

## 12 Years a Slave (from Wikipedia)

Presentation by Peter Anderson

**12 Years a Slave** is a 2013 historical drama film and an adaptation of the 1853 slave narrative memoir **Twelve Years a Slave** by Solomon Northup, a New York State-born free African-American man who was kidnapped in Washington DC in 1841 and sold into slavery. Northup worked on plantations in the state of Louisiana for twelve years before his release. The first scholarly edition of Northup's memoir, co-edited in 1968 by Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, carefully retraced and validated the account and concluded it to be accurate.[4] Other characters in the film were also real people, including Edwin and Mary Epps, and Patsey.

This is the third feature film directed by Steve McQueen. The screenplay was written by John Ridley. Chiwetel Ejiofor stars as Solomon Northup. Michael Fassbender, Benedict Cumberbatch, Paul Dano, Paul Giamatti, Lupita Nyong'o, Sarah Paulson, Brad Pitt, and Alfre Woodard are all featured in supporting roles. Principal photography took place in New Orleans, Louisiana, from June 27 to August 13, 2012. The locations used were four historic antebellum plantations: Felicity, Bocage, Destrehan, and Magnolia. Of the four, Magnolia is nearest to the actual plantation where Northup was held.

12 Years a Slave received widespread critical acclaim, and was named the best film of 2013 by several media outlets. It proved to be a box office success, earning over \$187 million on a production budget of \$20 million. The film won three Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress for Nyong'o, and the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for Ridley. The Best Picture win made McQueen the first black producer ever to have received the award and the first black director to have directed a Best Picture winner.[5][6] The film was awarded the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Drama, and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts recognized it with the Best Film and the Best Actor award for Ejiofor.[7]

### CRITICAL RESPONSE

**12 Years a Slave** received near-universal acclaim by critics and audiences, for its acting (particularly Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender and Lupita Nyong'o), [Steve McQueen's](#) direction, [John Ridley's](#) screenplay, its production values, and its faithfulness to [Solomon Northup's](#) account.

Film review aggregator [Rotten Tomatoes](#) reports that 97% of critics gave the film a "Certified Fresh" rating, based on 258 reviews with an [average score](#) of 9/10, with the site's consensus stating, "It's far from comfortable viewing, but *12 Years a Slave's* unflinchingly brutal look at American slavery is also brilliant—and quite possibly essential—cinema."<sup>[71]</sup> [Metacritic](#), another [review aggregator](#), assigned the film a weighted average score of 97 (out of 100) based on 48 reviews from mainstream critics, considered to be "universal acclaim". It is currently one of the site's highest-rated films as well as the best reviewed film of 2013.<sup>[72]</sup> [CinemaScore](#) reported that audiences gave the film an "A" grade.<sup>[73]</sup>

### PLOT

In 1841, [Solomon Northup](#) is a free African-American man working as a violinist, who lives with his wife, Anne Hampton, and two children in [Saratoga Springs, New York](#). Two men, Brown and Hamilton, offer him a two-week job as a musician if he will travel to Washington, D.C., with them. Once they get there, they drug Northup and he wakes up in a slave pen owned by James Burch, about to be sold into [slavery](#).

Northup is shipped to [New Orleans](#) along with other captured men, a woman, Eliza, and her two children. A slave trader named Freeman gives Northup the identity of "Platt", a runaway slave from Georgia. Northup and Eliza are ultimately purchased by plantation owner [William Ford](#). Northup manages to stay on good terms with the relatively benevolent Ford, but Mistress Ford sells Eliza, who cannot get over being separated from her children by Freeman. Northup engineers a waterway for transporting logs swiftly and cost-effectively across a swamp, and Ford presents him with a violin in gratitude. Northup later carves the names of his wife and children (Anne, Margaret, and Alonzo) into the violin.

