

# Interview

## Steve McQueen

By Elvis Mitchell (October 1, 2013)



Photography by: Sebastian Kim

THESE CHARACTERS ARE NOT THE CLASSIC SORT OF HEROIC PEOPLE WHO YOU USUALLY CONNECT WITH IN MOVIES. THEY'RE NOT SUPERMEN—THEY'RE JUST HUMAN BEINGS, MEN. Steve McQueen

The director Steve McQueen has found a way to constantly include the element of surprise in his work, both as an artist and as a filmmaker. It would be dismissive and reductive to say that he operates on pure instinct, but what he has done with his installations—such as his video pieces *Bear* (1993) and *Five Easy Pieces* (1995)—comments on the way that we inhabit space, and how subtly and insidiously shocking it is when our intimate spaces have been violated. He often seems surprised himself when he's asked about the unrelenting power in his work. The three feature films he's responsible for as director—*Hunger* (2008), *Shame* (2011), and his latest, an adaptation of Solomon Northup's 1853 narrative *Twelve Years a Slave*, which is out this month—all explore the notion of having someone's personal space invaded, and how the protagonists in each film deal with that issue.

Given how unflinching his productions have been, the 44-year-old McQueen is remarkably gentle and thoughtful—so much so that he will request a moment to consider a question, and turn it around in his head to get the shape and weight of it, before answering, occasionally with an excited rush of words in response. (And I'm hard-pressed to remember a conversation with him, be it an interview or a chat over tea, that hasn't included a chuckling, "I hope that won't stir up too much trouble ...") That has been my experience with him since we became acquainted a few years back, after the American release of *Hunger*. He has an insatiable desire to understand and to be understood; if his work stimulates conversation—demands it, really—then so much the better.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY



ELVIS MITCHELL: How much did you know about the Solomon Northup story before you took on this project? I remember that when you told me you were going to make this film, you were surprised that I knew about him and his story.

STEVE McQUEEN: Well, I'd known for a while that I wanted to make a movie about slavery, but I didn't have an "in" as such. I was working with [the screenwriter] John Ridley at the time, trying to get things together to possibly do something, and I'd had this thought about doing something about a free person who is kidnapped, and then through the kidnapping we'd get to see all of the different cycles of slavery. I mean, I'd read stories about people being kidnapped, but how were these people kidnapped? I'd spoken to my wife about it, and she'd said, "Well, why don't you just look for true stories about it?" So we both started doing some research, and my wife found this book by Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, and said, "I think I've got it." I read the book and immediately thought, This is amazing. The book read like a script. It *was* a script already—there it was, on the page—and with every turn of the page, there was another huge revelation. For anyone who thinks that they know slavery—you read that book and you do a double take. It was just stunning to me that I'd never known about it. In fact, the majority of the people who I spoke to about the story had no idea about it. I was like, "How did I not know about this book?" It was like reading Anne Frank's diary for the first time. I was surprised that this story had never really been thought of as material for a film before. I mean, Gordon Parks had done something on Northup ...

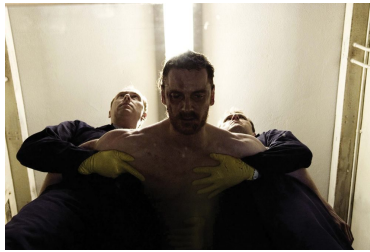
MITCHELL: Yeah, it was a public-television thing that followed Northup's story [the 1984 American Playhouse film *Solomon Northup's Odyssey*].

McQUEEN: Yeah. But I was just shocked that I didn't know this story, and immediately became very passionate that I wanted to make it into a movie.

MITCHELL: Maybe it's just part of being American or because of where I grew up in a certain era, but I was assigned to read that book in school. It's almost like a bit of a Grimms' fairy tale. It's got the feeling of a fairy tale—and that awful brutality that a lot of fairy tales have, too.

McQUEEN: I might've mentioned this before, but to me, this was like *Pinocchio*. It's very much like a fairy tale because it's one of those stories where the hero is lost, taken away from his home, and then finds his way back, but through this harrowing situation. Those Brothers Grimm stories are also classic stories—they are stories that have sort of withstood the passing of time. That was what hit me when I first read *Twelve Years a Slave*: that this was a classic.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY



MITCHELL: Why did you want to do slavery story?

