

Literature as a Lens: Examining Racial Injustice in America
through African American Texts

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The paper explores how the contemporary problems of the black community mirror those of the old ones. It uses African American literature to find a connection between problems from years or decades ago and the ones currently occurring. Now these cruel problems could never be understood by simply looking at a statistic; as we know, “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.” So this paper uses literary texts as a lens to delve into today’s problem, as only authors, in this case African-American ones, could hold up the true suffering and pain of the black community in the black-related problems of the past without any sort of distortion. When we look at these problems from a numeric standpoint, the victims are just numbers to us, but from a literary standpoint, they are not just numbers but living, breathing beings who are in pain and suffering. To further understand the suffering of the blacks in contemporary times. The framework of Critical Race theory was applied as it shows racism is encoded in different areas like law, wealth, education and so on. Now statistics are not completely absent, as they would have been used to enhance my message and deliver it home. The paper focuses on four major areas, which are mass imprisonment, police violence, economic disparity, and racial injustice. For addressing each of the major issues, separate literary texts, different real-world recent incidents, and diverse data have been utilized without a few exceptions. The paper also utilizes theories such as Weber's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, Marx's critique of capitalism, and Panopticism by Michel Foucault to make connections and enhance the understanding of the issues at hand.

Keyword: African American Literature, Racial Injustice, Economic Inequality, Mass Incarceration, Police brutality, Native Son, Critical Race Theory, CRT

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the African American people who are a victim of a system that is constantly working to hold them back whether through maintaining wealth disparity, wrongful conviction and incarceration, unjustified police assault and killing and much more. These problems are a huge problem in America as many blacks are continuing to suffers everyday. And so I want this paper to be new way of addressing the issues in the contemporary black community.

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INTRODUCTION

Problems like mass incarceration, police brutality, economic inequality, and even racial injustice among the African American community should have been a thing of the past, as they should have ended alongside the Jim Crow Law, but the reality is completely different. The African American continues to suffer even in the modern days like much has not change over the years. Throughout different decades, African American authors would uphold these problems from their particular time period in their works like novels, poems, books, essays, short stories, and so on. In the novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright upheld economic inequality and racial injustice from the 1930s, while Coates' *Between the World and Me* upheld police brutality from the 2010s. But through analyzing these texts from different time periods and comparing them to the recent incidents related to police shootings, beatings, and courtroom sentencing of blacks, we can find a pattern over here that shows how these problems depicted in African American texts decades, if not a century ago, still persist in the modern American black community. So my goal is to address that issue with the help of literary texts. In this particular department, much research has already been done, but they have solely used quantitative data and interviews to find the answers. But answering this question from a literature standpoint is yet to be done, and this is where my paper comes in. Now the question that people might ask is: Why literature? Is using literature in any way different or better than any other approach taken so far to address this issue? The answer is obviously yes, as human pain and suffering can never be narrowed down to a couple of numbers and statistics. The pain of a black person who lost 30 or 40 years of his life behind bars for a false accusation, an African American who was brutally beaten for a traffic violation, and a black family who had to endure poverty and live in inhuman conditions can never be truly

understood through a couple of numerical data points. This hole can only be filled with the power of narration and story-telling, which are only possible in well-written literary pieces. Only literature can help us understand what a person felt, went through, and suffered when they came face-to-face with their problems. So this is why, in my paper, I want to address the problems of police violence, mass imprisonment, racial injustice, and economic disparity in the modern black community with the help of African American literature from the past century. Now I did not entirely throw out quantitative information, but it was used to enhance my paper, while literary texts and real-world recent incidents are still at the center of my paper. When it comes to concepts of theories, Weber's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, Marx's critique of capitalism, Panopticism, will be utilized for making connections and ease of understanding.

RESERCH METHODOLOGY

My study's philosophy is that I believe despite decades or over a century passing by since the early 20th or even the late 19th century, problems such as racial injustice, police brutality, economic inequality and mass incarceration mostly remained the same in African America community and I am convinced that the use of African American literature is the best way to address this issue compared to any other method.

The question that I asked can also be answered without using literature at all as someone collect, compare and analyze data related to my specified issues from the 19th or 20th century and from the the current period in order to get their answer but this type of approach is not perfect as human pain and sufferings can never be narrowed down to a couple of numbers and statistics. Emotion plays a vital role in understanding the targeted problems which could be only understood through literature or in this case, African American literature. In the novel *Native Son*, the author brings forth the problems of the colored people from the 1930s or 40s. In the text, when Bigger was given the unfair death sentence for his crime despite his rough upbringing and his situation, the reader was able to feel and understand Bigger's pain and suffering. The same way when the reader or the people find out about recent incidents related David Sparks who was convicted and sentenced for murder despite not having sufficient evidence, Chanel Lewis receiving a much longer sentence compared to his non-black partner despite committing the same crime, the people can also understand their agony and pain. But if we narrow all of this down to couple numbers like in 1935, X number of black were wrongfully convicted and that number is Y in 2023, the emotional factor is complete gone. This entire approach can be summarize from the phrase "One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic."

My study follows an deductive or confirmatory approach as I want to start with the Critical Race theory or CRT before coming to a conclusion by analyzing African American texts. This paper follows a mixed approach but leans heavily toward the qualitative while putting quantitative second. literary texts such as novels, essays, books, short stories and so on from different African American authors are analyzed. That's not only it, many recent incidents such as the beating and the death of Patrick Lyoya, the wrongful conviction of David Sparks, the unfair sentence of Chase Legleitner and many more. When it comes to the quantitative side, data from US Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Federal Reserve Board, Federal Bureau of Prison and many more are analyzed and utilized.

When it comes to data analysis methods, content analysis is the perfect fit for my paper as I will be working with texts, information and data that already exists or have been produced. Literary texts such *Native Son*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, recordings of incidents related to police violence, racial injustice, statistical data of black imprisonment rate, employment in different sectors and so on are already with me and all I need is to analyze them. Comparative analysis is also important as I would try to find connection between the literary texts and the real world incident and/or the statistical data. The time horizon of my paper is clearly longitudinal as literature from different decades will be covered.