Ford's carpenter John Tibeats resents Northup and begins verbally harassing him. The tensions between Tibeats and Northup escalate; Tibeats attacks Northup, and Northup fights back. In retaliation, Tibeats and his friends attempt to lynch Northup. Ford's overseer Chapin keep them from hanging Northup completely and sends for Ford, but leaves Northup standing on tiptoe while in the noose for many hours. Ford cuts Northup down, but explains that in order to save Northup's life he must be sold to sadistic planter Edwin Epps to get him away from Tibeats. Northup attempts to reason with Ford, explaining that he is actually a free man. Ford states that he "cannot hear this" and responds "he has a debt to pay" on Northup's purchase price.

Epps believes his right to abuse his slaves is [biblically sanctioned](#). The slaves must pick at least 200 pounds (91 kg) of cotton every day, or be beaten. A young female slave named Patsey picks over 500 pounds (230 kg) daily, and is praised lavishly by Epps. He also repeatedly rapes her, and seems to fall in love with her against his better judgement. Epps' wife is envious of Patsey and frequently humiliates and attacks her. Patsey's only comfort is visiting Mistress Shaw, a former slave elevated to Mistress.

The abuse of Patsey worsens as Epps continues to rape her. Patsey wishes to die and asks Northup to kill her; he refuses. Sometime later, an outbreak of [cotton worm](#) befalls Epps' plantation; he decides that the new slaves are the cause, a plague sent by God. He leases them to a neighbouring plantation for the season. While there, Northup gains the favor of the plantation's owner, Jurge Turner, who allows him to play the fiddle at a neighbour's wedding anniversary celebration, and to keep his earnings.

When Northup returns to Epps, he attempts to use the money to pay a white field hand and former overseer, Armsby, to mail a letter to Northup's friends in New York state. Armsby agrees to deliver the letter, and accepts all Northup's saved money. Northup is betrayed by Armsby, and Northup is narrowly able to convince Epps that the story of a letter is a lie. Northup tearfully burns the letter, his only hope of freedom.

Northup begins working on the construction of a gazebo with a Canadian labourer named Bass. Bass earns Epps' displeasure by expressing his opposition to slavery, by trying to explain to Epps that he could have a little compassion towards those working for him. Epps sees them as his property.

One day, Epps becomes enraged after discovering Patsey missing from his plantation. When she returns, she reveals she was gone to get a bar of soap from Mistress Shaw, having become sick from her own stench as a result of being forbidden soap by Mary Epps. Epps does not believe her and orders her flogged. Encouraged by his wife, Epps forces Northup to flog Patsey to avoid doing it himself. Northup reluctantly obeys, but Epps eventually takes the whip away from Northup, savagely lashing Patsey.

Northup purposely destroys his violin, and while continuing to work on the gazebo, Northup confides his kidnapping to Bass. Once again, Northup asks for help in getting a letter to Saratoga Springs. Bass, risking his life, agrees to send it.

One day, Northup is called over by the local sheriff, who arrives in a carriage with another man. The sheriff asks Northup a series of questions to confirm his answers match the facts of his life in New York. Northup recognizes the sheriff's companion as C. Parker, a shopkeeper he knew in Saratoga. Parker has come to free him, and the two embrace. Though an enraged Epps furiously protests the circumstances and tries to prevent him from leaving, Northup ignores Epps in joyous disbelief and prepares for his immediate departure. However, before Northup can board the coach to leave, Patsey cries out to him, and they embrace in a bittersweet farewell. Knowing that they are in potentially hostile territory, at the urging of Parker and the sheriff Northup finishes his tearful goodbye with Patsey and immediately leaves the plantation.

After being enslaved for twelve years, Northup is restored to freedom and returned to his family. As he walks into his home, he sees Anne, Alonzo, Margaret and her husband, who present him with his grandson and namesake, Solomon Northup Staunton. Concluding credits recount the inability of Northup and his legal counsel to prosecute Brown, Hamilton and Burch, as well as the publishing of Northup's 1853 [slave narrative](#) memoir [Twelve Years a Slave](#) and the mystery surrounding details of his death and burial.