McQUEEN: Well, clearly, it's a huge part of history. It seemed to me like a kind of an obvious thing to do, to make a film about slavery—just like it's an obvious thing to make a film about the Second World War or the Holocaust. My grandparents from the West Indies were descendants of slaves. But then, at the same time, there really aren't too many films about slavery. It's funny because as I was going to make *12 Years a Slave*, I bumped into [Quentin] Tarantino, and he was working on *Django Unchained* at the time, and he said, "I'd hope there could be more than one film about slavery." It's interesting because there are a bunch of westerns, a bunch of gangster movies, a bunch of sex or war movies ...

MITCHELL: I find myself thinking back to a conversation that we had a couple of years ago, where you were talking about the incredible lack of stories about people of color. Was that aspect of things in your head, too?

McQUEEN: Well, yeah. This film is about that hole in a way—and this is a gaping hole because it's a part of history that's barely even in film. It's kind of incredible. It's similar to *Hunger*, for me, which was an obvious film to make in telling the story of 10 men who died in an British prison cell and their hunger strike. But with this film—I mean, goodness gracious. Prejudice is all around us. Just walk down the street—it's everywhere. So how is it possible that this subject—slavery—hasn't been given some larger form of cinematic representation? I don't know the answer to that.

MITCHELL: Did you watch any of the films about slavery that do exist before you made this?

McQUEEN: No, not at all. I'm not interested. To be honest, I just don't even really watch a lot of movies. It just has to do with the fact that I used to watch, like, five movies a week. But I was that person at that time, when I was younger. This film was really just in my head—the images were in my head—so it was really more a process of speaking to my DP, Sean Bobbitt, getting images in my head, and then feeling it out. For me, making a film is a bit like switching off the light in the room and trying to navigate around by touch and feel and smell and not by doing the sort of obvious thing of opening your eyes and looking around. It's a different way of trying to make a reality on film, and that's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in the here and now, and not other people and how they do things. It's doesn't help me. For me, it's all about being present with the material that you have.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

MITCHELL: The book is very straightforward in describing these things that happen to Solomon one after another in a very episodic way, and I was struck by how much of the detail you used in the film. I mean, even in that first beating that Solomon receives after he is kidnapped, when the guy who is beating him breaks the paddle over him—that's in the book.

McQUEEN: As I was saying before, the book itself is so much like a script. Making it into a film was almost like conceptualism in a way, where there was the book, and let's just make the film. So much of it was just about taking it off the page and putting it onto film. At the same time, though, the movie isn't an illustration of the book, as such. It's not linear. The book gives you so much information, but you've also got to figure out how to construct it and find a rhythm and transfer it all visually. The book is quite long and quite wordy. It is actually a bit of a yawn at points. But another aspect of wanting to make a film about slavery was the visuals. I mean, people talk about being beaten or what happened to them, but when you see it visually and interpret it or imagine it within images, it becomes a different thing. That, to me, was the possible power of the book and the way it was written. There was just so much material for making images and constructing a visual narrative. It was also about finding a kind of balance in telling the story. Making this film was almost like making a Calder mobile—everything has to balance in just the right way for everything else to work. One thing can't weigh too heavily because it sort of puts it out of balance, out of whack. So it was also about pruning, and balancing, and waiting to see how it's going to balance and if it balances correctly.

MITCHELL: Comparing this film to a mobile is a very good way to put it because *12 Years a Slave* goes to such extremes—even within the first five minutes.

McQUEEN: I wanted to throw the audience into the deep end at the beginning. I think, as far as audiences go, most people can swim, so the film dives right into the environment of slavery, and then we go back to see how it all started. It was just one of those things where I wanted the film to have an impact right off.

MITCHELL: I was thinking about the way you use the beginning of the movie to depict intimacy. Very early on, you move between a sex scene that occurs later chronologically, when Solomon is enslaved and in bound quarters, and then an intimate scene between him and his wife, which happens before he is kidnapped. In both cases, they actors are in profile and nose-to-nose.

McQUEEN: I think what was interesting for me about that scene that occurs once he has been kidnapped was that everything is controlled in the slave's life—what clothes one wears, what time one eats, what time one sleeps. The whole environment is controlled. So it was just that one moment where this woman, who is broken, grabs for this kind of intimacy with someone who she doesn't know and has this brief moment of freedom ... And then, of course, after she climaxes, she's back to her reality and the embarrassment, the sadness, the shame ... I don't want to even use that word because this isn't *Shame*, but it's more about her finding this moment of humanity and feeling human.

