



**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THOMAS
JEFFERSON'S IDEAS IN NAT PARKER'S *THE
BIRTH OF A NATION***

A FINAL PROJECT

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PRONOUNCEMENT

I states truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the result from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I did not take the material from publications or someone else's work except for the references mentioned in the bibliography.

Semarang, 13 July 2017

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**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THOMAS JEFFERSON IDEAS
IN “*THE BIRTH OF A NATION*” MOVIE**

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MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Your word is your bond. Make sure your words match your actions. Keep your word and fulfill your promises. Your character is more important than your reputation.”

– **W. Lamb**

“When life gets you down, just keep swimming.”

– **Finding Dory**

*I sincerely dedicate this final project to my beloved ones for their
encouragement and guidance*

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I realize that this project is still far from being perfect. I, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this project better.

Finally i expect that this project will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about american studies in contact and its effect for the society.

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ABSTRACT

Perbudakan adalah sebuah fenomena sejarah yang tidak bisa dihapuskan dari pikiran masyarakat Amerika, terlebih untuk orang kulit hitam di Amerika. Dalam film *The Birth of A Nation*, penulis ingin menganalisis bagaimana perbudakan terjadi pada akhir tahun 1800an, terlebih pada perlakuan antara orang kulit putih dan orang kulit hitam di Amerika yang telah termanifestasikan oleh ide Thomas Jefferson dalam bukunya yang berjudul *Notes of Virginia*. Dengan menerapkan penelitian pustaka, hasil menunjukkan bahwa perbudakan menciptakan efek untuk masyarakat serta memberikan pandangan baru tentang diskriminasi.

Keyword: *discrimination, slavery, black american, The Birth of A Nation*

I. INTRODUCTION

United States of America is a multicultural country that has various ideas, philosophy, cultures, beliefs, and norms. The freedom to express different ideas could make United States of America a leading democratic country in the world. The US leads in many aspects of life such as technology, economy, democracy, and culture.

For a long time, American's achievements in many fields of life are shown through the cultural medium, that is film. American films have a long record to show of how Americans' way of life and perspectives. American people devote their ideas into the screen in order to show their ideas to people and create new perspectives of life. Movie, which is a form of literary work, has a power to attract attention from people. This is not only because movie entertains people, but also the power of transfer values and create different point of views. In order to do so, director and American movie makers take the social background of the society as an important material to represent the philosophical idea of society.

Nowadays, there are lot of movies which based on a true story. A lot of conflict happen in American daily life. Movie, as one of media literature use to describe about society condition. One of society background that Hollywood tries to potray is about discrimination and inequality in the United States of America. Discrimination is about how people treat each other unfair. In other word people

try to degrade other's status of human being because of skin color, ethnic, sex, and age. The statement of discrimination is confirmed by a quotation from James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*.

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely. But a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (1931:214-215)

The discrimination case can be seen in the way to pursue happiness, and the freedom to work-hard and a fair ambition for a better life. Pursuing happiness in the United States of America is not easy as being expected. It is same as one of black Americans singer, Nina Simone's quotes about slavery. She states that slavery has never been abolished from America's way to thinking. It means that slavery and discrimination still happens in the society although there is Declaration of Independence which saying all men are created equal. Black Americans have to do their hard effort more than white Americans to gain the happiness. Black Americans have to face their pain while reaching their purpose.

Considering those ideas of discrimination, the writer is interested to analyze more about manifestation of Thomas Jefferson's idea in the *The Birth of A Nation* movie directed by Nate Parker. This movie is based on the true story and precieved by the writer to be the most suitable object to analyze about slavery

attitude. The director shows bravely about the daily life of Nat Turner with his hard-working to pursue his family happiness.

2. FILM AND SOCIETY

According to Dick in *Anatomy of Film*, movie is widely known as moving pictures; simply named because the pictures certainly move (1997:2). In his book, he offers a description of film from John Howard Lawson. He cites that a film is a process of audiovisual conflict from a premise proceeds to a climax and comes to the end of the action.