Now my paper does have some obvious limitation, Firstly, African American literature is gigantic and there is only so much I can cover over here. So famous authors like Alice Walker, Alex Haley, Nella Larson, Angie Thomas and many more are absent. Moreover, since I never lived in America, I could not use ethnographic research in my paper. In this type of research observation is used to capture the experience of the participants.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is utilized over here as it tells us how the term “race” is not a biological feature but rather a socially constructed one that is used to oppress and exploit colored people. Now this theory applies to multiple races in America, such as Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, and obviously blacks. For this paper, this theory will be solely applied to African Americans to see how they are being suppressed in areas like economics, justice, imprisonment, and so on. CRT argues that racism has been integrated into different aspects such as law, regulations, rules, and so on, which we currently know as systematic racism. For example, Chase Legleitner (black) and Lamar Lloyd (non-black) were convicted for the same crime, and both of them would plead guilty. Lloyd would get 2 years in the penitentiary, while Legleitner would get 26. CRT also brings up how disparities between racial groups, such as wealth and income, education, healthcare, and civil rights, are maintained, which will help me analyze the economic inequality part of this paper. Intersectionality from Critical Race Theory talks about how the overlapping of different races, genders, classes, and so on can create different identities, which also creates discrimination. For example, the “Missing White Woman Syndrome” talks about how the media and the police become hyperfocused when white women go missing but do not put the same focus on other ethnicity or genders. Similarly, in the novel *Native Son*, when Mary Dalton was known to be kidnapped (later she was found dead), the authorities would try their best to reclaim her. But when Bigger’s girlfriend, Bessie Mears, who was a black woman, was raped and murdered, But the authorities did not pay much attention to her. Now, I do need to mention that CRT is not only about addressing racial exploration but also about eliminating it. But I will skip the elimination part, as this paper solely focuses on addressing contemporary black issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the vast range of my topic, I would be going through many research papers, journal articles, books, and even animated films to show how the issues of the black community of the past that were shown in the work of African American writers are still present in contemporary times, despite decades or even a century passing.

Moving on, we have to talk about *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, as it brings up the issue of police brutality in America. In Part 2 of the text, the author brings up the death of Prince Jones, who was the author's friend. Prince Jones was shot and killed by police, despite being unarmed and in no way a threat. The police officer behind the incident was not charged with anything, which enraged Coates and made him leave the country. The author also tells us about his childhood, as he needed to stay "always on guard" due to the police and the white supremacists. The author also adds "racist violence that has been woven into American culture.". Even though this book was released to the masses, it was written as a letter to his teenage son to make him aware of issues like police brutality, symbolism, and what it is really like to be black in America. The text will be used to show how the police violence that Coates experience was not exclusive to her as this kind of events are common throughout America.

This book goes over police brutality while slightly touching on racial injustice. Moreover, the text was also recently published in 2015, which makes it even more relevant. Despite this being a well-known book, it still does not talk about mass incarceration, as blacks are being thrown penitentiary for petty crimes, while the ratio of black and non-black convicts is also much higher compared to the population. Economic inequality did not get attention, as the wealth gap is also between blacks

and whites. This book solely focuses on police brutality, symbolism, and so on. In this paper, I will dive deeper into the the economical disparity, court room injustice and so on while also taking a further look at what was discussed here.

Next on the line is *Race Matters, Animal Matters: Fugitive Humanism in African America, 1840–1930* by Lindgren Johnson, where texts written by Frederick Douglass, Charles Chesnutt, Ida B. Wells, and even James Weldon Johnson have analyzed, and the concept of “fugitive human” is the main focus. The blacks in America were associated with animals at one point, and they would ultimately seek to remove association with “animality” in order to establish their humanity. But this book focuses on how the blacks would incorporate the elements of animals into their own understanding of humanity. In this way, they would redefine the concept of “human” while also challenging the binary opposition of black/white and human/animal. In his work, he brings up *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, where Douglass talks about how enslaved blacks are compared with "beasts of burden." From the perspective of Critical Race Theory or CRT, the terms “animality” and "beasts of burden" is also socially constructed which is created to suppress blacks in America.

Johanson used the term “Fugitive Humanism” not only for blacks to distance themselves from animals and identify as humans but also challenging the traditional view of humans as superior to animals as the whites like to think that they are superior from other races. In the book, it mentions how this term was widely accepted by the people for it’s humanist approach and differentiating while also giving insight in animal studies and post humanism in our current moment. The approaches that Coates took is very similar to Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech where he

says “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia (Yes, Talk), the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood”. showing how both the sons of former slaves and former slaves are both human and can sit at same table without any issue. You also technically say it is more narrowed down version of identity politics as in identity politics, reshaping identity is used to counter stereotypes and in the same way reshaping the concept of “human”, blacks are able to counter the stereotype of being associated with animals.

This text does a great job of separating humans and animals while also establishing black identity by redefining the concept of “human”. The concept of “fugitive human” remains relevant today, as blacks are still, in some cases, compared to animals like monkeys or apes. But the text does not dive deeper into other issues that this association can cause, such as racial injustice or economic inequality. Moreover, despite coming out in 2017, it does not go deeper into any of the problems that blacks are facing in contemporary America. This is the gap my research will try to fill, as this issue can also be addressed in modern times.

To start, I want to bring up Macaluso’s journal article “Teaching "To Kill a Mockingbird" Today: Coming to Terms With Race, Racism, and America's Novel,” where he talks solely about Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He criticizes the text, saying that despite being regularly taught in schools and colleges, it did not do the black community any justice. He criticizes the character of Atticus Filch, as he is portrayed as a white savior to the black community, and his character is compared to the Pope or even Jesus (Macaluso, 280). Macaluso tells us that the novel uses the African American character Tom Robinson as a means to develop its white characters,

particularly Atticus. What he is trying to say is that the white characters, such as Atticus, Jem, Scout, and so on, are fleshed out, while black characters, such as Tom, just act as background characters and only serve to improve the character of Atticus. Moreover, the criticism of Atticus Flich would not end here, as he would go back to "Go Set a Watchman," which is the first draft of TKAM, where Atticus is seen attending a council meeting with a group associated with white supremacy and segregation.

In the journal article "Teaching "To Kill a Mockingbird," Macaluso's frustration can be understood as he believes that the character Atticus was supposed to be an ember of light in the highly segregated American society, but it turned out to be something different. But what we need to understand over here is that the character Atticus is based on the author's father, Amasa Coleman Lee, who was also a lawyer and defended two blacks accused of murder in court. Harper Lee stated this information in a 1962 interview with the New York Herald Tribune. So the chances of Harper Lee making Atticus Flich a two-faced character are highly unlikely. Moreover, criticizing someone's work based on a draft is not the best thing to do, as an unfinished piece might lack proper context and literary elements. Macaluso brings up Atticus the council meeting with white supremacists in "Go Set a Watchman," but assuming that Atticus was a bigot just by doing so is going a bit too far. Furthermore, Marcaulso also brings up how the blacks only served as a minor or supporting character, but we also need to understand that the setting of the novel is in 1930s Alabama, when the blacks were oppressed and undervalued, so seeing Atticus do all the heavy lifting during the entire trial historically makes sense. As a result, characters like Tom Robinson end up playing a small role and get overshadowed by Atticus.