MITCHELL: She is able to claim a moment for herself by expressing that sort of control over her life, however briefly.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

McQUEEN: Yeah, she can feel human for a moment. And then afterwards, of course, it's back to reality and the sad and unfortunate world that this woman lives in. We wanted to put that at the beginning of the film because that's right in the deep end of things, not just in terms of the environment, but emotionally as well. For me, it was really important to have it at the beginning because it's like, we're not playing—this is it. You're bringing someone into the game in a way that has some kind of impact. I mean, you could have started with Solomon alone, and then, *la-da-da-da-da*, he's in Saratoga, New York, and he gets kidnapped ... But for me, that's just too linear. It's not stimulating or challenging. This is storytelling—you need stimulus. To me, film is art. It's like painting or music or sculpture. How you structure a narrative is almost like how you structure color on canvas. So by bringing that piece of story forward and then showing what actually happens and having a reprise midway through the film where we get back to that section ... It's interesting because audiences are intelligent. They want to be stimulated, and having that kind of directness about the information that we're trying to give can be rewarding.

MITCHELL: The line in the book that really lives for me in the movie is the one where Solomon talks about how slaves live their lives with a constant fear of punishment. There's this perpetual sense of dread that lingers in the book.

McQUEEN: Yes.

MITCHELL: And you found a visual correlative to that. You illustrate that constant fear.

McQUEEN: Yeah. At any time, anything can happen.

MITCHELL: One thing that's fascinating is the way that you use space in the film, which is so much about these kinds of violent intrusions. The violence in the film is horrific—and so powerful.

McQUEEN: The thing about slavery is that the violence was always present, but then people also went mad through their own behavior. Violence was part of slavery—that situation of people always being a second from being beaten or abused. So in making the film, it was, again, about finding a balance in terms of how that aspect of things is presented—which I did carefully and surgically. Sometimes you can't see violence, you know? It's sort of like the James Baldwin book *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*—you can see a bruise or a red eye without seeing how the person was hit. You can interpret it like that. Or you can use a sound to indicate rage. It's about building to a certain crescendo. It's just like writing or poetry, in terms of what you leave and what you take out.

MITCHELL: There's the palette of the movie, too, and the way you use color. I'm thinking of that awful red, which we often associate with violence ...

McQUEEN: We did kind of hold back certain colors for certain things, but we were also mindful of how we used it in terms of the plantations. We took soil samples from each plantation to match, basically to interpret each individual plantation owner. With Ford [Benedict Cumberbatch], for example, the colors in the plantation were a bit lush. With Judge Turner

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

[Bryan Batt], the colors were a lot less lush, but stayed warm. The temperatures were dictated by their personality, in a way. When Solomon was back in Saratoga, too—those scenes had much warmer colors.



MITCHELL: The way you illustrate the passage of time in this movie is also interesting. Obviously, you're operating within a certain structure dictated by the title. But time is like a force of nature. In this film, sometimes it's like a gale wind, other times it's like a hurricane, others it's like a breeze on a sunny day. It feels like time almost exists in the film as a character itself.

McQUEEN: Absolutely—and not just because it's called *12 Years A Slave*. It is like another character. But the environment also was crucial. The heat ... I nearly passed out in Louisiana. I was seriously thinking of calling my wife to have her get me a water vest at one point because people would die in that heat. We were filming in the middle of Louisiana in the summer, so it was crazy. But interpreting that was very important, the certain kind of swampiness ... It's a huge character in this particular story. Huge character.

MITCHELL: Just seeing how much Chiwetel Ejiofor, who plays Solomon, sweats in the movie—I haven't seen an actor sweat that much in a movie in my life.

McQUEEN: The heat was awful. And these people were working in it every day. But I think that's the kind of thing that you want to interpret in the movie. You want that uncomfortable thing, that sensuality.

MITCHELL: With *Hunger*, *Shame*, and now *12 Years a Slave*, you have, in a way, made three films about imprisonment.

McQUEEN: That's what you told me when you saw it. *[laughs]* Forgot about that.

MITCHELL: Well, it makes me wonder what the idea of imprisonment means to you. *Hunger* literally takes place in a prison, and then *Shame* is about a man who is basically in a prison of kind of his own making. The difference with *12 Years a Slave* is that the imprisonment is not created by one's own will. Bobby Sands knew what he was doing. Brandon, in *Shame*, knows what he's doing. But Solomon Northup is thrust into his imprisonment.

