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Shadows of Justice: Racism and Civil Rights in the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*

Submitted and Defended by:

Abziz Fatima Nada

Supervisor:

Mr. Sedrati Yasser

Board of Examiners

Mr. Sedrati Yasser: Supervisor

Dr. Sekhri Hadjira: Examiner

Mrs. Taalah Asma: Chairperson

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my parents, Ferhat and Bencharef Ourida, for encouraging and believing in me. I am especially grateful to my mother, who has been my constant support since day one. She was the only one besides my sister who supported me in choosing to study English. All family was against that, but her faith in me kept me growing and bringing up the best version of myself. My mother, sacrificed everything she had and bet on me and still doing all she can for me and my sisters. We can never thank you enough, my dearest mother. You are a piece of my soul, and I am nothing without you. You are the best thing that ever happened to me. To tell the truth, I consider myself lucky to have such a caring mother like you, Mama.

To my father: Thank you for your efforts. You always put our needs before your desires. I appreciate you, for securing, protecting, and making sure to provide the best in everything for my mother and us. Thank you, for ensuring our happiness and comfort. My mother and my father, thank you for everything, from my earliest days to now as a grown woman. Your efforts, sacrifices, and love have shaped me. May Allah grant both of you a long life, so you can witness both my success and my sisters'.

You mean the world to me.

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And to my little Assinet, my precious, you are my joy and heart's delight. Seeing your laughter makes me want to protect it forever; your hugs and kisses warm my heart; sometimes I feel like I need to hug you more than you do. You always tell me how I am your safe place and always run to me and ask for a hug so you can feel okay when you are feeling blue. I love you

so much, my little passionate sister. You remind me of my younger self. My sweetheart, you are a smart and passionate little girl. Your eldest sister will always be proud of you, have your back, and support your dreams until they come true. You are always going to be my little princess, no matter how grown woman you will be.

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Abstract

This dissertation, titled "Shadows of Justice: Racism and Civil Rights in *Mississippi Burning* (1988)," examines how accurately the film *Mississippi Burning* shows the mysterious disappearance of three civil rights activists Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney in 1964 Mississippi. The primary concern of this study is how closely the film's events, scenery, and characters represent what happened. Other questions focus on how the FBI agents are depicted and how the film reflects the social and cultural divisions of 1960s Mississippi. Using descriptive and analytical methodologies, this study explores major events, dialogues, and characters in the film to uncover themes in its depiction of injustice, segregation, and FBI agent roles. The findings indicate that *Mississippi Burning* expresses the emotional essence of historical events despite being a crime thriller rather than a documentary. The film effectively depicts the corruption and Klan involvement in the murders, as well as the role of local police enforcement in keeping authority and suppressing African Americans using illegal and immoral strategies. The character analysis emphasizes differing perspectives on social concerns, hatred, and injustice. FBI agents Anderson and Ward represent the quest for justice within legal constraints despite opposition, whilst local law enforcement and community members exhibit deeply ingrained racial stereotypes. Important characters, such as Mrs. Pell and a local preacher, demonstrate various responses to prejudice and violence, highlighting the societal intricacies of the time.

Key words: Racism, Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, Ku Klux Klan, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

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General Introduction

In the world of movies, some films effectively depict the progress of society as well as the struggle for civil rights. Among these cinematic masterpieces, "*Mississippi Burning*" (1988) is like an oppressive picture of America dealing with its past and trying to fight racism during the Civil Rights Movement. The film presents a simple yet powerful story about how unfair things were back then. It shows the organized inequities as well as the participation of those who are in positions of power. It also represents the determination of people who bravely stood up to these crimes.

"*Mississippi Burning*" is a film which was released in 1988. The film is based on the true story of three civil rights activists, James E. Chaney, Michael H. Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, who disappeared first and then killed in Neshoba County, Philadelphia, Mississippi, United States, on June 21st, 1964. Klan members and local law enforcement are accused of their deaths. The activists, two white and one black worked hard to help African Americans vote in Mississippi because, for a long time, Southern states like Mississippi made it quite hard for Black people to vote. They used unfair rules and discrimination to keep them from voting, starting way back in 1890 and continuing until the early 1900s.

Their tragic murders by members of the Ku Klux Klan not only showed how widespread racial discrimination was, but also led to lot of activism and exposed serious issues with how the police and local government worked. This film tries to show how tough life was for Black Americans back then, and how some people were extremely cruel to them only because of their skin color.

The summer of 1964, was a really important time in the United States' journey towards fairness for everyone, no matter what their race is. That year was a historic year regarding the Civil Rights Movement. People across the country became more involved and began speaking out, protesting, and advocating for change. From big cities to very small areas in the South,

numerous individuals were driven to make things right. They were clear in their desires for everyone to be treated fairly, and their voices could be heard from significant locations like Congress to the streets of little villages and groups.

Research Problem

The present research aims to investigate the accuracy of *Mississippi Burning* (1988) in representing the 1964 murders of civil rights activists in Mississippi. It explores the film's portrayal of actual events, FBI agents' responsibilities, cultural and social problems of that time, as well as its impact on modern ideas of racism and civil rights.

Research Questions

This research focuses on how racism is served and shown in *Mississippi Burning 1988* film, and how law enforcement is maintaining inequality based on the skin color of people in the United States of America. This piece of work tries to investigate some major as well as subsidiary-specific questions on this subject.

The major question of this study is: how closely do the events, scenes, and depictions present in “*Mississippi Burning*” match the actual historical events and the real story surrounding the disappearance of the civil rights activists in 1964 Mississippi?

This work also intends to investigate some specific subsidiary questions on this subject:

- To what extent does the depiction of FBI agents in “*Mississippi Burning*” correspond to the actual issues dealing with law enforcement during the Civil War Era?
- How do the characters in “*Mississippi Burning*” express various views on hatred, local laws, and cultural norms common in 1960s Mississippi, and how do these differing viewpoints add to the film’s analysis of societal divisions and obstacles during the Civil War Era?

Research Methodology

This research will be conducted with a descriptive method using analytical analysis to examine key events, dialogues, and characters, as well as to identify patterns within the film's portrayal of injustices, segregation, and FBI agents' roles.

This dissertation seeks to not only show the film's depiction of unfair practices and treatment, racial segregation, and the struggles that African American communities have faced, but also to offer a deeper understanding of the problems encountered by those working within the system. The first chapter consists of a historical background that explores a brief history of Slavery in the United States. It also sheds light on Racial Segregation, Jim Crow Laws, and Black Codes. In addition, this chapter tends to present an overview of the Civil Rights Movement. The second chapter takes a close look at how the movie shows the FBI participation, puts the events in a historical frame, and checks out how the FBI agents are shown during the fight for civil rights. The third chapter dives into what different characters in the movie think about the big issues in Mississippi back in the 60s, like racism, local laws, and the way people lived, giving us a picture of what was going on during the civil rights movement.

**Chapter one: Unveiling America's Racial Past: From
Slavery to Civil Rights**

Introduction

America has been referred to as a place of golden opportunity and freedom, and it is considered a light of hope on the worldwide stage, constructed on noble principles of equality, liberty, and justice for every individual. However, underneath the surface of glory exists a darker reality: a past that was marked by the horrific shame of slavery, a legacy that keeps afflicting the nation's heart. While America claims itself to be a promoter of democracy and equality for all, its growth path has been covered with conflicts and moral ambiguities. For generations after generations, African Americans have suffered from slavery, abuse, and dehumanization, which have darkened the state's core values. From enslavement shackles to protest obstacles, the journey to justice and equality has been marked by pain, sacrifice, and constant hard work. From the beginnings of colonial settlement until the violent days of abolition, this chapter provides an exploration through time, tracing the roots of slavery in the United States and looking into its long-term influence on society.

