legislators and law makers still found ways that discriminated against people of color. One way in which this was done, that still heavily effects many individuals is in modern time was that of voting rights. In Ava DuVernay's directed film, *Selma*, this is displayed significantly as well as other issues of Jim Crow laws, which heavily affected people of color, primarily those of African American decent. Selma is a city within Alabama in which the fight for people of colors suffrage rights ultimately began with nonviolent demonstrations. The film essentially sheds light on the trials and tribulations of the civil rights movement in 1965. Through many obstacles and adversities from those trying to suppress these individuals, those who fought for citizen's rights still prevailed. Furthermore, it focused specifically on one of the most predominant individual of the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (David Oyelowo).

Within this film review, I will discuss DuVernay's and all those involved in creating this film's purpose. I will then briefly discuss the historical contents of Selma and its significance to present day circumstances. I will then discuss the imagery and film visuals that help the narrative

of the story. Finally, I will conclude with my final thoughts. The film *Selma* was developed to further showcase and implement the significance of voting in modern day time by using historical contents in a cinematic way.

Beginning with the purpose of the film, Ava DuVernay essentially created this film in the height of police brutality in the USA. Ultimately the goal DuVernay had for *Selma* was to shed light on those who experience racial injustice, not just in 1965, but over the course of time. Racial injustice has been a huge concern within the United States since the discovery of this country. Overall, DuVernay as a filmmaker is who creates to bring a call to action to her audience, who are typically apart of those within the African American community. Michael T. Martin, writer for *Black Camera*, states that "DuVernay is among the vanguard of a new generation of African American filmmakers who are the busily undeterred catalyst for what may very well be a black film renaissance in the making" (Martin). He further states that her work is "to further and foster the black cinematic image in an organized and consistent way, and to not have to defer and ask permission to traffic our films: to be self-determining" (Martin). Essentially, DuVernay used the historical images and characters in the film as they were in real life. Of course, because it is a film, some scandalous events are also discussed to capture the audience's attention, such as the infidelity in Dr. Martin Luther King's marriage with Coretta Scott King (Carmen Ejogo). Further, DuVernay's use to captivate the white audience is also used and seen with white actors also being mistreated if they supported the Civil Rights movement.

Other predominate individuals within the black film community and who have been awarded played significant parts in the production of this film. Among them is Christian Colson, who is primarily known for the highly awarded film *Slumdog Millionaire*. Oprah Winfrey, a black mogul whom has been in the industry for numerous years. Finally Dorcas Wright Gardner

and Jeremy Kleiner, who both are known for their two award winning films, *12 years of slave* and *Moonlight*. Being familiar with these films, it is believed that the goal of everyone involved in this film wanted to display the struggles of African Americans and how ultimately historical context has a lot to do with how they operate within the world present day.

Historically, the events that occurred in Selma have helped shaped African Americans in modern day time. A lot of this historical content was showcased in the film *Selma* and were filmed to display pretty accurate context. Essentially, the city itself represented the bad that occurred and still does occur within this country, specifically within the Southern states. Even after the implication of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, black civil right groups, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Council, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, were met with resistance by individuals, who were predominately white and Southern, who did everything within their power to prevent individuals from voting. Some of these implementations included high expectations and knowledge of government of black individuals that did not have to be met by their white counterparts, as shown in the film with the scene Annie Lee (Oprah Winfrey).

One of the most famous events that occurred in the state, and displayed in the film, is the march from Selma to Montgomery coming across Edmund Pettis Bridge, occurring as a response after the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson (Lakeith Stanfield). Protestors from around the world marched fifty four miles to the state capital. This march included famous historical figures John Lewis (Stephan James) and Hosea Williams (Wendell Pierce) as well as 600 people. In their journey, many were faced with deadly obstacles from “local authorities and white vigilante groups,” specifically those who were Alabama state troopers. Many of the marchers were met with tear gas and nightsticks and other use of violence (Granade). Eventually, news spread

rapidly on the mistreatment of these individuals and the National Guard had to come in and protect these individuals, allowing them to finally achieve their goal and making it to the state capital. In achieving their goal, other individuals in faith such as pastors and rabbis, as well as other social activist joined the movement, growing from 600 to over 2,000 individuals. These individuals were not only black, but came from a wide variety racial background. However, tension still occurred, ultimately leading to the death of a white minister, James Reed (Jeremy Strong). Eventually, the district courts had to step in and permitted that the march move forward. A few days later, President Johnson went to support the march, many believing because of the harsh images displayed in the media (“Selma to Montgomery March.”).

DuVenary does exceptionally well showcasing these events as accurately as possible, from cinematic effect and costuming. No individual was dressed modernly, but in attire that came from the sixties. Actors do phenomenally with taking on the characters in which they are portraying, to even the tiniest detail of their voices to fit the characters that they are playing. It is essential that it is done this way to create some form of credibility from its viewers. Had scenes in the film been mediocrely presented with no facts or exaggeration of events, the film would not have gotten as much recognition as it did. Also, the use of violence within the film makes it that much more appealing. Had this not been used in the film, it would have given false pretenses that none of these bad things occurred when they indeed did. The use of lighting further helps the film in positive aspects. It helps to display which decade they are in and further creates a mood of overcoming tribulations. Also the angle of cameras during certain scenes helps the audience who has some idea of the historical background to understand what part of the timeline it was on. For instance, the pan over the bridge showcased the march. Also, the scene of the girls in the church showcased that the timeline was at the bombing on the church building. The narration of

the film from the point of view of the FBI was also significant because it showcased how these authority figures truly felt about these people who were trying to find peace. In a way it was almost disturbing because they wanted it to showcase it as if he was doing something wrong, but these individuals were just trying to fight for their rights.

Controversies of the film essentially come from the legacy of President Johnson. Many people believe that his role in the film was significantly exaggerated and made him look like a person who truly did not care. Former aids of the president even argue that the meetings between him and Dr. King were not as confrontational. However, critics of the film also discuss that the scenes are closely similar to that that was implemented in Dr. King's autobiography. Also critics argued about the accuracy of the relationship between Dr. King and Coretta. Besides these details of the film, the vast majority of *Selma* did showcase the events that occurred pretty accurately (Grandade).

To conclude, the film *Selma* is a great film that accurately showcases historical events helping with its credibility. Further, those involved in the film seem to also have credibility because of previous projects they were a part of. Finally, the use of cinema captivity and effects helped push the film even more, appealing to the audience by giving accurate information rather than sugarcoated false pretenses. This film differs from most films about the movement because, though it does discuss Dr. King predominately, it also showcases all other people who played huge roles in the film. It is essential to discuss the importance of all roles, and DuVernay did exceptionally well doing such.

## Bibliography

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