McQUEEN: Well, for me, it was a matter of having people in the audience, regardless of their race or ethnicity, look at Solomon and see themselves. All Solomon wanted, at the end of the day, was to get back to his family, and the whole idea of that sort of imprisonment and that anyone could identify with it was the "in" for me. In telling the story, I wanted to put people into

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

Solomon's shoes, but then, as I said, also take them through the journey and the conveyor belt and the different cycles of slavery.

MITCHELL: One of the other ways that *12 Years a Slave* links to your other movies is that the protagonists that Michael Fassbender plays in both *Hunger* and *Shame* are people who are incredibly verbal. Solomon is, too, which makes him a sort of classic McQueen protagonist. But Solomon can't be that person—he can't be verbal—because of what it will cost him.

McQUEEN: One of the great things about Chiwetel—and that I discovered in working with him—was that he has this quality where he's like a silent movie star in a way. It's all about the eyes. Because he cannot be verbal in the movie, he has to use other tools to communicate. Of course, Solomon is not just some sort of nice guy who gets lost. He goes along with the guys who end up kidnapping him out of a bit of arrogance, too, because he wants to train with these musicians and tour. But I think the connection between Solomon and Brandon in *Shame*, in particular, is that these characters are not the classic sort of heroic people who you usually connect with in movies. They're not Supermen—they're just human beings, men. But what touched me so much about Solomon's story was that in this horrific environment that he was in—and which he, at some point, participated in as well—he still managed to hold on to a certain kind of humanity, even though what was happening to him and around him wasn't particularly humane.

MITCHELL: Is the idea of innocence important to you?

McQUEEN: Yes and no. I think Solomon is innocent to a certain extent but at the same time, he is a little bit more complicated. His innocence is tested by things like the conversation that he has with Lupita Nyong'o's character, Patsey, where she asks him to take her life. The way he sort of turns his back on her ... There's a certain kind of thing where you might start off sort of innocent, but by the time you get out of the hole, you're damaged to where your abilities to remain innocent are gone. You've gone through the gauntlet and come out a different person, so you're no longer innocent. That's what I was interested in, really, as far as innocence is concerned.

MITCHELL: In that scene that you are referring to with Patsey, it seems like Solomon is fighting to hold on to whatever he has left of his innocence, and by assisting her in that act—

McQUEEN: Sort of. He would never do what she's asking him to do, but he's also not particularly caring. He's actually very aggressive towards her. He throws everything on the floor and says, "How can you ask me to participate in such a godforsaken act?" He's very aggressive, and he then just turns his back on her. He's not comforting her. I think at that point in his journey, he is trying to figure out a way to survive—and in order to survive, he has to be very selfish. He has to think about himself and how he's going to survive the next day rather than think about other people.

MITCHELL: There is a circularity that runs through the film as well. I'm thinking of that scene early on where Clemens [Chris Chalk], one of the slaves kidnapped with Solomon on the boat, runs to his master, who comes to claim him, and Solomon is left behind.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

McQUEEN: Yeah. It's survival. When they're on the boat, Clemens is always preaching about how he'll survive without saying anything, you know? He is always preaching, "Keep your head down," and "Don't do anything," and "Don't walk off." But as soon as he sees his master, he doesn't even turn around and look at Solomon or the others.

MITCHELL: Having those three characters on the boat—Clemens, Robert [Michael K. Williams], and Solomon—interact the way they do almost feels like a play on these three ideas of African-American masculinity being spoken aloud.

McQUEEN: Well, that's it. You had a Malcolm, you had a Martin, and then you had the dialectic, with the guy in the middle, Solomon, sort of seeing which way he was going to go. Was he going to go the militant way? Or was he going to go with a more passive approach?

MITCHELL: Talk to me about the casting because it's such a great group of actors that you've got in this film. From Chiwetel and Michael Fassbender, to Chris Chalk and Michael K. Williams, to Paul Giamatti, Benedict Cumberbatch, Paul Dano, Sarah Paulson, and Alfre Woodard, to the newer people like Lupita and Adepero Oduye ...