1 Historical Background

1.1 A Brief History of Slavery in the United States and its legacy

In American history, the term "slavery" refers to a practice of forced labor and oppression in which people -mostly those of African descent- were denied basic rights that everyone has and treated like property. It was defined by the ownership and dominance of one individual over another, usually based on social class, race, or ethnicity. This type of slavery is called chattel slavery, where human beings are owned like goods with a high chance of being sold, bought, and forced to work without wages. White people believed that colored people were born inferior and could not have the same rights as white Americans. Allain states in this, "According to Taney, black people were "so far inferior," that they had no rights that white men were bound to respect. Thus, he believed that blacks were never going to become citizens of the United States, even if they were born free and regarded as citizens of the states where they belonged"

(129). American slavery was rooted in the notion that black Americans of African descent were inherently inferior and suitable only for enslavement. Additionally, it propagated the idea that, without the support and benevolence of white individuals, black Americans could never fully integrate into American society or achieve Americanization (Nunn, 2020). As a matter of fact, scholars have defined the term "slavery" differently because there are various forms of enslavement. The widespread usage of the concept "slavery" in many situations and the difficulties experienced by diverse organizations, from academics to activists, in properly defining the term are shown in the following paragraph:

“Slavery is arguably the most misused word in the English language. It has become a metaphor for extreme inequality, for subordination, deprivation and discrimination. It is bandied about in all manner of contexts. Thus, we have the ‘classic’ or ‘chattel slave’, the Marxian ‘wage slave’, the ‘sex slave’ and, in the late twentieth century, the ‘contemporary slave’. Scholars, government officials, colonial civil servants, explorers, missionaries, nationalists, League of Nations and United Nations anti-slavery committees, human rights activists, and lawyers charged with drawing up national laws and international conventions, have all wrestled with the difficulty of giving a precise meaning to the term” (Pargas and Roşu 184).

The dark period in American history, or in other words, the Slavery Era, lasted for two centuries, beginning with the arrival of the first African slaves in the early 17th century and continuing until the abolition of slavery in the late 18th century. Slavery was a social institution that subjected a slave to forced labor and denied him or her all human rights. Since the slave is

his master's property, he may be bought, sold, given, or mortgaged according to the master's wishes. Slavery was an accepted institution up until 1865, when a slave was forced to labor and refused all rights. Specifically speaking, the terms master, slave master, slave owner, or slaveholder were prevalent concepts during the Atlantic or transatlantic slave trade period of time in the United States of America, which referred to white people who had control over almost every aspect of the owned person's life, including where they lived, whether or not they could marry or have children, how many children they could have, and the nature of jobs they were allowed to work. As a matter of concern, black women were forced to conceive as early as age 13 and to give birth as often as possible, so that there would be more slaves ("History of African-Americans").

American slavery started in the 17th century, when 20 Africans came to the English colony of Virginia in 1619. According to Dr. Zoe Hyman, who is a historian and scholar of modern transnational American history with a particular focus on race and class in the nineteenth and twentieth-century American South, in 1607, the first Englishmen were established in what they considered the new world in North America, with some considering themselves explorers. They founded the first English settlement in North America, Jamestown (now Virginia) and since they were leisure men, they lacked the skills and necessary knowledge to maintain a colony. During that era, the colony began to prosper and flourish as tobacco plantations were established. This economic growth created more demand for labor, leading to the enslavement of individuals. Africans were brought in as enslaved workers, alongside those forcibly taken from England (Hyman 1:28). To be more specific, those few enslaved Africans mentioned before were approximately 20 people who were taken captively in the English colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in August 1619, after being caught aboard a Portuguese slave ship, marking the onset of slavery in America (Hyman 2:02).

During the period of the 17th and 18th centuries, Africans, referring to black people who were brought from Africa by force or kidnapped, and African Americans, those born in the New World, had no choice but to work as slaves on tobacco, rice, and indigo plantations across the Southern Coast. Slavery ultimately developed widely in the South's massive cotton and sugar farms ("History of African-Americans"). Due to slavery, cotton production flourished in the United States of America, particularly in the South. This form of production played a role in the foundation of the Southern economy. However, it is essential to admit that the entire Southern economy was heavily reliant on slavery. Without it, the economic structure would have faced significant challenges. The supporters of slavery in the Southern States often justified its existence and continuation by naming it a "necessary evil" because they did not want to give up exercising this illegal and immoral activity. They argued that, while morally objectionable, slavery was essential for maintaining the Southern economy, outcome, and way of life. Additionally, the concept of slavery as a "Positive Good" emerged as a concept that defended dehumanizing Africans and African Americans. Southerners claimed that the slaves were happy, comfortable, and appreciated. George Fitzhugh, a well-known American social theorist, argued in favor of slavery in his books "Sociology for the South" (1854) and "Cannibals All!" (1857). *Sociology for the South* (1854) and *Cannibals All!* (1857). Fitzhugh painted a rosy picture of the South, suggesting that slavery contributed to a peaceful and orderly society (*Documenting the American South (DocSouth)*). According to Stevens, Fitzhugh's theories were popular because they defended the Southern way of life. In his pamphlet entitled "Sociology for the South," he openly claimed that slavery was beneficial for society and emphasized the tranquility of the Southern states. As he wrote in this excerpt of the pamphlet :

“...slaves are always dependent, never the rivals of their master. Hence, though men are often found at variance with wife or children, we never saw one who did not like his

slaves, and rarely a slave who was not devoted to his master. 'I am thy servant !' Disarm me of the power of master. Every man feels the beauty, force and truth of this sentiment of Sterne. But he who acknowledges its truth, tacitly admits that dependence is a tie of affection, that the relation of master and slave is one of mutual good will.... The slave always has a home, always an interest in the proceeds of the soil.... At the slaveholding South all is peace, quiet, plenty and contentment. We have no mobs, no trades unions, no strikes for higher wages, no armed resistance to the law, but little jealousy of the rich by the poor. We have but few in our jails, and fewer in our poor houses. We produce enough of the comforts and necessaries of life for a population three or four times as numerous as ours. We are wholly exempt from the torrent of pauperism, crime, agrarianism, and infidelity which Europe is pouring from her jails and alms houses on the already crowded North. Population increases slowly, wealth rapidly..." ("A Pro-Slavery Argument (1850)").

In this passage, George Fitzhugh pointed out some positives about having slavery in the South. He believed that it made the region peaceful, with no mobs, strikes, or armed resistance. He also noted that there were not many people in jail or in poor houses, suggesting low crime rates. Plus, he said that the South was doing well economically, producing enough for everyone living there and growing wealthier.

Abraham Lincoln (born February 12, 1809, Kentucky, U.S.—died April 15, 1865, Washington, D.C.) (Current), a self-taught lawyer, legislator, and vocal opponent of slavery, was elected 16th president of the United States in November 1860, shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War (Zapata). He is most known for his Emancipation Proclamation speech, which paved the way for the Abolition of Slavery (Zapata). The speech was on September 22nd, 1862, and it was addressed to the slaves in the Confederate-held territory to be free during the American Civil War. We shall recall that the Civil War aimed at maintaining the state's union, so that it would not be divided because of slavery, as the North was against enslavement while the South defended it. The Emancipation Proclamation was a needed order at that time because slavery was the foundation of the southern states' economy, providing important labor for its agricultural sector, mostly cotton production. In addition, the objective of the war was to preserve the Union; however, as the conflict proceeded, there was extending pressure from moral advocates to address the issue of slavery directly. So, we may predict that the proclamation was meant to bring some humanity to the war. While the Proclamation itself did not end slavery, it was a crucial step toward the abolition of slavery. It led the way to the 13th Amendment, which was legislation passed by Congress on April 8, 1864, and it abolished slavery in a clear section. Abraham Lincoln declared in the 13th Amendment that slavery and forced labor shall no longer exist in the United States, except as a punishment for a crime of which a person has duly committed ("Constitution of the United States"). This Amendment acts for a fundamental change in American law, permanently ending practicing slavery legally and making a new human rights standard. The 14th Amendment was passed by the United States Congress after three years of passing the 13th Amendment. On July 9, 1868, the 14th Amendment was passed, and it represents citizenship rights and equal protection for all people born in the United States of America, including African Americans. Although the two amendments mentioned were effective, yet another amendment was needed so that black Americans could

practice their citizenship and have the right to vote while still making their voice and choices heard. Due to that, the 15th Amendment was passed by Congress on February 26, 1869, which states that the right to vote cannot be denied based on race, gender, color, or religion. The mentioned Amendments were meant to guarantee liberty to slaves while also establishing and prohibiting discrimination in certain rights for past slaves and all citizens of the United States (“Reconstruction Amendments”).