The book *The Changing Same: Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* by Deborah E. McDowell caught my attention as it specifically focused on African American women's contribution to literature while also addressing the problems that they were facing in the USA. She explores the themes of representations of slavery, sexuality, and homoeroticism through different literary works. McDowell dives into three eras: the women's era (1890s), the Harlem Renaissance (1920s), and the Second Renaissance (1980s). In the 1890s, she brings up Frances Harper's "Iola Leroy," which centers around the daughter of a wealthy planter in Mississippi who was sold to slavery when it was discovered that she had Negro blood. The author wanted to show how black women were treated in the late 19th century, as they could be discarded or sold even if they were from a wealthy, rich family. Jessie Fauset's "Plum Bun" was brought up from the Harlem Renaissance, as this novel focused on a young black named Angela Murray who would identify as a white woman in order to avoid discrimination as she was able to date a white man and also get accepted in New York City. McDowell wanted to show how Murray was able to make her life easier just by passing as a white woman, showing the obstacles that black women had to face in the 1920s. Other texts, like Emma Dunham Kelley's "Four Girls at Cottage City," Nella Larsen's "Quicksand," and "Passing," are also used to explore the following themes in the light of African American literature.

The book of exploring the themes of race, gender, and sexuality while also addressing black-related issues from different time periods. To tell you the truth, this is the first book that has tried to address the problems of the black community using African American literature. But the book came out in 1995, which means that there is no way that it could address the current problem of blacks in America. The two problems from her that I bring up for my analysis shows the problem of slave trade

and transracial (a person who identify as a different race despite their biological ancestry). The other black related problems that she brings up in her text does not come anywhere close addressing racial injustice or police brutality or anything like that. So this is what I try to cover in my paper.

The text "Plotting" the Story of Race: Pedagogy Challenges in History and Literature by Amritjit Singh tries to explore the narrative of race in the United States. Singh uses a variety of literary works to illustrate the complex layers of race in the country. For example, he uses W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Conservation of Races," where Du Bois tells us how race is not only a physical distinction but also a unique cultural and historical experience (Singh, 7). But what caught my attention was his take on Ralph Ellison's "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" (1953), as he used it to invoke the centrality of race in the narrative of the United States as a nation. Singh quotes Ellison's metaphor that sees all of American life as a drama played out on the body of a giant African American man who, like Gulliver, is trussed up to form the scene and the stage on which the action takes place (Singh, 7). This metaphor highlights the difficulties and significant influence that race has on the American story.

At surface level, it seems like it is only trying to understand the notion of race, but if we dive deeper, we can see a pattern as the author uses metaphor, an interdisciplinary approach, and historical accounts from literature to find freedom and equality in American society. Even though this text succeeds in addressing issues like liberty and fairness in the black community, it completely ignores contemporary issues. Even though mass incarceration, economic inequality, and police brutality are

completely ignored, racial injustice and equality have a few similarities. This is what I will look into further in my paper.

Next, we need to talk about the essay *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book* by Hortense Spillers' from her collection "Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture." The text brings up the long-lasting effects of slavery on modern black families. Before the Civil War, blacks did not have any family structure as the father was absent, either sold or working all day and night in the cotton fields. On the other hand, the mother is the only one to take care of her kids, but she is still not considered a legal parent. The American grammar or symbolic system would be used to complicate the gendering of black women (Spillers, 78). Moreover, even the kids were possessions of the planters. Over here, we can see how, despite over a century passing since the abolishment of slavery, the structure of black families has not changed. In modern days, the father is missing as he is either killed or ends up in prison, most likely to never get out. Research done by the data center at kidscount.org shows us that 66%, or 6,333,000 African-American kids, were raised by a single parent in 2015 alone (The Annie E. Casey Foundation). Most of the time, the single parent is the mother and normally does whatever she can to take care of her child. But sometimes the mother is likely either a drug addict or a prostitute, which makes her an unfit parent. So the state would relocate the children to a foster home while taking away any custody of the mother or any parents. Times have changed, but black families have not, despite the legacy and impact of slavery to this date.

Hazel V. Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* also has an interesting take on the subject matter, as she

analyzes periods like Jim Crow and Booker T. Washington, depicting a time of intense cultural and political activity, in order to present the argument that black women were excluded from the definition of womanhood. At that time, white women would ally themselves with a racist patriarchal order that was against both black women and men (Carby). In a sense, it is the process of whitewashing the black community to make them accept white as the only acceptable standard. From Critical Race Theory or CRT perspective, the term “womanhood” is also socially constructed where white is labeled as beautiful, black is labeled as ugly. By creating this bias, the dark skinned people can be oppressed by calling them ugly

The reflection of Carby’s take from the text can be seen in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eyes*, where the main character Pecola Breedlove becomes whitewashed to the point that she believes her problems would go away if she had blue eyes like white women. Even Frieda MacTeer was obsessed with white actresses like Shirley Temple. But would I say that this white-washing mentality still exists today? The answer is a mixed bag to tell you the truth, as the drive to become fair might not openly exist in America, but the differentiation of light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks does openly exist. Famous people like Dwayne Johnson and Barack Obama are labeled as having light skin, while Akon (Aliaune Damala Bouga) and Chadwick Boseman are labeled as having dark skin.

Economic Disparity and Its Impact on Black Lives

Now, if anybody wants to find a relationship between modern black lives and black literature, we first need to see what is happening in today's America. Economic disparity is a common issue in a capitalist country, but this problem is even bigger for African-Americans. According to research done by the Federal Reserve Board, the median and mean wealth of black families are less than 15% of that of white families, at \$24,100 and \$142,500, respectively. The racial wage disparity is a surprisingly concentrated phenomenon. Less than 4% of all occupational categories account for more than 60% of it (FRB). It does not matter what they choose; At the end of the day, they will either end up taking help from their kids or in a retirement home. Thus, the cycle of poverty keeps going.