Movies watched at cinema, on television, are notably narratives. These narratives are often about characters going through experiences and how they go about it. In addition to Lawson's argument, Dick also explains that movie is also the same as narrative film that builds a climax and descends into a resolution shown audio-visually (1997:2). To a far extent, Kaul (2004) on *Representation of Social Issues on Films* also writes that "a movie usually refers to a motion picture for the masses whereas a film is something with more artistic and or educational appeal".

To say a movie is merely for entertainment, it could be right or wrong. The main purpose of a movie is indeed to entertain. However, it depends on how a viewer sees a film, whether for entertainment only or getting deeper meaning. This means through film, the viewers could learn about a particular phenomenon. To add, Kaul (2014) states that a film often represents a certain issue and it highlights

its perspective on the issues that it present, either in direct or indirect interpretation. Hence, films have great influence on the viewers' way of thinking, decision making and even mood. Furthermore, films can also raise social awareness and effect change in itsviewers if it is used responsibly.

In the education purpose, films can be taught to gain better understanding of society and its social issue. In *Using Contemporary Films to Teach about Social Problems* Journal (2010:3), Jannet Cosbey from Eastern Illinois University states that he teaches some films to his students regarding particular issues. For example, in the film *The Pursuit of Happiness*(2006) he found that the film shows how the individualism and American dream ingrained in each character. However, this film also reflects that within society there is still certain group who struggle for decent salary. Consequently, it has successfully developed sense of awareness and better understanding of his students about social issues in society through films. He adds, "using films to illustrate social problems worked quite effectively in this class" (2010:6).

An analysis of cinema has been consequently related to the theories of narrative (Andrew, 1984:76). A film always contains a story. Thus, narrative elements can be applied in analyzing a film. The narrative elements discussed in this paper are character, setting, and conflict. These elements are also found in written literature.

According to Kennedy, a character is a person who lives in a story that is generated from imagination (2007:74). He classifies the character into round and

flat characters. He says that a round character is represented in thorough insight. The importance of this character's involvement in the events builds up the story. Meanwhile, a flat character possesses only one trait to be represented (Kennedy, 2007:75).

The second narrative element is a setting. The setting is used to identify time, and place of the story. Setting has a function to give realistic impression about the story. In addition, the setting is used to create a certain atmosphere as if it really exists and happens. This is supported by the opinion of Kennedy (1987:68)

The last narrative element is a conflict. The conflict is one of the important elements to make the story seem lively. According to Perrine, "conflict is a clash of action, desire, ideas, or goods in the plot of a story (1987:42)". Thus the conflict makes a story have purpose. There are two classifications of conflict, external conflict and internal conflict. According to Meyer (1990), the external conflict is a conflict which happens between a person with other individual or environment, while the internal conflict is a conflict which occurs between himself and his own desire.

3. THOMAS JEFFERSON'S IDEA TOWARD SLAVERY

Thomas Jefferson is known as a founding father and the author of the Declaration of Independence. He was elected as third president in the United

States after John Adams in 1801. In his own lifetime, he was struggling toward egalitarian ideology and racist practice.

Occupying Thomas Jefferson's governance, slavery is the big issue in the United States. Jefferson is contrary to slavery issue in his career. According to Thomas Jefferson as the writer of The Declaration of Independence states

“that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” (1776)

It means that every people have the same right to have opportunity to get the better life in line with their achievement and ability.

A lot of philosophical ideas he made to resist the slavery. One of his ideas is from *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1787 (query 18). Thomas Jefferson states that “the whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other” (1787:174). It means that the master or the one who has money always has more power. It is going to mortally. There is always degrading toward people because he is black. Human trafficking toward black people is common way to do by white people. Human trafficking is done continuously and terribly.

In another idea, Thomas Jefferson realizes that black people have to struggle more than whites to reach their goals in life. It indicates in his idea that “The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals underpraved by such circumstances” (1787:174). There are so many obstacles for black people toward reaching the goals (being freedom). Yet they have to struggle like put so

much efforts on it. This following quotation shows that the one who can struggle is the one who is chosen and has a big patient on it. Because it is not easy to see and face the circumstance happened. Thomas Jefferson also demonstrates that “There must doubtless be unhappy influences on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us” (1787:173). He wants to show that there are bad influences toward slavery in the society. It is about how people facing the slavery and how people getting the impacts from the slavery. There are always unawariness habits to treat people as a slave. Black people will see a slavery as the worst dream for their descendant. It makes a root mindset that black people was born to be a slavery and no one will change it.