By the end of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln’s vice president, Andrew Johnson, became the 17th United States President in 1865. He was from the South and a slave owner who established reconstruction and racial segregation laws that state to separate white people from colored individuals. As a matter of fact, President Abraham Lincoln was from the Radical Republican Party, whereas Andrew Johnson was from the Democratic Party. At that time, in other words, during the Reconstruction Era, the two parties - Republicans and Democrats - had a disagreement or different visions concerning the nation’s future, mainly about accepting African Americans in society. In some ways, there were radical Republicans, which were Northerners abolitionists, who had been asking for the abolition of slavery in both the North and the South. Still, the Southerners did not give up on enslavement. Although the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, it did not end it in the South because Slavery was a state issue and the government could not decide about it.

During the Reconstruction Era, a bunch of really important rules and actions were put in place. They were all about trying to fix the mess slavery left behind, making sure African Americans had fair treatment, and giving the South a big improvement. Racial segregation, Jim Crow laws, and black codes were some of the significant challenges that came up during this time. Even though there were these obstacles, the era also saw efforts to rebuild the South and support civil rights, setting the stage for future progress in equality and justice.

1.2 Racial Segregation and Jim Crow Laws

The Reconstruction Era started in 1865 and ended in 1877. It was a time of big changes in American society, especially in the southern states. Its main goal was to rebuild the South and help slaves who were just freed by their masters, or African Americans in general, fit into society. But during this time, racial segregation and Jim Crow laws also started to appear, especially in the South, as white people did not accept sharing a place with ex-slave Black Africans. These racist laws shaped a system of discrimination and unfairness, making it hard for African Americans to enjoy the freedoms they were supposed to have. These regulations took effect all over the South, dictating most areas of black people's lives, including where they could live and work. Following the abolition of slavery, the rules also guaranteed the availability of black labor at a low cost (Zapata, 2023). The term "Jim Crow" was also used to refer to racial segregation, and it originated from the portrayal of black people in antebellum minstrel shows ("The Oxford Companion to United States History," 2001). The legal principle known as "separate but equal" was previously created by the Supreme Court in the Plessy v. Ferguson case in 1896, which made segregation legal. This idea caused a lot of unfairness towards black Africans. Jim Crow laws had a huge impact, enabling racial segregation in the US. The doctrine maintained that segregation laws did not violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution as long as they had an equal impact on white and black individuals. State and local governments in the South continued to pass Jim Crow laws that, although said to treat white and black Americans equally, in reality enforced a racial caste system in which black people held the lowest rank. These laws were justified by the constitutional principle of "separate but equal." (Volle, 2023).

One of the prominent racial segregationists at that time was George Wallace, a Democratic politician from America who served as governor of Alabama four times. and who led the Southern resistance to the federal government's 1960s imposed racial integration. Wallace, a

farmer's son, put in a lot of work to earn his law degree from the University of Alabama in 1942. He was elected to two terms in the state assembly after serving as assistant state's attorney in 1946, after serving in the military during World War II. In 1953, he was elected as a judge for the Third Judicial Circuit of Alabama. In 1958, he made an unsuccessful bid for governor, losing the Democratic nomination to a candidate who supported segregation and received support from the Ku Klux Klan (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). between 1967 and 1968. Wallace also made four unsuccessful presidential runs, appealing to white populist feelings and opposing the growth of federal power. He adjusted his ideas on race to fit the political situation with each election cycle. Although Wallace advocated for infrastructure, education, and business growth, he is well-known for his opposition to civil rights, constrained economic outlook, inability to change the tax code, and obsessive attention on campaigning at the detriment of state administration (Encyclopedia of Alabama, 2024). Governor George Corley Wallace of Alabama became the most prominent opponent of the rising civil rights movement in 1963. Six months later, he became well-known throughout the world for blocking the entrance of two black students, James Hood and Vivian Malone, who had been granted admission by a federal judge, at the University of Alabama (BlackPast, 2019). Alabamans felt that they were "under siege" as a result of the growing Civil Rights movement, and they wanted a leader who would support the radical beliefs of the white elite. "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," Wallace declared in his election address after embracing that racism (Carbary, 2021).

Beginning in the 1890s and lasting for three-quarters of a century, the American South was ruled by a formalized system of racial apartheid known as "Jim Crow" laws. These laws enforced segregation and separation in various aspects of people's daily lives, including restrooms, transportation, drinking fountains, parks, schools, trains, and restaurants. American

Africans, and even affluent black individuals, were often subjected to inferior facilities due to these discriminatory rules. The Jim Crow Laws perpetuated white supremacy following the end of the slavery period.

After the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, legislators swiftly enacted laws that aimed to hinder black voters from exercising their right to vote. These measures included poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy requirements. Aspiring voters were required to pass literacy tests, which involved writing lengthy essays or completing challenging exercises. These tests were intentionally difficult for black individuals, even posing a challenge for white literate people. Individuals with less education, immigrants, and those with lower incomes are significantly disadvantaged by these assessments. Poll taxes were another strategy used in a number of states, requiring qualified voters to pay a charge before casting a ballot. These regulations were among the several Jim Crow laws that were enacted following the Civil War to compel racial segregation and deny black people the right to vote (Adeoye et Silver, 2023).

1.3 Organized Discrimination and Black Codes

Organized Discrimination refers to creating rules and policies that purposely marginalize and oppress certain groups of people because of their race, ethnicity, or gender. After the American Civil War, this was seen through the rise of Black Codes and the Ku Klux Klan. Black Codes were issued by the Southern states, in order to ensure white supremacy and keep controlling the newly freed African Americans. Those codes were different from one state to another, yet they all aimed to limit and restrict the rights of Negroes and keep racial inequality in practice.

According to the Louisiana Black Codes of 1856, Section 02, black individuals were required to carry written permission to leave their homes after 10 p.m. The section states: “Be it further ordained, that every negro freedman who shall be found on the streets of Opelousas after 10 o’clock at night without a written pass or permit from his employer shall be imprisoned

and compelled to work five days on the public streets, or pay a fine of five dollars” (Kerboua and Loulou 1). We should note that the employer indirectly replaced the master, as the freedman’s actions required authorization from his employer. Furthermore, the law prohibits gatherings of people of color in public spaces. This was explicitly stated in the fifth section of the Louisiana Black Codes, which forbade any public assemblies or meetings of black individuals within the town of Opelousas without prior approval from the mayor or the president of the board. The examples provided show the discriminatory nature of the Black Codes, highlighting the unjust treatment and denial of rights to black individuals’ rights that were supposed to be guaranteed, particularly in the Southern states. These codes are a clear reminder of the racial injustices of that time.

The Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group, was created in the South in 1865. The Klan wanted to keep up white dominance by terrifying African Americans and those who supported them. They used violence, like lynchings, arson, and beatings, to create fear and stop African Americans from using their new rights, like voting and owning property. The Klan also went after white people who supported African American civil rights and Reconstruction. Their actions created a culture of fear and made it much harder for justice and equality to progress, both during and after the Reconstruction Era.