Before I get into the literary texts, I want to answer why this happens more with one particular race than the others. Well, the obvious answer to this question will be "heritage wealth." If we just turn back the clock by 60 years, we will see how blacks lived in miserable conditions as their entire family resided in a rented one-room apartment. They could not simply go and buy a house as they were barred or charged more than the regular. Moreover, making any sort of money is a challenge, as they have to do jobs like maids, construction workers, street sweepers, and so on. They could barely meet their own needs, and so there was no way that they could leave anything for their future generations. And so, 3–4 generations later, blacks obviously have little to no heritage wealth. While the whites had a head start in their lives as their grandfather or great-father left them something like a plot of land or a house or resources like gold or diamonds, which they rely on, According to a research named "Inheritance by Race," white households inherit over 5.3 times as

much as black households and 6.4 times as much as Hispanic households (Penn Wharton). White households are 2.8 times more likely than black households to inherit any wealth (Penn Wharton). A house means that you don't have to pay rent every month, while resources like gold grow in value over time, which can be used in hardship to overcome any difficulty.

At first, the novel that I want to bring up is none other than Richard Wright's *Native Son*, a novel about an African American named Bigger Thomas living in 1930s Chicago who is a victim of systematic injustice and inequality. This novel actually openly addresses the issues that I just mentioned, as Bigger depicts the terrible conditions of black people at that time period as he was forced to do a low-level job as a chauffeur despite having a dream of becoming a pilot. Bigger, with his entire family, has to live in one room in a black housing complex. By analyzing Bigger's condition using CRT, we can see how he was a victim of the Jim Crow law which was both socially and formally constructed. The Jim Crow law was a collection of laws that that used deny the black rights in many areas such as education, jobs, healthcare and so on. This will covered more deeply later in the paper but this was in action in order to suppress and abuse blacks during that time.

Now people might think these difficulties that Bigger faced are now irreversible in modern times, as anybody can now get any jobs and nobody is forced to live in a crowded apartment, but that is where they are wrong. Even in the 21st century, job-barring still exists, as it is just more indirect now. There is a reason why blacks and Hispanics have the highest percentage of people working in the service sector, covering 28 and 31 percent, respectively in 2022 (US Census Bureau). While the most white workers are in office and administrative occupations (17%), the

runner-up would be sales-related occupations (13%). The service sector only contains 11 percent white workers. It should be quite obvious that service-related jobs do not pay well, as waiters make on average 15 dollars per hour (Ziprecruiter), janitors only 14 dollars per hour, and cashiers only 13.5 dollars per hour. Now, why does this happen? Why are blacks forced to do hard service work as janitors or construction workers while others can comfortably work in air-conditioned offices and even get paid more? The simple answer is that socially constructed belief is how we believe Asians to be smart, South Americans to be good football players, and even label Indians as scammers or Mexicans as drug dealers. The same blacks are labeled as less smart, even as criminals, which makes them less favorable for high-level professional jobs. Moreover, according to the US Census, black home ownership was only 42.1 percent, while non-Hispanic American ownership was almost 75 percent in 2019. This goes to show that even today, more than half of African Americans do not own a home. But you might be saying that it does not mean that they are staying in overcrowded places, as they could be residing in rented apartments or staying with their parents. But as we already know, these jobs do not pay well, and the average rent cost can range from 850 to 4730 dollars, depending on the state (Forbes). So it is either overcrowding or living in their mom's basement.

Next, I want to bring up *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, which is an interesting text as it covers the lives of three women in 1960s Jackson, Mississippi. Even though this text is old, it is used to show how despite all this time, blacks are still doing same menial low paying jobs . One of them is Aibileen Clark, who has worked as a maid and caretaker for the Leefolt family for about two years. She is a moral and compassionate woman who has raised seventeen children in her career. Despite her good heart, she had to face much racial oppression in her workplace. She had to do

many additional tasks around the house without any additional compensation. Moreover, Miss Leefolt and her friend Hilly would build different bathrooms for her, as they believed blacks carried different diseases than whites. The death of her son, Treelore, changed her and made her “bitter sweet” about all the racial oppression, but she could not do anything in a white dominant society. Then we have Minny, a girl who has worked as a maid since she was 14. Due to her outspoken nature and quick temper, she would get fired multiple times in her career. She also constantly gets beaten by her husband while working at the Leefort; Hilly would spread racist rumors about her to fire her as she used her bathroom during a storm. At the end of the novel, Hill was able to convince Elizabeth to let Minny go and get her revenge. This goes to show how petty racist people in the 1960s were, as they wanted to take revenge for something like using their bathroom. Moreover, we see how Aibileen had to do extra chores around the house for free, which shows the exploitation and abuse of black workers in the 1960s. By using CRT, we see how Minny is also a victim of Jim Crow similar to bigger.

If we compare the situation of Minny from text to the current day and age, we see problems like labor exploitation, discriminatory layoffs, and unpaid work are on a scale much larger than ever before, and a good number of blacks are becoming victims too. As we previously talked about, black workers get lower-paying jobs than their white counterparts. But to answer this, I want to take help from the German philosopher Karl Marx. Marx was not a big fan of capitalism and would thoroughly criticize it. His criticism had many aspects such as alienation of labour, commodity fetishism, inherent contradictions and so on but I want to particularly focus on the exploitation aspect. Marx tells us how the capitalist economy is systematically designed to pay its worker less than the value of their labor in order to create a

“surplus value”. In other words, the bosses would squeeze or exploit the workers to make the goods while paying them less for their labor. The bosses that pay the workers more than the bare minimum will not be able to maximize profit and will be replaced by the ones that can. Now the service jobs that I mentioned, such as waiter, barber, flight attendant, and so on, are jobs for the working class or the proletariat. And one-third of these jobs are done by blacks. These black workers are victims of the same capitalist system, as their bosses pushed them to overwork while underpaying them. Even jobs like doctors or nurses are not safe, as the healthcare system in America is also run with the sole intention of profit. Despite all this time, blacks are still victims of jobs that will make you work from finger to bone only to pay you with bread crumbs. Decades ago, blacks had to work in construction sites, as waiters, establishment greeters, and so on, for a bare minimum wage, and now, in 2023, the same is happening as waiters, construction workers, barbers, and fast food workers—all these low-tier minimum wage jobs are being done by blacks.

Moreover, these types of jobs do not last forever, as Marx mentioned that maximizing profit is the only thing that matters. Now, the higher-ups of organizations might use excuses such as a lack of demand, cutbacks, losses in business, automation, and even outsourcing as reasons for termination, but the reality is quite different. In June 2023, Microsoft fired almost 300 veteran employees who had been working there for almost 14 years, despite the company making a record profit of 146.05 billion (Forbes). A quick analysis would tell you that lack of demand or cutback was not the reason, but corporate greed. Now you might be asking that this affects everybody, not just blacks, but colored folks actually suffer from it more, as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics of 2022 shows 28 percent of black workers in service occupations and 18 percent are in production and exportation, which also runs for

profit in corporate America. So if a trillion-dollar company like Microsoft could lay off a huge number of their long-term employees despite making the highest profit in the company's history, it tells you how other companies might also do the same to make a few more bucks while a good portion of hard-working black workers are left jobless with no certainty of their future.