“For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another and which he must lock up the faculties of his nature” (1787:174). This quote appears that black people was created to be slaves. There mostly will be no ways to change such things. They are born to be a labour of their owner and live in a miserable condition. There will be almost no opportunity for them to change their fate. No other destiny except being a slave. It stands for the descendant of black people no matter how.

Thomas Jefferson wants to emphasize that this slavery circumstances has happened since they were a kid. He states that “Our children see this and learn to imitate it: for man is an imitative animal” (1787:174). Since they were a kid, whites people see that people who have black skin will be treated as animal. It makes the root mindset of white children even their parents do not measure them

to do bad treatment toward black people. It means that slavery will be existed to posterity. It is logically said that slavery toward black people will be hard to be cutted down. “Indeed I tremble for my country when i reflect God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever” (1787:175). Certainly, Thomas Jefferson represents that there will be some people who try to escape black people from slavery. It gives hope to black people that there are some people who are brave enough to break the rules even it is hard to do. Thomas Jefferson also mention God in this quote, it means that by the God’s support is nothing impossible to do.

From these statements of Thomas Jefferson toward slavery, it embraces to be analyzed about the implementation of the manners effect of slavery from Thomas Jefferson ideas in *The Birth of A Nation* movie directed by Nate Parker.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

To analyze the implementation of Thomas Jefferson ideas in *The Birth of A Nation* movie, method of research and method of approach are employed. The method of research being used in this essay is library research. According to Semi, library research is a research which the collecting data that are realted to the analysis is done by researching books, magazines, newspaper, internet or audio visual means. (1993:17). The major data of this project will be taken from two objects, which are movie titled *The Birth of A Nation* directed by Nate Parker and Thomas Jefferson’s book entitled *Notes of State Virginia*. The supporting data will be taken from other sources article from the internet and some books. The process

of composing this project is focused on analyzing the character and social background of the movie considering to Thomas Jefferson's manners of slavery essay.

In analyzing the implementation of Thomas Jefferson's idea about slavery manners in *The Birth of A Nation* movie, objective approach is suitable to support this study. According to Abrams, method of approach is "giving full attention to literature as an autonomous structure with intrinsic coherence" (1979:3-29). The writer also using sociological approach to literature to implement the ideas of Thomas Jefferson in *The Birth of A Nation* movie. According to Kennedy and Dana in a book entitled *Giola's Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. It is said "critic examines literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received.". It means that mostly literature work has connection to the situation around the author. In the other words, literature is the expression of social feeling, or about feeling that come from the social life.

5. THOMAS JEFFERSON'S IDEA IN *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* MOVIE

In *The Birth of A Nation* there are two leading characters which play as slave and master. Nathanael Turner or Nat Turner is the leading characters who are a slave and master in Turner Family. Turner is the name of white

family as his identity that he is owned by Turner's Family. Since he was child, Nat's family has served to Turner's family. Nat is a smart slave. As a black people, he is the one and only who can read. He learns to read and write. He helps the other slaves to read the bible. He leads group of slave and being a preacher. He lives in cotton field owned by Turner's Family as a slave and a preacher for the slaves around.

Nathanael is deeply religious, he spent his life time mostly to read bible and spread it to another slave. Turner's family is a good family treating their slave, but not with another white people. Nat's always called to give spirits to another slaves by Bible, it makes him to see how terrible white people treat their slave. Until one day he remember of what white people done to his father. Just because he is black, white people can do whatever they want like an animal. He believes that he comes to make the freedom of black people. He wants to protect his people from white people had done to them.