1.4 Civil Rights Movement

The 1960s were a pivotal decade in the United States for the civil rights movement. Several prominent leaders emerged, each with distinct goals and strategies. Martin Luther King, Jr. racial pride was a prominent and very influential leader. He was a social activist and Baptist minister who, from the middle of the 1950s until his assassination in 1968, led the American civil rights movement. The success of that movement in erasing the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other regions of the country was largely due to his leadership. As the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King

gained national attention by advocating for nonviolent strategies to advance racial rights, including the historic 1963 March on Washington. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize (Carson and Lewis). Through nonviolent protest, Martin Luther King Jr. sought to eradicate racial discrimination and segregation. In his ideal world, everyone would have equal rights in a racially integrated society (History.com Editors).

Malcolm X was a well-known African American leader of the Nation of Islam who, in the early 1960s, developed the ideas of black nationalism and racial pride. The broad publication of his autobiography, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), following his assassination elevated him to the status of an ideological hero, particularly among young black people (Mamiya). He advocated for black nationalism and separation from white society. Malcolm X later shifted toward a more inclusive approach after his pilgrimage to Mecca. He focused on black empowerment and self-defense (Wesleyan University).

Rosa Parks was an American civil rights activist whose refusal to give up her seat on a public bus led to the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama in 1955–1956, which served as the impetus for the American civil rights movement (Wallenfeldt). She was a well-known activist and organizer in Alabama's Civil Rights Movement. In addition to demonstrating active resistance by staying put, Parks assisted in planning and organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Many have attempted to minimize Parks' involvement in the boycott by painting her as a weary seamstress who was simply too fatigued to move (Norwood). Rosa Parks sought to end racial segregation, particularly on public transportation. Her actions were instrumental in challenging the Jim Crow laws (History.com Editors, "Rosa Parks").

Conclusion

To sum up what has been said before in this chapter, "Unveiling America's Racial Past: From Slavery to Civil Rights," the United States of America has a painful dark past, from

slavery to the Civil Rights movement. It reviews how slavery began and continued to exist in the United States, especially in the South, demonstrating how it viewed people as property and led to long-term injustices based on race. It also shows America's history and how economic concerns and racial ideas maintained slavery and eventually evolved into institutionalized racism. By exploring slavery's various aspects -from considering individuals as property to the damaging beliefs of white supremacy- the chapter reveals its long-term impact on American culture and thinking.

Chapter 02: *Mississippi Burning*: Film and Racial Injustice

Introduction

This chapter thoroughly examines the depiction of racism in the "*Mississippi Burning*" film. The analysis is structured around key scenes that strongly picture racist acts, offering a comprehensive exploration of how the movie represents the deep-rooted racial tensions that afflicted the American South during the Civil Rights Era. It is of particular significance that the film is based on a true, heartbreaking story. The 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Neshoba County, Mississippi. This horrific accident, which shocked the nation and triggered the Civil Rights Movement, serves as the basis of Parker's thrilling storyline. This chapter breaks down various scenes, each showing different aspects of this racism, from the violent intimidation tactics of the Ku Klux Klan to the gradual spread of white supremacist ideologies.

This 2nd chapter does not only illuminate the obvious acts of racial violence, but also uncovers the underlying beliefs and social structures that allowed such atrocities. In doing so, it invites readers to critically engage with "*Mississippi Burning*" as more than a fictionalized drama; it is a lens through which we can better understand the complex, often dangerous processes of racial oppression in American history.

1 Examining "*Mississippi Burning*"

1.2 Racial Injustice and the Role of Law Enforcement

The film starkly depicts the terrifying abuses that African Americans suffered during the Civil Rights Era. These brutal acts of violence were more often than not, carried out without provocation or justification, reflecting the deep-seated racial hatred and systemic oppression widespread at the time. African Americans were frequently subjected to severe beatings, often at the hands of white supremacists like the Ku Klux Klan group, as well as complicit local law enforcement. These beatings were intended to intimidate and suppress any attempts at seeking

equality or justice to plant fear among witnesses and make them below basic human rights. This included threats and an ongoing fear of violence, which was driven by racism rather than any justifiable reason. As a result, African Americans were unable to even look at white people.

One should know that African Americans were subjected to systemic economic oppression, including unfair labor practices, denial of loans, and exclusion from economic opportunities, further entrenching their marginalized status.

The film also shows how African American homes and churches were served as shelters and places of refuge. Black churches were organizational sites for social and political activities, centers for economic development and growth. As microcosms of the larger society, “black churches provided an environment free of oppression and racism for African-Americans. In black churches, African-Americans were consistently exposed to social, political, and economic opportunities which could be sought and had by all members equally” (Simms Parris 134-135). These churches were targets of arson and destruction. Such acts of terror were designed to disrupt the cohesion and safety of the black community. The ultimate form of racial violence - lynching and kidnapping- was a tool of terror used to publicly humiliate and execute African Americans (Mustika 39).

In this movie, the white characters presented racial practices toward black people, expressing their hatred and dominance in the Deep South through the implementation of Jim Crow laws and the actions of the KKK. These racial practices aimed to maintain white supremacy, indicating that whites saw themselves as a pure race entitled to control others and were opposed to racial mixing. Besides, they also hate the other race development welfare that could threaten white supremacy (Arrasyid, M. Fauzi, et al. 12).

These brutal actions, vividly portrayed in “*Mississippi Burning*,” underscore the extreme and often lethal challenges that African Americans faced during the civil rights movement, highlighting the relentless and pervasive nature of racial injustice in that era.

1.3 The representation of the FBI

This film focuses on the representation of the FBI. On one side, the agents are shown as brave, courageous, and somewhat heroic figures who risked being shot or attacked and threatened on more than one occasion while pursuing justice in the face of massive opposition. Anderson and Ward's characters adopt different approaches to law enforcement, revealing internal conflicts within the FBI. Anderson is practical, street-smart, realistic, and pragmatic. His past experience as a sheriff in the South gives him an enhanced knowledge of local dynamics. Ward's positive and organized way is quite effective, leading to an interesting story that examines the various ways police could help in the civil rights battle. However, the film's portrayal of the FBI has received mixed reactions. While some praise its depiction, others criticize it for exaggerating the FBI's heroism and oversimplifying the intricacies of the civil rights movement. Critics argue that by focusing primarily on the FBI's role, the movie potentially minimizes the significant contributions and personal sacrifices made by local activists and civil rights workers.

Although the film effectively captures the broader social and political climate of the era, it takes creative liberties with specific events and characters to enhance dramatic impact, raising questions about historical accuracy versus artistic interpretation.

2 The Movie's Historicization Process

The 1988 film "*Mississippi Burning*" undertakes a significant process by transforming the real-life 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner into a dramatic narrative suitable for the big screen. In doing so, it engages in a process of historicization, adapting historical facts into a cinematic format that can captivate and educate many people.



Picture 1: The civil rights workers, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner

The plot centers on three activists -two young Jewish men and one black man- in Mississippi helping black residents exercise their voting rights. This storyline closely mirrors the actual events when Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were working to register black voters, highlighting the dangerous reality faced by civil rights advocates during that era.

"*Mississippi Burning*" opens with one of the most traumatic scenes in 1980s cinema: a church being burned by the Ku Klux Klan. This stark visual serves as a powerful symbol of their deep-rooted hatred, immediately setting a tone of tension that reflects the racial hostilities of the time.

Throughout the film, black characters are depicted as silent and submissive, accepting the KKK's actions without opening resistance. While this portrayal might seem disempowering to modern viewers, it accurately reflects the oppressive environment of the 1960s Deep South. In this stressful and terrifying situation, many African Americans felt obliged to hide their anger and protest in private, knowing that any challenge could end in a violent response. This demonstrates how brave one has to be to speak up during this unsafe period of time.