Now I want to bring up the book *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* by Mehrsa Baradaran, which directly addresses the racial wealth gap in America as it delves into the financial structure of the country to show how it maintains inequality. The book's opening is strong, as it starts in 1863, when the blacks in America only owned one percent of the wealth of the country, and now 150 years later, that number has not changed much. The author brings up the banking system of the country, which relies on credit. During the Civil War in the 1860s, small military banks would hold wages for blacks, especially those who were in the military. One example is Freedman's Bank, which was backed by Abraham Lincoln himself and was considered to be trustworthy at the time. But as the financial panic hit in 1873 and the expansion of the westward railroad began, the bank collapsed, leaving many blacks in ruins. The author wants to show how it was intentional, as the ability of capital to proliferate was not present for the black depositors.

Similarly, in the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, many people would take loans from banks, but people with bad credit needed to mortgage their homes to get money, and many of them were black. Moreover, this type of loan has a higher interest rate to make up for the risk. As the prices of houses started falling, the homeowners found themselves with mortgages that were larger than the value of their homes. According to the National Low Income Housing Colonization, almost 8

percent of American blacks lost their homes in the 2007–08 crisis, while that number was 4.5 percent for non-Hispanic whites. The statistics also show how overall wealth among blacks declined by 31 percent between 2007 and 2010.

Economic inequality is just one of many forms of discrimination that blacks have been facing since their arrival in America. During slavery, they had no wealth or possessions, and now, in the 21st century, they might, in theory, but the government can easily take them away at any time. As we know, governmental organizations like the IRS can easily take away your possessions if you fail to pay your taxes fully or partially.

Now the book that I want to bring up is about the post-civil war period when the blacks finally gained freedom from slavery but the freedom for jobs was still not present. “For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865” by Robert H. Zieger actually talks about those issues. The author uses satire, such as the promise of jobs for blacks, which is similar to the forty-acres-and-a-mule restitution pledged to African Americans. Over here, the “forty-acres-and-a-mule restitution pledged to African Americans” refers to the promise and is also a part of Special Field Order 15, which wanted to give back the 400,000 acres of confiscated lands to the black families. But this was revoked right after Lincoln’s assassination. Zieger also brought up the Pullman Company and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which had a large number of black employees, as the CIO would have 500,000 black workers in 1935. But both of these organizations were highly discriminatory, as they would overwork and underpay their workers, and since they were former slaves, they would know how to cater to their potential customers. It brought up how the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was formed to fight against the injustices of

these companies. Moreover, it brings up how the constitution says all men are equal, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title VII enforcement measures prohibiting employer discrimination based on race. But despite all that workplace discrimination, overworking while underpaying still exists in modern times.

Now I want to bring up the crunch culture of America, as the capitalist leaders are ready to overwork their employees in order to meet certain deadlines. Now, first of all. I want to make it clear that everybody is a victim of the crunch, despite race or ethnicity. But blacks suffer the most when it comes to salary, as blacks in general earn less while the overtime they get from the crunch is even less or sometimes not given at all. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2022, blacks aging 16 or older tend to earn 878 dollars on average, while that number is 1,084 for whites. This report also brings up the unemployment rate, which, to no one's surprise, is 8.6 percent for African Americans, 4.7 percent for whites, and the entire country's unemployment rate is 5.3 percent. So blacks are not only earning less but also employed less too. Since CRT also discusses the ways in which racial groups continue to differ in areas including wealth and income. The wage inequality among the blacks and non-blacks also falls in that category.

The text *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie caught my attention as it portrays life in America from the perspective of an immigrant black woman. The main protagonist, Ifemelu, is a Nigerian woman who would apply to school in America. She would get accepted and also be provided with a scholarship. But later she found out that her student visa does not allow her to work, and without a full scholarship and stipend, Ifemelu must find a source of income. She would struggle to find work due to the obvious racial bias in the job market. Finding no other choice,

she agrees to work for a shady tennis coach as his “relaxation assistant,” which involves allowing him to touch her sexually. But it would turn out a little better as Ginika introduced her to Kimberly, a white woman who needs a babysitter. This allowed her to focus on her studies.

Now this novel takes place in the 1990s, but the problems that are depicted over here, such as racial bias, sexual misconduct, and so on, are faced by many black women in America or coming to America even today. First of all, the Trump travel ban list needs to be mentioned, as the United States witnessed a dramatic expansion of its immigration policy restrictions, with approximately fourteen countries placed on travel bans. Among those countries, Nigeria was on the list as they could not travel to the US and attain a residency permit. As we already know from the book, Ifemelu was a Nigerian. Moreover, the misconduct that Ifemelu faced is not exclusive to her, as the American Psychology Association tells us that 35% of colored women experienced some sort of sexual violence during their day-to-day lives, while 40% to 60% of black women report being subjected to coercive sexual contact by age 18. The situation in Ifemelu is only scratching the surface.

The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein has an interesting take on the economic inequality present in American society. It follows the story of Frank Stevenson, an African American man living in Richmond, California, in the mid-20th century. He worked at a Ford motor factory, but he was still unable to buy a house in Richmond due to the segregation. The author would look into the history of segregation related to public housing as it was intended for “respectable” working- and lower-middle-class people. But these housing projects were not available to African Americans before the 1930s, and when they were, segregation was inevitable.

Rothstein also talks about race-based zoning, as it not only excluded African Americans from the most desirable locations but also worsened many black neighborhoods by allowing toxic waste facilities to be situated nearby. This goes to show how the blacks throughout history always got screwed over, not only by the supremacists but also by the government.

Based on that book, A recent report from UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging shows me how America is still infested with this type of issue. It shows us how 81% of metropolitan regions were more segregated in 2019 than in 1990. For example, according to statistics, the fallen city of Detroit has the most segregation in the nation, as 80% of the locals are black. On the other hand, Grosse Pointe, a suburb that shares a border with Detroit, has a 90% white population. This goes to show segregation is still a thing in 21st-century America. Sure, it might not be as aggressive as in the 1930s, but it is still present. It is just a little indirect, that's all.