## HISTORICAL ACCURACY

African-American history and culture scholar [Henry Louis Gates Jr.](#) was a consultant on the film, and researcher David Fiske, co-author of *Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave*, provided some material used to market the film.<sup>[44]</sup> Nevertheless, news and magazine articles around the time of the film's release described a scholar alleging some license that Northup could have taken with his book, and liberties that McQueen definitely took with Northup's original, for dramatic, modernizing, or other reasons.

Scott Feinberg wrote in the [The Hollywood Reporter](#) about a September 22 *New York Times* article that "dredged up and highlighted a 1985 essay by another scholar, James Olney, that questioned the 'literal truth' of specific incidents in Northup's account and suggested that David Wilson, the white [amanuensis](#) to whom Northup had dictated his story, had taken the liberty of sprucing it up to make it even more effective at rallying public opinion against slavery."<sup>[45]</sup> According to Olney, when [abolitionists](#) invited an ex-slave to share his experience in slavery at an antislavery convention, and when they subsequently funded the appearance of that story in print, "they had certain clear expectations, well understood by themselves and well understood by the ex-slave, too."<sup>[44]</sup>

Noah Berlatsky wrote in the [The Atlantic](#) about a scene in McQueen's movie version, shortly after Northup is kidnapped, when he is on a ship bound south, when a sailor who has entered the hold is about to rape a slave woman when a male slave intervenes. "The sailor unhesitatingly stabs and kills him," he wrote, and "this seems unlikely on its face—slaves are valuable, and the sailor is not the owner. And, sure enough, the scene is not in the book."<sup>[46]</sup>

Forrest Wickman of [Slate](#) wrote of Northup's book giving a more favourable account of the author's onetime master, William Ford, than the McQueen film. In Northup's own words, "There never was a more kind, noble, candid, Christian man than William Ford," adding that Ford's circumstances "blinded [Ford] to the inherent wrong at the bottom of the system of Slavery." The movie, however, according to Wickham, "frequently undermines Ford."<sup>[47]</sup> McQueen undercuts Christianity itself as well, in an effort to update the ethical lessons from Northup's story for the 21st century, by holding the institutions of Christianity up to the light for their ability to justify slavery at the time.<sup>[48]</sup> Northup was a Christian of his time, writing of his former master being "blinded" by "circumstances"<sup>[47]</sup> that in retrospect meant a racist acceptance of slavery despite being a Christian, a position untenable to contemporary Christians<sup>[49]</sup> and to [Christian abolitionists](#) of the 19th century but not contradictory to Northup himself. Valerie Elverton Dixon in [The Washington Post](#) characterized the Christianity depicted in the movie as "broken".<sup>[48]</sup>

Emily West, an associate professor of history at the [University of Reading](#) who specializes in the history of slavery in the U.S., said she had "never seen a film represent slavery so accurately".<sup>[50]</sup> Reviewing the film for *History Extra*, the website of *BBC History Magazine*, she said: "The film starkly and powerfully unveiled the sights and sounds of enslavement – from slaves picking cotton as they sang in the fields, to the crack of the lash down people's backs. We also heard a lot about the ideology behind enslavement. Masters such as William Ford and Edwin Epps, although very different characters, both used an interpretation of Christianity to justify their ownership of slaves. They believed the Bible sanctioned slavery, and that it was their 'Christian duty' to preach the scriptures to their slaves."<sup>[50]</sup>

## TWO 2014 NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS

**Malala Yousafzai** ([Pashto](#): ملاله يوسفزی [\[məˈlaːlə jusef ˈzej\]](#),<sup>[1]</sup> [Urdu](#): ملاه یوسف زئی *Malālah Yūsafzay*, born 12 July 1997)<sup>[2]</sup> is a [Pakistani activist](#) for [female education](#), who became the youngest ever Nobel Prize recipient in any category.<sup>[3]</sup> She is known mainly for [human rights](#) advocacy for [education](#) and for [women](#) in her native [Swat Valley](#) in the [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#) province of northwest Pakistan, where the local [Taliban](#) had at times [banned girls from attending school](#). Yousafzai's advocacy has since grown into an international movement.