The arrival of these civil rights workers in Mississippi County is seen as a threat by the KKK activists, who are staunch followers of Anglo-Saxon ideals. They view any attempt to

grant blacks their voting rights as a challenge to their notion of democracy and racial superiority. The activists are willing to resort to extreme measures -intimidation, violence, and even murder- to maintain their power and prevent other races from challenging their dominance.

The scene effectively portrays the lengths to which the KKK would go to block any efforts they disapproved of in the county. Their actions reflect a deep-seated commitment to preserving their version of democracy, one that upholds white supremacy at the cost of others' rights and lives.

Although the film "*Mississippi Burning*" does not explicitly mention Stokely Carmichael (a major voting rights activist in Mississippi) or the Black Power Movement, its narrative structure mirrors the issues, origins, and remedies for racial injustice that motivated Carmichael and other Black activists. However, the movie centers on two fictional FBI agents, Rupert Anderson (Gene Hackman) and Alan Ward (Willem Dafoe), who investigate the mysterious disappearance of three unidentified civil rights activists. The agents strive to locate the missing men and prosecute their killers, despite facing resistance from local law enforcement.

The FBI's investigation is significantly hampered by Sheriff Stuckey and Deputy Clinton Pell, the main antagonists. The challenges faced by the agents, their understanding of the problem, and their different strategies for solving the case in the face of local police obstruction are said to reflect the main principles that drove the Black Power Movement.

This following passage describes a sinister scene in "*Mississippi Burning*" where Clayton Townley, a big figure of the Ku Klux Klan, is interviewed outside his office. His statements reveal the deep-rooted prejudices and conspiracy theories that fueled the KKK's principles.

Clayton Townley: "I am sick and tired of the way many of
us Mississippians are having our
views distorted by your
newspapers and on TV. So, let's

get this straight. We do not accept Jews because they reject Christ. Their control of the international banking cartels are at the root of communism today. We do not accept Papists because they bow to a Roman dictator. We do not accept Turks, Mongols, Tartars, Orientals nor Negroes because we're here to protect AngloSaxon democracy and the American way” (Mississippi Burning 57:19-57:50).

He rejects Jews on religious grounds (for not accepting Christ) and due to antisemitic beliefs linking them to international Black Power banking and communism. Catholics are also targeted, seen as disloyal to America for their allegiance to the Pope. Most strikingly, Townley's intense and irrational xenophobia extends to a wide range of non-Anglo-Saxon races, including Turks, Mongols, Tartars, East Asians, and black people. This prejudice has roots in the KKK's core belief in white supremacy, specifically Anglo-Saxon superiority and their view that these groups threaten their vision of American democracy.

In sum, Townley's interview provides a chilling insight into the KKK's multifaceted bigotry. Their hatred isn't limited to one group but spans across religious, economic, political, and racial lines. They see themselves as defenders of a narrowly defined American identity—one that is white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant—against all who don't fit this mold.

In another scene at 1:21:23 in "*Mississippi Burning*," the film shows the brutal realities of racial violence in 1960s Mississippi. A black family's farm, targeted for their cooperation with the FBI, is engulfed in flames set by Ku Klux Klan members, a chilling symbol of intimidation. The family's father, refusing passivity, grabs his gun to defend his property, but his courage is met with savage retribution. In a shocking turn, he is struck down and subjected to lynching, one of the most horrific forms of racial terror. This harrowing image not only captures his individual tragedy but also symbolizes the broader campaign of fear used to suppress Black Americans' fight for equality.

Yet, a tiny bit of hope shines in the form of a little boy who, witnessing the brutality his father is enduring, acts swiftly despite the danger and releases his father from the noose. Miraculously, the man survives. This powerful scene points out key themes of the film: the constant threats faced by Black families, the violent backlash against those seeking change, the use of terror tactics like arson and lynching, and the courage of those who resisted, even when the cost could be their lives. It is a terrible scenario that brings the historical realities of the civil rights struggle into focus.

As the previous analysis of the film explains, examining these parallels between the film and the movement reveals how "*Mississippi Burning*" reflects Black Power ideologies.

2.1 Depiction of the Disappearance of Civil Rights Activists

The start of the story is filled with suspense and worry. Not long after they go missing, the car belonging to the activists is found left in the river, all burned up. This points to someone doing them harm and is much like the actual event where their wrecked car was discovered hidden away. The people living nearby do not want to talk or help with the case. Driven by fear and unfair feelings about race, they either keep quiet or throw the investigation off track. This part of the tale sheds light on the deep-seated unfairness and the silence that kept those who did

wrong safe. In fact, they were protecting the predators who were hunting them. It touches on the bigger issues that were part of the fight for equal rights.

For instance, in one scene, members of the KKK went to the house of a black person. They dragged him to a pig pen and attacked him severely. When they were done, they threatened him, saying, "We better not catch you talking to the FBI. Or you'll be dead, boy. Real dead" (Mississippi Burning 19:27). Then, they locked him in a small cage until the next morning, when they threw him in the town center.

In a film addressing Civil Rights or Black Power, it's unsurprising to see local officials portrayed as racist and oppressive, given their historical roles in obstructing civil rights. In reality, Neshoba County Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Clinton Pell arrested Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, releasing them to local Klansmen the night they vanished. Even when not directly harming civil rights supporters, local public officials often obstructed black citizens' rights. For instance, in efforts to impede black voting, registrars often subjected blacks to extremely difficult exams when they attempted to register, a requirement not imposed on whites. Furthermore, outside the South, instances of police brutality were also prevalent (Hoerl 8).

Despite its alignment with past civil rights efforts, "*Mississippi Burning*" presents an unexpected portrayal of FBI agents, depicting them as the primary seekers of justice for African Americans. The film establishes the agents' commitment to civil rights early on, with Ward's prior assignment to protect James Meredith during his integration into the University of Mississippi and Anderson's departure from his sheriff position due to his disgust with the South's racism.

Paradoxically, the film represents FBI agents, representatives of a political institution challenged by Black Power proponents, as the primary agents for black empowerment, overshadowing the predominant role played by black activists in the civil rights struggle.

Furthermore, the film's focus on the FBI downplays the agency's actual relationship with local officials during the civil rights movement.

While "*Mississippi Burning*" depicts the FBI agents' struggles with local police, historical accounts reveal a more amicable relationship between the FBI and Neshoba County police (Hoerl 8). Just as historical officials in Mississippi denied blacks their civil rights, fictional local officials in the film deny Ward and Anderson's legal authority. An early scene underscores the FBI's position in the narrative, emphasizing their confrontations with local authorities. This depiction echoes the experiences of black activists, highlighting the parallels between the struggles faced by civil rights advocates and those faced by the FBI agents in the film.

2.1 A Comparative Study of "*Mississippi Burning*" and Historical Reports

"*Mississippi Burning*" offers a fictionalized and somewhat dramatic version of real historical events rather than a fully accurate one. Analyzing the analogy between the film's representation and historical reports reveals both parallels and divergences that serve to enhance the narrative while sometimes sacrificing historical accuracy for dramatic effect.

Case files, photographs, federal files, witness testimonies, and other records from the 1964 "*Mississippi Burning*" murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner have been made public. These newly accessible materials, which date from 1964 to 2007, were transferred to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in 2019 and are now available for viewing at the William F. Winter Archives and History Building in Jackson. The three civil rights activists, all in their 20s, were investigating the burning of a black church near Philadelphia, Mississippi, when they disappeared in June 1964, when they met with a deadly ambush. On June 21st, 1964, the three men were arrested by local police on traffic charges, jailed for several hours, and then released at night. After their release, they were trapped by members of the Ku Klux Klan, brutally beaten, and murdered. Their bodies were

then buried in an earthen dam, a heinous act that underscored the violent racial violence of the time (CBS News).