So we can see here how many factors, throughout a long period of time, led to the current economic condition among the black community. Even though it is economics and needs to be dealt with in numbers and statistics, human poverty and suffering can never be narrowed down to a couple of numerical values. This is why the literary standpoint, alongside statistics, is the best way to understand this. If I said that in 20XX, the number of blacks suffering from extreme poverty is Y, it would answer the question that I set to answer, but it would never help us to understand the suffering that these people are actually going through. In this case, Bigger and his family from *Native Son* would simply be one of the families with the value Y, and that's it. We will never get to know about his shortcomings. CRT also helped us to see how wealth disparity among races is maintained in order to economically suppress the

blacks. With the help of literature, we are able to understand the agony and pain of people like Ifemelu and Minny, while statistical and numerical values enhance the answers that we were seeking.

Racial Injustice and the Role of Literature in Advocacy

First of all, we need to know what racial injustice even is America. Racial injustice is a complex term but it simply refers to how the legal system denies certain rights and give unfair sentences to a group of people based on their skin color. But that is not only it but it also involves improper traffic stop, consent-less or warrant-less search, arrest without any cause and so on. Now, when we talk about the legal system of America, we need to know how it is designed in a particular way to protect the parasitical rich elites while holding down the general working people. Among the oppressed working class, blacks are the largest victims of the justice system, as they get longer sentences than their white counterparts while also having the largest prison population compared to any other race. Despite almost three years passing since the death of George Floyd, injustice in America did not get any better as attention increased. According to data from the American Civil Liberties Union, black people are five times more likely than white people to be incarcerated and often receive sentences that are 20% longer for similar offenses. So based on this an analysis using literature needs to be conducted to understand it further.

At first, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee needs to be brought up, as the author does an amazing job of bringing up the injustices of the racial system of the 1930s, which can be used to address the current systematic racism. Now I already brought up an article related to this text, as that article talks about how the protagonist, Atticus, was labeled as a white knight for the suffering black people of Maycomb, Alabama. The black character of the text was just used to make Atticus look better, but like I said, Harper Lee based the Atticus character on his father, while the text was criticized based on the draft "Go Set a Watchman". If you do not know, *Go Set a*

Watchman was the draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird* which was publicly released before the final paper. These people would only criticize the draft rather than the final text. In the text, we see how Tom Robinson was falsely accused of raping a woman. But Atticus Finch, Robinson's defendant, would show how he could never do such a thing, as Robinson could not use his left hand as it got caught in a cotton gin as a child. Moreover, the victim, Mayella, forcefully kissed Tom, and he could not simply push her away as he was black. Atticus showed the court there was not enough evidence to convict Robinson, but regardless, they gave him the guilty verdict. Later, when he tried to escape from his cell, he was shot by a prison guard. This took place in 30s Alabama, and many would simply assume that we have grown past the fact that it does not happen in the modern day, but they would be making a grave mistake.

The wrongful conviction of David Sparks mostly mirrors what happened with Tom Robinson, as the man was charged with the killing of Gary Hall. According to CBS news, On September 4, 2006, Sparks was arrested for violating curfew, and on the same night, Gary Hall was killed. Based on the testimony of two eyewitnesses, Sparks would be charged with murder and ultimately imprisoned at the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution in Phoenix (Chasan). Later in 2023, more evidence would surface where it shows how Simmons was instead killed by someone else and Sparks was wrongfully convicted for the murder and released later this year. But by the time Sparks got out, he had already spent 17 years behind bars, and now he is in his 30s. This goes to show how broken the legal system in America is and how a person can be jailed just based on eyewitness testimony and lose a portion of his life behind bars. Many people might say that at least he is out and can start over, but that is not how life works, as the man lost his chance to go to university, start a family, and have a good career all because of a false discriminatory conviction. Now many

might ask how this conviction is discriminatory, as even a white man could also be convicted like this. Well, the simple answer is that the justice system in the USA believes that every man is innocent until proven guilty, but why was that not the case for David Sparks? Why was he guilty until proven innocent? False convictions also happen for other ethnicity, but that rate is higher for blacks. According to the national registry of exoneration, over 2400 people have been wrongfully convicted in the US since 1989, and among those convictions, 49 percent were African Americans. Critical Race theory tells us how racism has been integrated into different aspects such as law, regulations, rules, and so on. This integration can be seen in people like Sparks.

Another example would be the case of Chanel Lewis, who was found guilty of murder and sexual abuse and sentenced to life without parole. This case caught some controversy as there was not enough evidence to even convict Lewis, let alone give him life. Lewis's attorney brought up how racial profiling was at play as the police used an unfair "racial dragnet" targeting black men before landing on him as their prime suspect. Moreover, the NYPD allegedly used a private and secretive DNA lab to conduct unproven forensics, but they failed to disclose it during Lewis's first trial. Furthermore, there was prosecutorial misconduct that was overlooked. Despite having so many holes in this case, Lewis was still given life without parole, and he is still rotting in prison. This is not exclusive to Lewis as many other black American also sitting inside a prison cell without any proper conviction. This goes to show how systematic racism was built into the justice system. Critical Race theory again proves itself by showing the existence racism in the justice system.

Moving on, I again want to bring forward Wright's *Native Son*, as this text also contains the theme of racial injustice. At the end of the novel, we get to see Bigger's trial, where he is tried for the rape and murder of Mary Dalton. Even though Bigger did commit the crime, the judge and the jury did not bother to listen to Bigger's side of the story, where his lawyer Max brings up how he was raised in a harsh, poor condition and had a terrible upbringing. Max would request the life sentence, but that was overthrown, and the protagonist was given the death penalty. This goes to show the legal system in Chicago in the 1930s was extremely harsh to African Americans, which did not show any mercy whether you had a terrible past or not.

Similar treatment can be seen even today, especially in the African American community. One great example would be the case of Chase Legleitner and Lamar Lloyd in Florida, as both of the convicts were charged with the same crimes on the exact same trial. The judge and the jury of the trial were the same while both men pleaded guilty to their crimes. Even though it looks like they would get similar punishment, they did not, as the white defendant, Chase Legleitner, only got two years and is already out, while the black Lamar Lloyd was given 26 long years in penitentiary and is still rotting inside. The difference is night and day and would spark protests among the community, but it really did not do much. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, it was found that black men serve sentences that are on average 19.1 percent longer than those for white men for similar crimes. There are many other examples, such as when a woman named Pamela Moses was charged with felony as she was trying to vote despite not being eligible; normally, a crime like this will at best get you probation while she gets six years in prison. The case of Michael Avenatti also needs attention, as he tried to extort the company Nike, which is a white

collar crime, but for this he was given two and a half years behind bars. This further drives home how blacks have to face the full wrath of the American legal system. CRT also shows here how the sentencing bias or discrimination is persistent in laws, regulation and courtroom.