Her family runs a chain of schools in the region. In early 2009, when she was 11–12, Yousafzai wrote a blog under a pseudonym for the [BBC](#) detailing her life under Taliban occupation, their attempts to take control of the valley, and her views on promoting education for girls in the Swat Valley. The following summer, a [New York Times](#) documentary by journalist [Adam B. Ellick](#) was filmed<sup>[2]</sup> about her life as the Pakistani military intervened in the region, culminating in the [Second Battle of Swat](#). Yousafzai rose in prominence, giving interviews in print and on television, and she was nominated for the [International Children's Peace Prize](#) by South African activist [Desmond Tutu](#).

On the afternoon of 9 October 2012, Yousafzai boarded her school bus in the northwest Pakistani district of Swat. A gunman asked for her by name, then pointed a pistol at her and fired three shots. One bullet hit the left side of Yousafzai's forehead, travelled under her skin through the length of her face, and then went into her shoulder.<sup>[4]</sup> In the days immediately following the attack, she remained unconscious and in critical condition, but later her condition improved enough for her to be sent to the [Queen Elizabeth Hospital](#) in [Birmingham, England](#), for intensive rehabilitation. On 12 October, a group of 50 Islamic clerics in Pakistan issued a [fatwā](#) against those who tried to kill her, but the Taliban reiterated their intent to kill Yousafzai and [her father](#). Some Pakistanis believe the shooting was a [CIA](#) setup and many conspiracy theories exist.<sup>[5]</sup>

The assassination attempt sparked a national and international outpouring of support for Yousafzai. [Deutsche Welle](#) wrote in January 2013 that Yousafzai may have become "the most famous teenager in the world."<sup>[6]</sup> United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education [Gordon Brown](#) launched a UN petition in Yousafzai's name, using the slogan "I am Malala" and demanding that all children worldwide be in school by the end of 2015 – a petition which helped lead to the ratification of Pakistan's first Right to Education Bill.<sup>[7]</sup> In the 29 April 2013 issue of [Time](#) magazine, Yousafzai was featured on the magazine's front cover and as one of "[The 100 Most Influential People in the World](#)". She was the winner of Pakistan's first [National Youth Peace Prize](#).

On 12 July 2013, Yousafzai spoke at the [headquarters of the United Nations](#) to call for worldwide access to education, and in September 2013 she officially opened the [Library of Birmingham](#).<sup>[8]</sup> Yousafzai is the recipient of the [Sakharov Prize](#) for 2013. On 16 October 2013, the [Government of Canada](#) announced its intention that the [Parliament of Canada](#) confer [Honorary Canadian citizenship](#) upon Yousafzai.<sup>[9]</sup> In February 2014, she was nominated for the World Children's prize in [Sweden](#).<sup>[10]</sup> On 15 May 2014, Yousafzai was granted an honorary doctorate by the [University of King's College](#) in Halifax.<sup>[11]</sup>

On 10 October 2014, Yousafzai was announced as the co-recipient of the [2014 Nobel Peace Prize](#) for her struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education. At age 17, Yousafzai is the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate.<sup>[12][13]</sup> Yousafzai shared the prize with [Kailash Satyarthi](#), a [children's rights](#) activist from [India](#).<sup>[14]</sup> She is the second Pakistani to receive a Nobel Prize, [Abdus Salam](#) being a 1979 [Physics laureate](#).<sup>[15]</sup> and the only Pakistani winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Kailash Satyarthi** (born 11 January 1954) is an Indian [children's rights](#) activist and a [Nobel Peace Prize](#) Laureate.<sup>[1]</sup> He founded the [Bachpan Bachao Andolan](#) (lit. *Save the Childhood Movement*) in 1980 and has acted to protect the rights of more than 83,000 children from 144 countries.<sup>[3][4][5]</sup>

He was awarded the [2014 Nobel Peace Prize](#) jointly with [Malala Yousafzai](#) "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education."<sup>[6][7]</sup>

### **Early life**

Kailash Satyarthi was born on 11 January 1954 in the [Vidisha](#) district of [Madhya Pradesh](#). He completed his degree in electrical engineering<sup>[8]</sup> in Vidisha and then pursued post-graduate studies in high-voltage engineering. He then joined a college in [Bhopal](#) as a lecturer for a few years.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Work**