In response to their disappearance, the FBI launched a massive investigation, to locate the missing men. The case quickly drew national attention, highlighting the extreme racial violence and systemic racism spreading in the South. The investigation led to the arrest of 18 men, who were charged with civil rights violations. Ultimately, seven men were convicted and received minor sentences, but no one was charged with murder, reflecting the deep-seated challenges of achieving justice for racially motivated crimes during that era. There is a deep hatred for the races of color. Combining white American race and colored race will make their superiority threatened. They believe that the white American race is more superior than colored people (Mustika 39).

The deep dislike for different races is shown. Some people think that mixing white Americans with people of color threatens their higher status. They see white Americans as better than others (Mustika 39).

The passage then fast-forwards 41 years from the murders to 2005, when KKK member Edgar Ray Killen, at 80 years old, was finally, after decades, found guilty of manslaughter -not murder- for these deaths. He is the only KKK member ever convicted in this case, as Mississippi courts initially made no arrests. In 1967, a federal trial found seven Klansmen guilty of conspiracy, while others were acquitted or had mistrials (Workers World).

The film sheds light on the FBI agents' perspectives, investigations, and characters, which drive the narrative forward, instead of going deeper into the experiences of African Americans' lives, conversations, and emotions. This could have provided a more powerful portrayal of the struggles they faced during that time by giving more screen time and depth to their stories.

As a result, Hollywood glamorizes the FBI, while the real heroes -those fighting for civil rights- are being hounded. Even today, with Killen's conviction, we're left wondering if true

justice will ever be served. It's a reminder that our country's past isn't just in history books; it's still shaping our present in ways we'd rather not admit.

3. Evaluation of FBI Agents' Image

In the movie "*Mississippi Burning*," the main characters are FBI agents Rupert Anderson and Alan Hackman, played by Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe. These characters are based on real FBI agents who looked into the murder of three people fighting for civil rights. The way they are shown in the movie adds drama and looks into bigger ideas like what's right and wrong, and the struggle with racism.

Agent Rupert Anderson is shown as a smart, experienced former sheriff who knows a lot about life in the South. He sometimes uses methods that might not be entirely legal. His way of getting involved in the case shows he really gets the local way of life and how much he wants to find justice in a place that's filled with corruption and racism. Anderson's role makes us think about the tough choices cops have to make when they're dealing with deep-seated racism.

Agent Alan Ward, in contrast, is an idealistic, by-the-book agent from the North, committed to legal procedures and civil rights. His adherence to protocol reflects his belief in justice and order, though he faces frustration when these methods prove ineffective against local resistance and institutional racism. Ward's character contrasts sharply with Anderson's flexible approach, underscoring the tension between idealism and pragmatism in the pursuit of justice.

Agent Ward embodies the moral high ground, often clashing with Anderson over tactics, which underscores the tension between idealism and pragmatism in the pursuit of justice. The dynamic between Anderson and Ward is central to the film's narrative, with their conflicting approaches creating tension but also a productive partnership as they balance each other's strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the film, both agents experience growth, with Anderson showing signs of adopting some of Ward's legalistic principles, while Ward becomes more

pragmatic, recognizing the necessity of some of Anderson's methods. This mutual influence signifies the complex interplay between different law enforcement philosophies.

While based on real events, the characters of Anderson and Ward are fictional, and their methods and personalities are dramatized to enhance the narrative. The film illustrates the FBI as both a force for justice and an entity willing to use morally ambiguous methods, capturing the real-life complexities of the FBI's role in the civil rights movement. The depiction of the FBI's use of controversial tactics, such as intimidation and threats, raises important ethical questions and prompts viewers to consider the moral costs of achieving justice in extreme situations. By showcasing both the successes and moral compromises of the FBI agents, the film encourages a nuanced understanding of law enforcement and highlights the difficulties in balancing legal integrity with the urgent need to combat profound injustice.

The illustration of FBI agents in "Mississippi Burning" serves as a powerful narrative device to explore themes of justice, morality, and racial conflict. The characters of Anderson and Ward, while fictional, effectively dramatize the real-life challenges faced by law enforcement during the civil rights era. Their dynamic interplay and moral complexities provide a compelling, albeit dramatized, portrayal of the FBI's efforts to navigate and dismantle deeply entrenched racism in the pursuit of justice.

Conclusion

"*Mississippi Burning*" clearly portrays 1960s Deep South racial dynamics, exposing four non-discursive practices: violent intimidation by White Klan members against those challenging segregation, rigid enforcement of Jim Crow Laws, lynchings to deter Black voter registration, and church burnings to attack symbols of Black empowerment. The film reveals how these practices were weaponized to suppress civil rights and maintain white supremacy. It also overdraws certain aspects of the story for dramatic effect. For instance, the FBI's use of aggressive tactics is heightened to create tension, underscore the moral ambiguities involved in

the pursuit of justice, and intensify specific scenes to sympathize with African Americans who were living in horror and constant fear just because of their skin color. Which remains a dark chapter in American history.

Chapter three: Voices of Conflict: Social Perspectives in
"Mississippi Burning"

Introduction:

This chapter covers a few characters' viewpoints on the primary societal and cultural problems of their time. The film is set during the 1960s civil rights movement in Mississippi and presents multiple perspectives from people from different backgrounds, addressing racism and societal conflicts of those days. This chapter delves into the mix of beliefs and deeply rooted racism in society by examining the conversations, actions, and motivations of characters such as white supremacist leaders Frank Bailey and Clinton Pell, as well as the actions of civil rights activists and FBI agents Rupert Anderson and Alan Ward. The film additionally shows the horrible facts of racial violence and separation, but it also provokes wider debates about past injustices and how memories influence today's view of relationships between races. Through this study, the chapter seeks to provide a clearer picture of how *Mississippi Burning* reflects and criticizes public conditions of the moment, as well as how it impacts people's perspectives and the historical narrative.

1 Characters' Points of View on Social Issues**1.1 Review of Characters' Perspectives**

In the movie "*Mississippi Burning*," a variety of characters offer unique perspectives on the prevalent social issues of the time. The story includes opinions from people with different backgrounds, exposing the landscape's complicated racial dynamics. The dialogues, conversations, and the actions of the characters allow us to examine how complex societal issues are seen to these people in Mississippi during the civil rights movement. The film features sharp contrasts in the views of the white supremacist community (led by characters such as KKK local leader Frank Bailey and Deputy Sheriff Clinton Pell) as compared to civil rights activists and sympathetic persons (including FBI agents Rupert Anderson and Alan Ward). Their dialogues are one of intolerance, violence, and a fear of change with respect to the current state of segregation and racial hierarchy. On the other hand, characters like Agent Anderson and

Ward who act as a foil to the oppressive views of the white supremacists through their words and deeds.

In the narrative of "*Mississippi Burning*," the film portrays the conflict and tension between differing motives and points of view within the Hollywood establishment. Alan Parker, the director of *Mississippi Burning*, confessed that his motivation to visualize American race politics emerged from his white, working-class, English upbringing.: "It was the first time those of us who admired America from abroad saw that life wasn't perfect there. That even American suffered profound injustices" (Cagin 337). Parker's decisions in making the film also reflected his assumption that most film-going audiences are not interested in watching historically accurate portrayals of controversial political events. He told the media that he approached the film from a dramatic perspective rather than a documentary one because he wanted to reach an audience who is completely unaware of the realities -of social struggle- and certainly doesn't watch PBS documentaries (King). Several critical reviews addressed the film and one of the first was by New York Times critic Canby (1988), who wrote that the film was "utterly authentic" as "one of the toughest, straightest, most effective fiction films yet made about bigotry and racial violence".