I want to talk about a book written by Martin Luther King Jr. himself named *Why We Can't Wait*, which talks about a lot of things related to racial segregation in the United States, specifically focusing on the 1963 Birmingham campaign. But I just want to focus on the injustices that King brings up in this text, starting with the Pupil Placement Law. In 1954, the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation based on race, but only a handful of southern states obeyed the ruling. It was due to the Pupil Placement Law, which allowed states to determine where students went to school based on things like the student's status, family background, and obviously race or ethnicity. As a result, most southern states maintained the status quo of segregation, which led to different schools for blacks and whites.

Now this element that King brought up should be irrelevant right now in the 21st century, as discrimination in educational institutes should be a thing of the past. But the truth is that it is still present, and besides blacks, other ethnicity are also victims of it. The United States has the most top-ranking universities in the world, and many students dream of getting bachelors and masters from there, but recently there has been a push toward diversity in these education institutions. One of the initiatives is that many universities want to use "positive discrimination" in order to achieve diversity on campus. Now the question that is roaming around everyone's mind is: how can discrimination actually be positive? Well, the answer is unclear, but the main objective of the activists is to make sure that there are students of all cultures,

nationalities, genders, ethnicity, and obviously races. According to the department of justice

On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that Harvard and the University of North Carolina's (UNC) undergraduate admissions processes violated the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Court declared that the schools' race-conscious admissions programs were unlawful, effectively prohibiting affirmative action policies.

At first glance, it might look like a good thing, as this push toward diversity would allow many blacks to join universities, but if we take a closer look, it presents a larger issue as you see these top universities are actually dominated by Asian students. In 2016, 58 percent of Asians between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in university, while that number was 36 for blacks and 40 for whites. This information comes from the National Center for Educational Statistics, or NCES, which shows how Asians dominate the academic scene, but that is not the problem. This problem starts when "positive "discrimination" comes into play, which is ready to reject qualified students for the sake of diversity. It should be quite obvious that Asians are the biggest victims of this so-called "positive discrimination." But what about the blacks? Are they victims too? Well, it is hard to tell, but what is possible to say is that the more diverse you are, the more likely you are to get accepted. For example, a person who is half Hispanic, half Russian, or lesbian, using the pronoun they or them, has a higher chance of getting accepted than a straight man or black man, for that matter. This is just the tip of the iceberg, as this goes much deeper, but I would not like to go there and stay focused on my objective. So again Critical Race theory proves it's point but this time, it is the education system.

Now the book *Chokehold: Policing Black Men* by Paul Butler is really something, as it points out how the criminal justice system is designed to criminalize black men. The writer Paul Butler is a former federal prosecutor and also a law professor at Georgetown University Law Center, which gives him much insight into the justice system of the government. Like the title suggests, the systemic oppression of black men is compared to a "chokehold," as the laws, policies, and practices would restrict the freedoms of black men while treating them as potential criminals. During patrol, police officers tend to stop black drivers or passengers more than white ones. The stereotype is that African Americans are being labeled as gangsters, drug dealers, and even murderers. Butler would use new data to demonstrate that white men commit the majority of violent crimes in the United States. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, white men and women were arrested for almost 60 percent of all violent crimes in 2012. The crimes were aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and even murder. After seeing that number, many people will argue that whites are getting more arrested than blacks, but when we bring in the ratio, the truth comes out. The author tells us that despite being 13 percent of the population, blacks are four times more likely to be sent to a correctional facility. A report by the Crime Prevention Research Center, or CPRC, showed us that in 2022, the murder rate among blacks was reported to be 653% higher than the murder rate for whites. This further shows the justice system is racially one-sided in the countries, as blacks are not only getting more conviction but also less justice.

In this book, Butler would also admit his guilt, as he would enjoy prosecuting black men and sending them to prison. But eventually he realized that this system was designed this way to keep the black community from rising. So a change of motivation sparked within him as he now fought for the blacks. Butler brings up how

the law holds enormous power over individuals, as the authorities can decide whom to charge with a crime and what exact crime to charge him with. The power alone determines the punishment of a person rather than a judge or jury.

The book does a great job highlighting issues that were apparent to everyone but were always pushed aside. Now the first thing I want to discuss is Butler's corruption, as he mentions how he enjoyed imprisoning African Americans. It was only that they understood the systematic racism and had a change of heart. I do not intend to throw the author under the bus, but the question that I have is: is it possible that many other prosecutors or people working in the legal field also might share the same former interest as Butler? I respect Butler for understanding his wrongdoing and doing the right thing. But these people might not have. As a result, unfair arrests, trials, sentencing, and many more might still be present in the judiciary. Now obviously, baseless accusations are not pretty things, so let's find some evidence. Now, when we bring up the justice system, the first thing that comes to mind is the police. A report titled "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System" from the NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) covers the traffic stops conducted by the cops, which shows racial bias. This paper deals with a lot of information, as a total of 95 million stops from 21 state patrol agencies and 35 municipal police departments across the country would be analyzed in order to find the correct information without any margin of error. The results were quite similar, as blacks normally stop the most during daylight, but after sunset, the number decreases rapidly, as during the night, it becomes hard to properly identify a person's color or gender. It also mentions how the bar is set lower to search for blacks and Hispanics compared to whites.

Now what I want to add over here is that according to the 4th Amendment, a citizen is safe from any sort of unlawful search or seizure, which makes arbitrary searches by the police illegal. But the police can still search a citizen or his vehicle if he gives consent, probable cause, for the safety of the officer, a search warrant, and so on. When it comes to black men, one of the following boxes will always tick due to the stereotype of being a gangster or even a criminal, which leads to technically mandatory searches. Now all races have a different sense of fashion, and the same is true for blacks, as many like to wear hoodies, tank tops, jays, bandannas, ear piercings, and so on. But the fashion of the black folks obviously creates predetermined prejudice among the cops. The police might use the gangster excuse on them as a search is necessary for their protection, such as a search for a hidden weapon. As the stereotype goes, gang members like to pack heat and do drive-bys. If the gang member excuse does not work, they might also trick them into giving consent using arguments like, If they have nothing to hide, they should allow the cops to search them. Not agreeing to their searches makes him look guilty. So many people, without knowing it, would give in to the police's demands and let them search.

Now many might say, Why do they not retaliate by accusing them of stereotyping and discrimination? The answer to that question will be "obstruction of justice," as the police will treat it as obstructing their work, which could lead to bigger consequences.

