


 EXPLORING & CONFRONTING  
**OUR RACISM**

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### Season 3 - Movie #1 - *The Birth of a Nation* (2016)

*The Birth of a Nation* is a 2016 American period drama film written and directed by Nate Parker in his directorial debut. It is based on the story of Nat Turner, the enslaved man who led a slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831. The movie can be rented on Apple TV, Amazon, You Tube, Vudu, Redbox and Direct TV.

#### **Cast**

Sam Turner - slave owner

Elizabeth Turner - Sam's sister

Nat Turner - slave who was literate and was a preacher

Nancy Turner - Nat's mom

Bridget - Nat's Nana (grandma)

Cherry - Nat's wife

Hark - slave whose wife Esther was "requested" by one of Sam's guests

Isaiah - house slave for Sam Turner

Raymond Cobb - member of slave patrol that rapes Nat's wife Cherry

Reverend Walthall - Reverend who encourages Sam Turner to use Nat to calm/control other slaves

#### **Study Guide Questions for October 24, 2022 (N.B. 1, 5, 6, 8 10)**

1. Nate Parker's film, *The Birth of a Nation 2016* tells the story of Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion, a critical event in African American history. But it takes its title from another such event: D.W. Griffith's silent film about the Civil War. Why do you think Nate Parker named a film about slavery and a slave rebellion *The Birth of a Nation*?
2. Between 1740 and 1834 Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Virginia all passed anti-literacy laws - punishable by a fine or imprisonment. What was the purpose of such a law? What sort of power might a slave derive from literacy? How do characters in the film, *Black and White*, respond to Nat Turner's ability to read? How did this law affect generations of people of African descent?



3. There was a scene where a child dropped the doll and Nat spoke to the mom to alert her and was beaten for speaking to a white woman. Do you think the woman should have been more persistent to tell her husband what really happened? Today, how does silence perpetuate racism?
  
4. Describe Sam Turner's relationship with two of his slaves Nat Turner and Isaiah. What did the film show us about trust, respect, and fear in "relationships" for Whites and their slaves? How do you explain the moments in the film when Whites seem to have an emotional contact with an enslaved person.
  
5. There is a heavy influence on religion in this film. When the movie starts, we are told that Nat had "Holy marks." We were also told that he was a prophet, he was a leader and that people should listen to him. How did you feel/what did you think when you heard Nat use the Bible to incite other slaves to rebel against their slave owners ( I Samuel 15:3). What was the sign that Nat received that signaled it was time to start the rebellion? Nat wanted to force Virginians to confront the evil that was at the root of their society. How does Nat Turner use the Bible to achieve his ends?
  
6. How did it feel to watch white ministers promote using enslaved people to control other enslaved people? How did you feel as you heard the Bible used to justify slavery and brutality by Whites? Is it true that the Bible can have various interpretations? Be prepared to explain your answer.



7. House slave, Isaiah Turner told Nat, “If you kill them then you kill us.” Many enslaved and free people of African descent were murdered and tortured before and after Nat Turner surrendered. Should Nat have listened to Isaiah or was the violence that resulted from the slave rebellions justified?
  
8. Slaves were punished by whipping, shackling, hanging, beating, burning, mutilation, branding, rape, and imprisonment. Punishment was often meted out in response to disobedience or perceived infractions, but sometimes abuse was performed to re-assert the dominance of the master (or overseer) over the slave. Think about some of the torture slaves suffered in this film. Think about how other slaves suffered after the rebellion. Think about what was done to Nat Turner’s body after he was lynched. What kind of person intentionally maims and tortures other people and forces the victims' family members and friends to watch? What do these actions say about the character of some slave owners in the 1830s? Is there another action slaves could take instead of attacking the people who beat, raped and mutilated them and their families?
  
9. How did Nat Turner’s Rebellion affect Whites? How did it affect enslaved and free people of African descent?



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10. Racism was the driving force behind dehumanization and use of brutal, violent treatment toward African Americans in America. African people were enslaved and forced to work and take care of White Americans. While African people were enslaved they were stripped of their African names and given slave owners names. They were forbidden to learn to read. Slave owners used torture and fear as a means to keep slaves under control. African women were savagely and brutally raped. This film is based on events in 1809-1831. Describe some of the generational trauma that African Americans have endured since being enslaved in America. How has life for African Americans improved? How has racism continued to affect the lives of African Americans?

### **Challenge Actions for our meeting November 21, 2022**

What will you do now to learn more, teach or confront Racism? Spend time talking to someone about what you have read and learned and be prepared to share what they learned from you and share the climate of the conversation.

- For more information on the Nat Turner Fray, see the 2015 Nat Turner Project at the University of Alabama. Website: <https://www.natturnerproject.org/>
- For more information on the title of the movie *Birth of a Nation* 2016. [Click Here](#)
- Watch the latest documentary series (4 episodes) by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *MAKING BLACK AMERICA: THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE*, will premiere on Tuesday, October 4, 2022, at 6PM. Over the course of four weekly episodes, *MAKING BLACK AMERICA* takes viewers into an extraordinary world that showcases Black people's ability to collectively prosper, defy white supremacy, and define Blackness in ways that transformed America itself. [Click Here for more information](#)