The film provides a harsh look at the deep-seated racism, hatred, and violence toward Black Americans that existed in Mississippi and other parts of the Deep South during the 1960s civil rights era. White power structure, represented by characters like the racist sheriff, mayor, and members of the Ku Klux Klan, vehemently upheld segregationist laws and cultural traditions that stripped black citizens of basic rights and human dignity. Their perspective was one of poisonous hatred as they viewed black people inferior and felt justified in using intimidation, brutality, and even murder to maintain their twisted idea of white supremacy. Some additional critics commented on the authenticity of *Mississippi Burning* by indicating that the film brought back their own personal recollections of racial injustice. Thus, *Mississippi Burning's* ability to

elicit additional remembrances of racial injustice from viewers illustrates how influential and hegemonic films can indirectly prompt further media attention to historical social injustices. the film was not just about depicting the racist violence and oppression that civil rights activists encountered in Mississippi during the 1960s; the implications went far beyond that cinematic storyline. *Mississippi Burning* reignited personal memories of discrimination and inequality and provided a catalyst for a renewed public dialogue to contend with that historical era. Critics have celebrated the film with recognition for starting a more public wide conversation to reflect on and grapple with the role of the Ku Klux Klan in that era. *Mississippi Burning* was described as the first major film to address the Klux Klan and critics believed the emotional power generated to assess this history was remarkable--extending the popular cultural presence of the film in a way that suggests the film and its aftereffects demand re-building and re-telling, to sustain the focus and public through a popular work to address this historical period. Bob Moses, the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), in 1964 expressed his disapproval of the movie "*Mississippi Burning*" for its portrayal of individuals. He believed that the film reflected Americas rooted racism by sidelining characters and focusing more on white FBI agents. Moses felt that this representation perpetuated stereotypes and undermined the agency and resilience of those involved in the Black freedom movement a cause he dedicated his life to supporting through grassroots activism. "We'd been working in Mississippi for years before 1964, and America never saw us. Now again they don't see us. Blacks in the movie are a plot device - a backdrop for the white heroes" (Robert Marquand).

As Lipsitz points out, these forms of recounting personal experiences and memories "prompt revisions to existing historical narratives by providing new perspectives about the past" (213). By highlighting the personal struggles that former civil rights activists endured against racist FBI agents, journalists were offering counter-memories that challenged *Mississippi Burning's* one-sided narrative. These counter-narratives called for the film's depiction to be revised to also

include the widespread patterns of harassment and hatred that Black Americans faced from law enforcement beyond just the state of Mississippi.

The story unfolds primarily from the perspective of two FBI agents navigating the deeply entrenched hatred in 1960s Mississippi, witnessing firsthand the violent and pervasive racism of the era. As they investigate the disappearance of civil rights activists, they immediately recognize the unwelcoming attitude from many of the white residents upon their arrival in the county. Unsurprisingly, the local sheriff and his deputies provide little cooperation, dismiss their concerns, and deny any knowledge of the activists' whereabouts. This initial encounter establishes the antagonistic relationship between the FBI and the local law enforcement. This attitude is symptomatic of the broader societal disdain for anyone challenging the status quo. Ward, who adheres strictly to FBI protocols, and Anderson, who understands the nuanced realities of Southern life from his previous experience as a sheriff, both recognize the depth of this animosity. Anderson's seasoned perspective on local dynamics provides a stark contrast to Ward's procedural approach. As the investigation progresses, during attempts by law enforcement officials to gather testimonial accounts or material evidence from members of the African American community, adherents of the Ku Klux Klan organization reportedly subjected those individuals to acts of violence, intimidation, and property destruction. These purported actions included physical assaults, arson targeting residential dwellings, and arson targeting places of worship. The apparent motivation was to hinder the investigative process by discouraging cooperation and participation from potential witnesses through tactics of terror and retribution. Moreover, the local legislation plays a crucial role in maintaining the oppressive social order. Laws and local ordinances are structured to disenfranchise Black citizens and uphold white supremacy, making the FBI agents' task even more challenging. The sheriff and his deputies not only enforce these laws but also embody their spirit, using their authority to obstruct justice and protect the interests of the white community. The activists' efforts to register

black voters are met with legal and extralegal resistance, showcasing how local legislation is weaponized to maintain racial inequality. Ward's frustration grows as he confronts a legal system designed to perpetuate injustice, while Anderson's pragmatic understanding of the law's misuse offers a sobering view of how deeply embedded these structures are.

The mayor's statement reflects an attitude of defensive parochialism, rejecting outside influence and asserting local autonomy over racial norms. Mr. Tilman said, "We don't take the outsiders telling us how to live our lives, and I'm here to tell you our negras were happy until those beatnik college kids came down here stirring things up. Before that, there wasn't anybody complaining", Anderson laughed, "Nobody dared" (Mississippi Burning 27:04-27:12) which acknowledges an atmosphere of fear and repression that stifled any dissent. When Anderson mentioned the three missing boys, The mayor suggested the boys were setting up in Chicago joking about the commotion they've steered up down Mississippi, and finished his speech with a direct segregationist view expressed in "we got two cultures down here, white culture and the color culture. Now, that's the way it always has been, that's the way it always will be". This unapologetic assertion of enforced racial separation as an immutable social order is a chilling embodiment of the ideology underpinning institutionalized racism and bigotry in the region. Overall, these quotes normalize racist attitudes, imply the subjugation of the African American community through intimidation tactics, make light of legitimate social grievances, and enshrine the concept of racial inequality. They exemplify the entrenched, unrepentant perspectives that enabled systemic oppression and injustice to persist.

The film highlights the clash between the old and the new, between those who cling to the past and those who seek a more just future. The agents' experiences illustrate the complexities of confronting cultural norms that are not only accepted but fiercely defended by those who benefit from them. Their differing approaches to navigating these legal obstacles reflect the

broader struggle between upholding justice and confronting the harsh realities of a legal system complicit in racial oppression.

A significant breakthrough comes when the agents find the activists' burned-out car hidden in a swamp outside the county. This discovery confirms the activists' grim fate and escalates the investigation. Ward, determined to bring in more resources, calls for additional FBI agents to flood the town. Which to that Anderson argues “don’t do it, Mr. Ward. You’ll start a war” ward’s honest response “it was a war long before you got here” (Mississippi Burning 35:49-35:53). However, this move further intensifies the tension between the federal agents and the local residents, who see this as an invasive act.

The agents proceeded to engage in a dialogue with Deputy Sheriff Clinton Pell. Anderson immediately identified him as an affiliate of the Ku Klux Klan. Recognizing that he was unlikely to provide reliable information. Sensing a dead end, Anderson instead directed his attention to conversing with Pell’s wife. Agent Anderson employs an empathetic approach to gradually earn the trust of Mrs. Pell, the, who has been living in a climate of spousal abuse and ingrained racist attitudes. Through delicate handling, Mrs. Pell ultimately provides invaluable insider perspectives that prove pivotal to the investigation's progress. Anderson’s patient methodology stands in stark, Unlike Agent Ward, who preferred straightforward and procedural methods, Anderson believed in building personal connections, which often revealed deeper truths.

In a critical turning point, feeling increasingly entrapped by her husband’s violent behavior and the moral degeneration pervading the town, Mrs. Pell privately discloses to Anderson the specifics of the night the murders occurred, implicating local law enforcement officials and Ku Klux Klan members. This confession represents a monumental evidentiary breakthrough, furnishing the FBI with sufficient leverage to decisively swing the investigation's momentum in their favor. Simultaneously, it depicts Mrs. Pell as a psychologically complex figure, torn

between justifiable trepidation and an innate desire to see justice served. As she was feeling increasingly suffocated by her husband's violence and the corrupt atmosphere surrounding her, she took a brave step, confided in Anderson, sharing what she knew about the night the murders happened. She revealed the involvement of local law enforcement and Ku Klux Klan members. This courageous disclosure was a turning point in the investigation, providing the FBI with the crucial evidence they needed to push the case forward. Through this, Mrs. Pell emerged as a deeply conflicted yet courageous figure, torn between her fear and a profound yearning for justice. Her decision to speak out resulted in her being beaten severely enough to require hospitalization and medical care. Which caused the conflict between the two agents, compelling Agent Ward to reassess and modify their strategic approach to the situation.