McQUEEN: Adepero was amazing. She had to be in a certain state of mind throughout the shoot, which could not have been easy. Her character, Eliza, is a woman whose children were just taken away from her, and this woman's children were her life—once they were taken away, she had no reason to live anymore. There was no will to continue. I mean, that's one of the things that kept Solomon alive—the possibility of him getting back to see his children. But with Patsey, all hope has evaporated. We auditioned more than a thousand girls for her role, and we were becoming desperate. It was like looking for Scarlett O'Hara—like, "Oh my god, we're never going to find this person." Then one day I saw this image on my computer, and that was it. Benedict, too, was just so right—there's a certain kind of genteelness to Benedict, but also a seediness about how he performed or interpreted our thoughts. Again, it's a balancing act—he has us all torn. He has feelings towards Solomon and the other slaves, but at the same time, he's within this system, and a system that he also wants to uphold. But the list of actors goes on and on and on.

MITCHELL: Had you seen Adepero in *Pariah* [2011] before?

McQUEEN: Oh, yeah. That's how I found her.

MITCHELL: The way you cast the parts of Hamilton and Brown, the two guys who steal Solomon into slavery, was remarkable to me. The actors actually look like his descriptions of those men from the book.

McQUEEN: Those two actors, Scoot McNairy and Taran Killam, were fantastic. They came to rehearsals in New Orleans, and they were off script so fast—they were finishing each other's sentences. We don't really get *Saturday Night Live* in Europe—or I don't really see it—so all I knew about Killam was through his audition. But his timing was so perfect.



## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY



MITCHELL: It was great seeing Michael K. Williams turn up, too. I'm guessing you were a fan of *The Wire* ...

McQUEEN: Oh, yes, huge fan of *The Wire*. Michael was only on the set for a short time toward the last few days of shooting, when everyone was feeling a little bit fatigued. But he just lifted everyone's game and brought this energy and this focus ... Everyone just stood up straight. He's an incredible actor and his presence was electric.

MITCHELL: How did Brad Pitt end up getting involved with the film? [Pitt co-produced the film through his Plan B shingle, and also appears in the movie as Bass, a worker on Epps's plantation.]

McQUEEN: Jeremy Kleiner from Plan B had approached me after *Hunger* about working together, and then I met Brad while he was filming *World War Z* in London and had a very long, engaging chat about *Twelve Years a Slave*, and Brad emphasized his commitment to bringing the film to the screen. He is the kind of guy who, when he wants to work with somebody, he'll approach that person. That doesn't usually happen. So that was pretty good. *[both laugh]*

MITCHELL: What was the rehearsal process like? Did you have a read-through with the entire cast?

McQUEEN: No, we didn't do that. Unfortunately, everyone was not around at the same time, so I just took sections of the film in rehearsals and divided people into groups.

MITCHELL: Was it harder doing it that way?

McQUEEN: Not really because, as we've said, the actors were incredible anyway, so it was more about rolling up your sleeves and getting into the moment, and there are so many different moments in Solomon's journey. It's almost like they're little episodes within the journey, so it was pretty straightforward in that respect.

MITCHELL: Watching the way you use Michael Fassbender, who plays the brutal slave owner, Epps, in the movie is also very interesting. He's such a physical actor in your film, but this character is all impulse. In fact, the only time he seems to be liberated from his ways is when he's acting out physically.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

McQUEEN: I think, in the end, there are pieces of action, but this character, Epps, is in love. He's in love with Patsey. He's in love with her, but he cannot fulfill that love. He also hates himself for it. He hates himself because he loves this slave—he loves this black woman. But it's a funny thing about love because you really can't control it. It just happens. It's not something that you can just switch off or switch on. It's a constant. So he hates himself for it. He hates *all* for it. So there's this guy who has a lot of anger and a lot of longing that just comes out in a physical way—in violence most of the time.

MITCHELL: You've worked with Michael now on all three of your films. What were your discussions with him like? How do you work together?

McQUEEN: Well, Michael reads the script and we talk about who the person is that he's playing, and then we rehearse, which is really where things get shaped. Michael, though, has his way of doing things and he realizes how to get a good angle on a character. For me, rehearsals are a very important part of the process, and Michael warmed up to me pretty quickly. But with different actors, you work in different ways.

MITCHELL: This was your first time working with Chiwetel. What was your process like with him?

McQUEEN: Chiwetel was different. At first, I thought he was going to be difficult because I didn't know him but also because I needed him to trust me. Gaining people's trust is important because there can't be any question of that in the work. So we had to get to know each other, which took a little bit of time, but things just started to fall into place, which was amazing.

