

Kasi Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*. 2019, New York City: Focus Features, 2019. Amazon Prime.

Directed by Kasi Lemmons, the critically acclaimed film *Harriet* portrays the life of abolitionist Harriet Tubman. She was born as Araminta “Minty” Harriet Ross, an inspiring woman who led over three hundred enslaved people to freedom between 1850 and 1860 in the American South. Throughout the movie the audience witnesses her extraordinary transformation from Minty into Harriet Tubman. This journey takes her from being an enslaved woman to a strong, independent liberator and opponent to the institution of slavery.

*Harriet* illustrates the oppression, violence, and heartbreaking reality of family separation that enslaved people experienced in the antebellum South. The film begins with Harriet and her family asking their owner to uphold a previous agreement to free the family when her mother reached the age of 45. Twelve years had elapsed since this emancipation was supposed to occur. This introductory scene highlights the horrendously cruel relationship between enslaved people and their owners. When denied their claim to freedom, Harriet liberated herself in a dangerous and miraculous journey to the North, utilizing the Underground Railroad. Her journey included a death-defying jump off a bridge to escape slave catchers. This was just the first of countless daring acts of heroism all in the name of freedom for herself and fellow slaves.

Upon arrival in Philadelphia, she met William Still who encouraged Minty to rename herself Harriet Tubman in honor of her mother and the husband she left behind. William was part of the Underground Railroad and helped Harriet get situated in Philadelphia. Eventually she decided to return to the South to liberate her mother and siblings, as well as her husband. When Harriet arrived, she discovered that her husband, a free man, had remarried, believing she was dead. His new wife was expecting their child, prompting his refusal to leave his family. Over the next decade, Harriet proceeded to lead hundreds of enslaved people to safety as part of the Underground Railroad. Tubman’s actions eventually led to her gaining the moniker “Moses” throughout the South. The men and women she freed gave her this name.

*Harriet* is a captivating film because it tells a compelling story. Camera movement allows the audience to experience the emotions of characters during terrifying and suspenseful scenes, providing full immersion in the cinematic narrative. The audience wants to support Harriet's journey, especially when dire consequences threaten Harriet and her companions. Viewers who are not familiar with the historical figure of Harriet Tubman, will gain important insights. The film has a message that determination and hope will prevail. The ending might be an opening for a sequel about Harriet Tubman during the Civil War. Ultimately, *Harriet* tells an inspiring and educational story.

*Aaron Mathew Lugo and Kimberly Romo*