Nathanael is a brave man by leading black rebellion toward white people in Southampton county. He starts to gather his supporters and killing his own master first. The rebellion spreads to another region in addition more supporters on it. The rebellion stands only for few days until the white strike back and taking over the situation. The white starts to look for Nat and punished a death sentence to him. Yet Nat has no guilty during his trial because he believes that rebellion is the work of God.



Picture 1 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:20:47)



Picture 2 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:20:50)

Samuel Turner is the master who owned Nathanael. He is white people who is humane yet filled with prejudice and racist toward black people. Samuel always helps Nat when he gets problem. Not only once Samuel protects his slave toward bad treats from white people. Even when Nat had done a fatal mistake by mocking white, he do punish to Nat, but still he speaks up for Nat and forgive. Even sometimes, Samuel has to put his side toward white people because it's so impossible straightforward speak up for his slave.



Picture 3 (*The Birth of A Nation* 06:36)



Picture 4 (*The Birth of A Nation* 21:21)



Picture 5 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:50:36)

Role scenes of *The Birth of A Nation* shows that there is enslave trading (see picture 1) toward black people and it is commonly to do. As Thomas Jefferson states that black people is created to be degrading and enslave. They are treated as terrible as animal even worse. In *The Birth of A Nation* movie scene proves for what Thomas Jefferson wrote that enslave trading toward black people will be a continuously activities in the society(see page 6). In the movie, Nat and Samuel are going to buy some daily need for Samuel's family, the way to home they both are seeing human trafficking as slave (see picture 2). Jefferson idea (see page 6) also explains that they dont even have any right for making their life decision.

Thomas Jefferson confirms all the pictures above in his idea that black people who has extraordinary talent and has the ability of self controlling in every hard situation toward slavery are people that can struggle in life (see page 6). Jefferson wants to emphasize how terrible black people are treaten because they are inferior in life status. Nat is one of the strong black people that Jefferson had mentioned. All the pictures above are showing that only the man who strong enough that can see those hurtfull and traumatic situations and still following the circumtances and struggling to help their people.

Natanael Turner experienced so many unfair black people treating since he was a kid. In some night, he saw his dad was caught stole food for him in the middle of night and executed by the whites directly at the place (see picture 3). Since that time, Nat has to live apart with his father because his father has to escape his life from the whites. After growing up, Nat become Turner's family slave. Samuel ordered him to follow look for life necessity. On the trip, he saw human trafficking was done by the whites. Even some whites want to buy black woman just want to rape her. his face look so concerned toward his people (see picture 4). He tried to convince samuel to buy the black woman as a new slave gift for his sister in purpose to save the woman. It shows in the dialog:

Nat : "Master, i want to say that girl surely can be a good gift for miss. Chaterine. You said that she keeps asking about new slave." (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:21:31-00:21:33)

Nat : "Right sir, she is young. With the right teaching. The girl like that can work a long time. Master, of course you will be so shamed if she sold in such a low price." (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:21:41-00:21:53)

The dialog above shows that Nat tries to convince his master to buy the woman as new slave instead of to save the girl from the bad whites master. He tries to save his people in polite way. But he can not do more since he realizes that he is a slave. He showed hurt feeling in his face but he has to be patient when he saw his people is treated unfairly even like an animal. He can not do many things

to defend black people. the only thing that he can do is seeing and obeying the rules.

Some days after Nat and Samuel went to another whites field to spread the Bible spirits toward black people. They were so surprised for what happened in the field. They both saw how the whites punished his slaves just because they rejected to eat stale food. Nat's face expression shows that he felt sorry and empathy about the terrible treatment (see picture 5). Everyday he has to see that his people is treated unfairly by their owner.



