***Explain how the social, political and cultural contexts of media influence how audiences may interpret the same media in different ways. Use Common’s Letter to the Free to support your answer.***

A subsidiary to Vivendi, UMG agreed to license premium videos from its artists, Common, onto Vevo. Vivendi, based in Paris, is a mass media conglomerate using horizontal integration so that they have activities in music, television, film and video games. Throughout his music, Common maintains a cultural and social concern, focussing on stressing matters on society which then engage and attract his audience to also fight for their rights. Letter to the Free was directed by Bradford Young (the cinematographer on Selma). The video has the camera moving at a slow pace through an empty prison implying that prisons are worthless if they are oppressing innocent people. The music video is also in a black and white documentary style, which could be used to highlight how common believes that colour shouldn’t define a person – everyone should be equal. Finally, throughout the video a hovering black square can be seen in addition with the final frame of a field where the colours are inverted. The inverted colours could be acting as a metaphor suggesting the idea of the reversal of roles between the black community in America and the higher capitalist class.

One way in which context can influence how audiences interpret the same media differently, would be culture and how people’s culture can differ/ be shared. For example, In the music video - 'A Letter To The Free', the American rapper and activist 'Common' can be seen in an old prison which is used to convey his message of the unfair imprisonment of black people; he is representing the black community who have been oppressed in the supposed 'Land of the Free', the song being the symbolic sign, a 'Letter' and other people such as capitalist whites being the 'Free' as they are 'superior' to the black community and have oppressed them. Cultural hegemony refers to the domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means (violence or consent), the dominant ideology being created by powerful social institutions. Therefore, in a Letter To The Free, Commons attitude towards the unfair treatment of black people links into Gramci's theory of Hegemony as the government - a capitalist social institution - are abusing mass amounts of black people, many of whom aren't criminals, just because they have the power and can influence what the dominant ideology suggests. To create a profit from the prisons for the owners - bourgeoisie businessmen. This view is evident through the lyrics - "Prison is a business, America's the company". Audiences may interpret this song in different ways depending on factors such as their culture, social status, religion and many more. For example, a black male from America would probably have a dominant view of this piece of media due to his relation with the subject. However, a white male from the UK may not have such a dominant view towards the media as he may not be able to identify with it as much and therefore disagree.

In comparison to common, the government, as a social institution, are far more superior and therefore more likely to have an influence on the public; the dominant ideology portrayed through media sources such as the news, will have been most likely supporting government ideas. In this case, oppressing all these innocent people and the continuation of slavery under the 13th amendment simply to gain profit. When referring to the social contexts and its effects on an audiences view on the same media product, it is important to take into account conglomerates such as Vivendi and the influence they have on society's beliefs. Vivendi’s subsidiary UMG stated "We exist to shape culture through the power of artistry", this quote, taken from the UMG website, suggests that via the power of culture - song and music video - and taking a subject such as slavery in Commons 'Letter To The Free', the artist has the power to change and shape social beliefs. Similarly, George Gerbners Cultivation theory states that the more an audience is exposed to a media product, the more they are going to believe in it/ question their own ideologies. In this instance, the more amount of times 'A Letter to The Free' is played the more likely the people who are unaware of the situation in America are going to believe commons view.