MITCHELL: This was such a demanding piece of material. Do you think that informed the relationship a little bit, too?

McQUEEN: Absolutely. It was like working on *Hunger* with Michael—when the material is so extreme, you have to have a trust there because you need support to go to that mental space. So in that way, we ran into this thing together—and we went straight to the deep end, which is one of things I love about working with actors. It was just amazing to see Chiw do that—you know, he ended up really opening up to the camera. It wasn't even him—it was Solomon—because he was so deep in things at that time.

MITCHELL: The physical abandon that Fassbender throws into his performance is remarkable.

McQUEEN: He had nothing to lose. There's a particular scene, that rape scene with Epps and Patsey, where he beats her ... Michael passed out in the middle of that scene while he was strangling her. He blacked out.

MITCHELL: Oh my god.

McQUEEN: I didn't know that at the time when we were shooting—he told me what happened about five months later. But that's the amount of focus and intensity that he brings.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY



MITCHELL: How much of that for him is instinctive?

McQUEEN: Oh, I don't know—you'd have to ask him. But he goes there because he is an artist, just like Chiwetel is an artist and Lupita is an artist now ... They're rarities, these actors, and I'm very fortunate that I got to work with them.

MITCHELL: It's almost like Michael's character and Chiwetel's character are opposing poles in this film, because Solomon has to be all deliberation because he can't let himself be liberated, be physically free.

McQUEEN: Well, there's that scene where Epps and Solomon are having a discussion about Solomon writing that letter ... I mean, it may be bold of me to say, but I think that scene is as strong as Marlon Brando and Rod Steiger in the back of the taxi in *On the Waterfront* [1954]. I'm talking about my own work in that way—I don't know if that's quite polite—but those two guys in that scene are incredible. It's exactly what I was getting at when I was talking about Chiwetel and that whole idea of sort of the silent actor—the eyes, the body language, the movement of Chiwetel, as opposed to the physicality of Michael.

MITCHELL: One image in the film that really sticks with me is when Solomon shatters the violin.

McQUEEN: The violin, to me, is his last remaining hope. It's like the sex scene with the slave that we were talking about—that object was his sense of being human. That was his instrument, that's what he wanted to engage in. And he gives up his hope, in a way, by smashing it.

MITCHELL: Well, the violin is also kind of his last link to his old world. There's also that pride that he has in his art—as far as he's concerned, he's an artist—and the idea of an artist giving up his means of achieving that art is heartbreaking.

McQUEEN: It's like destroying a piece of yourself in order to feel, I suppose. To feel what? I don't know.

MITCHELL: We see Solomon throughout the film as someone who always sees possibilities, and just destroying that violin means that he realizes he can't live for possibilities anymore—that he's just got to be thinking about existing day to day.

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

McQUEEN: Destroying your violin ... I mean, it's just about the worst thing you could do in that situation short of cutting off your hands. The worst thing you could do as an artist is to destroy your art.

MITCHELL: I have to ask you this because it's a question that you are going to get asked: Did you see *Django Unchained*?

McQUEEN: Yes.

MITCHELL: What did you think of that movie?

McQUEEN: I think Tarantino is a great moviemaker. There were aspects of *Django Unchained* that weren't my cup of tea, but the piece was quite interesting. When I met Tarantino, he was still shooting, and, of course, I was already starting ... But it just wasn't a reference for me because it was a different kind of movie than what I was making. People want to engage with this subject, though. They want to look at this side of history, to examine it and discuss it, and the best thing, for me, is if a film can start a discussion.

MITCHELL: Each of these films you've done feel like they're catalysts for discussion in different ways. Did you think of them as that?

McQUEEN: Not entirely, while making them.

MITCHELL: No?

McQUEEN: No. I mean, the only reason I'm making a movie is if there's really a very interesting story to tell on film. I could never think about starting a discussion by making a film. It can happen, but I can't make that happen at all. That's never my wish when starting to make a film. I hope it does that, but that's never my wish.

MITCHELL: Even though Solomon eventually finds his way to freedom, you let us know that because he's been where he has been and because of the emotional investment he had to make to survive, it's somehow not over.

McQUEEN: When he's back home with his family, when they're together, he's still thinking of Patsey and of all of the other people who he's left behind. So it's not over. It's not the end. It is the end, of course, of the movie, but it's not over.