Picture 6 (*The Birth of A Nation*
00:19:37)



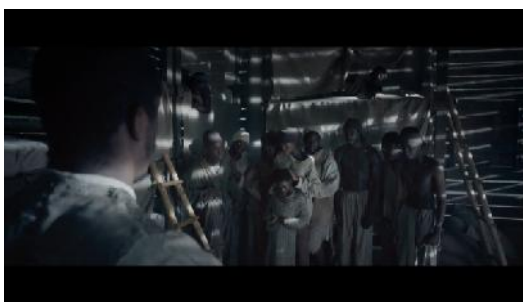
Picture 7 (*The Birth of A Nation*
01:18:43)

The Birth of A Nation movie depicts about Thomas Jefferson idea of manners toward slavery. Jefferson states that slavery creates unpleasant effects of attitude toward black people (see page 6) in the society as it is seen in the dialog bellow:

The white : “What you think you are doing? You spoke to my wife. Where is your owner, boy?” (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:19:35-00:19:50)

The white : “i wanna call sheriff. This boy assaulted me and he assaulted my wife and i will bring the charges.” (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:19:55-00:20:02)

From the dialog above shows that black people will constantly assume as dangerous man who should always be avoided to get in touch. This mindset created because of slavery circumstances in the society. It is a bad impacts which have to be accepted by black people. In the picture 7 shows Nat’s friends have doubt feeling whether they were strong enough to strikeback the whites and set the freedom for black people. It means Jefferson’s idea (see page 7) is emphasizing that the constant unpleasant effects toward slavery are not affect to the whites’ mindset only but also all the human creature living.



Picture 8 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:42:08)



Picture 9 (*The Birth of A Nation* 01:07:27)

The Birth of A Nation describes how miserable black people's life is. They live in together a unfeasible place without good food and life supplies. They have to struggle in such a bad condition. They have to work no matter how their condition. Sometimes they are paid by food only. This such condition is related to Jefferson idea, which is black people were born to be a slave. There are no another destination of life except being a labour and live in a miserable life (see page 7). In picture 8 shows when Nat wants to give the Bible spirits to his people, he looks around to the not feasible place they are live in without good food and life supplies. Moreover, they can not do anything to pursue his right as human since they were born as black people. In picture 9 shows the masters look so angry to Nat because he was going out of his line as slave. Both two pictures above are reflect to Jefferson black people was created to be slave. The society have mindset that black can not be superior than white.. It also can be seen in the dialog bellow:

Samuel : “we have been good to you and my whole family has. And you gone do some like this to me! A niger baptized white man in my property. Do you know how this res looks?” (*The Birth of A Nation* 01:07:17-01:07:29)

From the dialog above it shows the society have mindset that black can not be superior than white, while baptizing people can turn into something criminal if it is done by the black to white man.



Picture 10 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:20:24)



Picture 11 (*The Birth of A Nation* 00:42:08)

Those two pictures above relates to the Jeffersons idea (page 7) that as black people they are born to be treated as animal and as white, they can do anything to his “animal”. Thomas Jefferson also emphasize through this pictures about how children are treated by the treatment toward black and white. They learned about slavery since they are kid by seeing how their parent treats black people

The picture 10 shows that the children seeing how bad black people is treated. He sees unfairly thing when Nat Turner being kind to give the doll back to him but suddenly his father comes and hit Nat as the reason that Nat is teasing his family. While in the picture 11 shows a white child playing while pulled the rope that is bounded in a black child slave and they both are running around in the home terrace.



Picture 12 (*The Birth of A Nation*
00:00:41)

Picture 13 (*The Birth of A Nation*
01:36:18)

The picture 12 shows the director uses Thomas Jefferson's idea in the movie that there will be a rebellion of black people for escaping themselves from the slavery system. Another picture 13 shows Nat Turner becomes a leader of the rebellion and it was considered as God's work as he tried to escape his people from the slavery. In Thomas Jefferson's idea (page 8) also mentions about God that means there is nothing impossible to do by the God's hand.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is true that slavery attitudes happened among people in the United States. Thomas Jefferson describes the situation in the United States through his essay; how white people treated black people and how it gave impact to the next generation, not only black but white people. Black people learn that as hard as they put their efforts escaping from slavery and catching the freedom, it is nearly impossible to break the rule about slavery. Thomas Jefferson describes the social background in the United States about slavery and how it gives impacts upon people.

The Birth of a Nation movie shows how black people put their struggle toward hard situations in the United States. The life of black people really takes a

lot of efforts and sacrifices for pursuing happiness. Even for the smart black people it still hard to break the rules. Nat Turner never gives up to reach his desire to pursue happiness for his people.

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