In 1980, he gave up his career as a teacher and became secretary general for the Bonded Labor Liberation Front; he also founded the Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save the Childhood Mission) that year.<sup>[10][11]</sup> He has also been involved with the [Global March Against Child Labor](#)<sup>[12]</sup> and its international advocacy body, the International Center on Child Labor and Education (ICCLE),<sup>[13]</sup> which are worldwide coalitions of NGOs, teachers and trades unionists.<sup>[14][15]</sup> He has also served as the President of the [Global Campaign for Education](#), from its inception in 1999 to 2011, having been one of its four founders alongside [ActionAid](#), [Oxfam](#) and [Education International](#).<sup>[16]</sup>

From the expo at [Nobel Peace Center](#)

In addition, he established [Rugmark](#) (now known as Goodweave) as the first voluntary labelling, monitoring and certification system of rugs manufactured without the use of child-labour in South Asia.<sup>[17]</sup> This latter organisation operated a campaign in Europe and the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the intent of [raising consumer awareness](#) of the issues relating to the [accountability](#) of global corporations with regard to socially responsible consumerism and trade.<sup>[18]</sup> Satyarthi has highlighted child labor as a human rights issue as well as a welfare matter and charitable cause. He has argued that it perpetuates [poverty](#), [unemployment](#), [illiteracy](#), population growth, and other social problems,<sup>[19]</sup> and his claims have been supported by several studies.<sup>[20][21]</sup> He has also had a role in linking the movement against [child labour](#) with efforts for achieving "Education for All".<sup>[22]</sup> He has been a member of a [UNESCO](#) body established to examine this and has been on the board of the Fast Track Initiative (now known as the [Global Partnership for Education](#)).<sup>[23]</sup> Satyarthi serves on the board and committee of several international organisations including the [Center for Victims of Torture](#) (USA), the International Labor Rights Fund (USA), and the International Cocoa Foundation. He is now reportedly working on bringing child labour and slavery into the post-2015 development agenda for the United Nation's [Millennium Development Goals](#).<sup>[24]</sup>

Satyarthi, along with Pakistani activist [Malala Yousufzai](#), was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 "for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education."<sup>[25]</sup> Satyarthi is the fifth [Nobel Prize winner for India](#) and only the second Indian winner of the Nobel Peace Prize after [Mother Teresa](#) in 1979.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Personal life**

Satyarthi lives in [New Delhi](#), India. His family includes his wife, a son, daughter-in-law, and a daughter.<sup>[26]</sup> Apart from his social activities, he has been described as an excellent [cook](#).<sup>[27]</sup>

### **Awards and honours**

Satyarthi has been the subject of a number of documentaries, television series, talk shows, advocacy and awareness films.<sup>[28]</sup> Satyarthi has been awarded the following national and international honours:

- 2014: [Nobel Peace Prize](#)<sup>[1]</sup>
- 2009: [Defenders of Democracy Award](#) (US)<sup>[29]</sup>
- 2008: [Alfonso Comin International Award](#) (Spain)<sup>[30]</sup>
- 2007: [Gold medal of the Italian Senate](#) (2007)<sup>[31]</sup>
- 2007: recognized in the list of "Heroes Acting to End Modern Day Slavery" by the US [State Department](#)<sup>[32]</sup>
- 2006: [Freedom Award](#) (US)<sup>[33]</sup>
- 2002: [Wallenberg Medal](#), awarded by the [University of Michigan](#)<sup>[34]</sup>
- 1999: [Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Award](#) (Germany)<sup>[35]</sup>
- 1998: [Golden Flag Award](#) (Netherlands)<sup>[36]</sup>
- 1995: [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award](#) (US)<sup>[37]</sup>
- 1995: [The Trumpeter Award](#) (US)<sup>[38]</sup>
- 1994: [The Aachener International Peace Award](#) (Germany)<sup>[39][40]</sup>
- 1993: Elected [Ashoka Fellow](#) (US)<sup>[41]</sup>