Ward: We'll go after them together.

Anderson: You wouldn't know how.

Ward: You're going to teach me.

Anderson: You wouldn't have the guts.

Ward: Not only do I have the guts; I have the authority. No rules. We nail them any way we can, even your way.

Anderson (incredulously): We do it my way? With my people?

Ward: Whatever it takes (Mississippi Burning 01:36:10-01:36:37).

Anderson responded by threatening Deputy Pell, while Ward turned a blind eye to it. Revealing their character development and willingness to bend the rules to achieve justice.

Things finally reached a breaking point when the agents and their teammates had been quietly building their case, and now it was time to kick the hornet's nest. All hell broke loose as a convoy of federal trucks and sedans rolled into that one-horse town, sirens blaring like the end of days. You could see the fear in the locals' eyes as they realized the feds weren't messing around anymore. Most of them tried to run away, only to find no escape. The scenes cut between

images of corrupt law enforcement officers in handcuffs, jeering crowds of supportive black residents, you could just sense this wave of relief washing over the town, like the nightmare was finally ending. As the suspects are interrogated, the FBI's tactics become more intense, leading to confessions that unravel the conspiracy behind the murders. The scenes of the arrests and interrogations are charged with tension, showcasing the agents' determination and the suspects' gradual breakdown.

The film swiftly transitions to the touching scene of a funeral, which captures not only the deep sorrow but also the anger and resolve of the black community in the face of racial violence and injustice. The preacher, standing behind a plain wooden pulpit, speaks with a voice that is both strong and heavy with emotion. His words are a poignant mix of lamentation for the life cut short and a call to the congregation to persist in their fight for justice. As he recounts the virtues and struggles of the deceased, his message resonates deeply with everyone present, each of whom has felt the sting of racial hatred in their own lives. The camera pans slowly over the faces of the mourners, some weeping openly, others clinging to loved ones for comfort. The sorrow in the room is palpable, but so too is a sense of unbreakable unity and resolve. The community is gathered not just to mourn but to fortify each other against the relentless adversity they face.

Eulogist: They want me to say, "Let us not forget that two white boys also died helping negroes help themselves." They want me to say, "We mourn with the mothers of these two white boys." But the state of Mississippi won't even allow these white boys to be buried in the same cemetery as this [*points to coffin*] negro boy. I say, "I have no more love to give! I have only anger in my heart today, and I want you to be angry with me! That I am sick and I am tired, and I want you to be sick and tired with me! I-I-I am sick and tired of going to the funerals of black men who have been murdered by white men! And I-I am sick and tired of the people of this country who continue to allow these things to happen!" What is an unalienable right if you are a negro?

What does it mean, Equal Treatment under the law? What-what does it mean, Liberty and justice for all? Now I say to these people, "Look at the face of this young man, and you will see the face of a black man. But if you look at the bloodshed, it is red! It is like yours! It is JUST... LIKE... YOURS!"

After the heartfelt eulogy, the camera pans over the faces of the mourners, capturing a tapestry of raw, heartfelt emotion. There are tears of grief but also expressions of quiet, steely determination. This procession, moving slowly toward the small cemetery on the town's outskirts, transforms into a visual narrative of the community's unyielding resolve. They walk not just to bury their dead but to honor their legacy and reaffirm their commitment to the struggle for justice. Each step taken is a silent vow, a testament to their unwavering endurance and shared dream of a better tomorrow.

Conclusion:

"*Mississippi Burning*" effectively captures the challenging racial issues of the 1960s in the Deep South from the perspectives of different individuals. The film combines white supremacists' cruel and violent ideas with the heroic efforts of civil rights activists and friendly FBI agents. The film highlights the widespread fear, hatred, and refusal to change that existed at the time through the actions of these characters and the obstacles that they face. Director Alan Parker's rough way of telling the story captures the interest of viewers, pushing them to look into how unfair racial treatment has been and continues to be in America. The film explores both personal and community stories, emphasizing the importance of continuing to fight for justice and equity. Finally, "*Mississippi Burning*" serves as both a historical reflection and a call for change, reminding viewers of the need to continue fighting racial injustice. Its stories of courage and tough ethical choices are still relevant today, motivating people to better comprehend and work harder to address these major issues in our society.

General Conclusion

The movie "*Mississippi Burning*" provides valuable insights into American history, particularly regarding racism and injustice. It revisits the murders of Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney near Philadelphia, Mississippi, during the Freedom Summer of 1964. The findings of this study indicate that the film was inspired by actual events in the South. As the film is considered a crime thriller and not a documentary, the filmmakers seek to tap into the emotional currents of history without taking the heat for historical misrepresentation.

The research has revealed that the film accurately depicts the corruption and Klan involvement in the murders of the three civil rights activists, including the role of local law enforcement officials. The film also shows how they use illegal and unethical tactics, including kidnapping, beating, and arson, to assert their dominance, silence witnesses, and intimidate African Americans from speaking about their rights.

Moreover, the study has analysed several characters with diverse views on social issues, hatred, and injustice. The protagonists, FBI agents Anderson and Ward, who are tasked with the investigation, seeking justice through legal channels despite facing hostility and resistance. In contrast, local law enforcement and some community members illustrate deeply rooted racial prejudices and systemic injustices. Hatred and violence against African Americans spread rapidly, affecting individuals like Mrs. Pell, who plays a pivotal role in aiding the investigation despite her abusive husband, and the preacher who delivers a moving speech to mourn the dead and challenge the injustice. These contrasting viewpoints vividly illustrate the conflict between progress and bigotry, emphasizing the complexities and challenges of addressing social injustice during that period.

In conclusion, "*Mississippi Burning*" effectively conveys the themes of justice and morality, prompting viewers to reflect on important ethical considerations. The movie raises questions

about law enforcement ethics and the pursuit of justice, challenging audiences to contemplate the implications of upholding moral principles in the face of adversity. The moral dilemmas faced by the characters add layers to the storyline, creating a thought-provoking narrative that resonates with viewers. Ultimately, the film encourages viewers to consider the importance of standing up against injustice and oppression.

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الملخص

تتناقش هذه الأطروحة بعنوان ظلال العدالة: العنصرية والحقوق المدنية في فيلم "Mississippi Burning 1988" مدى دقة سرد الفيلم لاختفاء ثلاثة نشطاء حقوقيين - أندرو جودمان، مايكل شوپرير وجيمس تشاني - في ولاية ميسيسيبي عام 1964. يكمن الاهتمام الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة في مدى تطابق أحداث الفيلم ومشاهده وشخصياته مع ما حدث فعلاً. كما تركز الأطروحة على كيفية تصوير عملاء مكتب التحقيقات الفيدرالي (FBI) وكيف يعكس الفيلم الانقسامات الاجتماعية والثقافية في ميسيسيبي. باستخدام مناهج وصفية وتحليلية تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأحداث الرئيسية والحوارات والشخصيات في الفيلم لكشف المواضيع في تصويره للظلم والفصل العنصري وأدوار عملاء مكتب التحقيقات الفيدرالي. يصور الفيلم الفساد وتورط جماعة كلان في جرائم القتل، وكذلك دور الشرطة المحلية في الحفاظ على السلطة وقمع الأمريكيين الأفارقة باستخدام استراتيجيات غير قانونية وغير أخلاقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنصرية، حركة الحقوق المدنية، حركة القوة السوداء، كو كلوكس كلان، لجنة التنسيق الطلابية اللاعنفية (SNCC).