Now In the case of prosecutors and judges, things are not much different, as a study titled "Black and white bail judges show bias against black defendants" shows how blacks are more likely to be denied bail than the others. Black defendants are 2.4 percentage points more likely than white defendants to be detained while they await

their court hearings. The bail amount is set even higher; to be precise, it is on average 7,281 dollars more (Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang). Now what I want to add is that the bail is quite outdated, but it is still present. Back in the 19th century or even further back, if the bailed convict got away, you might need to send a bounty to track him down and get him back. The bail money would be used to pay the hunter. But now every citizen's movement and location can easily be tracked by the authorities, which makes it impossible for a bailed convict to get away. Now, like the report says, many black convicts are given higher bail. Combine this with my points about economic inequality, and you have a recipe for disaster. For example, 18-year-old Allen Bullock smashed a traffic cone at an officer during the protest of Freddie Gray's death. Bullock would turn himself in, but his bail would be set at 500,000 dollars (De Graaf). The irony over here is that the bail amount for the killer of Freddie Gray was half of that. Another example would be the incident of JaCari Letchaw, a mother of five. She would be arrested and hit with a 60-grand bail due to a dispute over the ownership of her dogs and puppies (Richardson). By analyzing it through CRT, the systematic discrimination is quite as how does someone gets arrested based on a dispute over puppies. This type of crime is certainly a misdemeanour but Letchaw was arrested for it.

Now that Americans are capitalists, it is no surprise that they even monetized bail bonds, as many bail bond agencies are ready to pay the gigantic bail amount for you. It is obviously not free, as they will happily charge 10 to 15 percent of the bail amount. Normally, bail is returned to the defendant after completing the trial, but the agencies are all business and for profit.

Coming back to the text *Chokehold: Policing Black Men*, we can see the complexity of the justice system. Now, many readers might not be able to follow the entirety of what I discussed, but that is literally the point. Make everything so complicated and confusing that it becomes hard to point out the systematic racism. The only reason some traces of discriminatory justice can be found is due to prosecutors like Paul Butler coming forward and pointing it out. But it is highly unlikely that many other corrupt prosecutor or judges will actually come forward to share their side of the problem.

Based on what I have discussed so far, it seems that black acceptance in America is not completely possible. I mean, sure, they had a black president and other black representatives in the federal states. Moreover, representation in media such as movies and video games has also drastically increased. I mean, Black Adam, a white character from DC comics, is now played by Dwayne Johnson, and Ariel (the white mermaid girl) from *The Little Mermaid* is now played by a black actress named Halle Bailey (IMDB). It is almost like they are trying to make up for the dark past of the blacks. If America really cared about black people so much, why are injustices, especially in the legal system, still present? The truth is that the media and entertainment industries really do not care about blacks, as they are only making products that will sell. If they are able to cater to a black audience by making the hero or heroine black, they would do so. That is exactly what they do in pride months to get LGBTQ people to buy their goods. They will add rainbows to their logo's background during Pride, but they won't do the same in the Middle East. In the same way, the system that determines the freedom or imprisonment of a man does not care if the man is black. Instead, many hidden white supremacists in the system is ready to pulled the wool over black people's eyes through wrongful convictions or unjust

sentencing. Just like Detective John Dillmann from the real-life incident as he wrongfully convicted 20-year-old Raymond flanks for a murder he did not commit, or Prosecutor David Buckley from the fiction *Native Son* as a man sentenced to death despite his harsh life.

Based on this, I want to bring up an essay titled “My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation,” which was written by James Baldwin himself. This essay was written for his nephew, in which he advises him not to waste his time and energy trying to get white people to accept him. Baldwin opens by expressing his profound love for his nephew and sharing stories of his brother, the nephew's father, from childhood to maturity. He considers the passing of time as well as the suffering and labor of those he has seen. The author accuses his nation and fellow citizens of being blind to the systematic racism that has destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives. Baldwin will tell his nephew, “Most of them do not yet really know that you exist,” as he is referring to the white population of America, many of whom are oblivious to the lived experiences of black people. Then Baldwin tells his nephew how to handle these types of people, as the world that he is entering is harsh and cruel. His nephew needs to understand that he should not seek validation from those who are ignorant of his existence and his experiences. Instead, Baldwin encourages his nephew to know his own worth and to find strength in his identity as a black man.

Even though James Baldwin wrote this essay in the 1960s, it is still relevant to this day, as justice is nowhere near close to accepting black men. They are not yet willing to give them proper, unbiased trials, which leads to wrong judgments and unfair punishments. Baldwin used this essay as a lesson for his growing adolescent

nephew, but let this text be a lesson for the children growing up in America, even in the 21st century. For this, I want to bring up the story of Barack Obama, the 44th president of America. Obama had to fight alone, as he did not even receive support from his own father. He had to navigate his identity primarily without his father's presence when his parents divorced when he was a young child and his father moved back to Kenya. This is similar to what Baldwin said about the difficulties black people face in a society that frequently ignores their experiences. Before moving back to Hawaii to live with his grandparents, Obama spent a portion of his early years in Indonesia. At the prestigious private school he attended, he started to realize the conflicts resulting from his mixed-race upbringing. This is consistent with Baldwin's guidance to his nephew about appreciating his own value and not looking to others who are unaware of him for approval.

Now if we look at the texts by Lee, Wright, Baldwin, Butler, and so on, we see how the issues related to racial injustices depicted in their texts, whether it was giving the guilty verdict despite being innocent, giving a harsher sentence despite the convict's rough upbringing, intentionally prosecuting and sending blacks to prison, and so on, are still present in modern days. The living examples are obviously the wrongful conviction of David Sparks, the unfair sentence of Chase Legleitner, the imprisonment of Chanel Lewis without a proper conviction, and many more. This goes to show that racial injustices that were depicted in literary texts that came out decades, if not a century ago, are still present in American society. Through CRT, we can see Lewis, Letchaw and many other blacks were unfairly treated. This approach also helped us to feel the pain and suffering that people like Sparks or Lewis had to endure. If I took a number-only approach, their suffering would never come to light, as ones and zeros cannot evoke emotions.

Police Violence on African-Americans: A Literary Examination

Police violence, or brutality, happens when the police resort to the use of violence without any justified cause. Police are legally allowed to use violence or deadly force in certain cases, such as when a suspect poses a threat, like carrying a firearm, when a suspect is resisting arrest, when a suspect is fleeing, and so on. But often times, when it comes to blacks, deadly force is used without a reasonable reason, as we will see in many literary texts and real-life examples.

According to a statistics by The Washington Post, police shot and killed at least 1,055 people nationwide in 2021. This number is on the rise as it was 1,021 shootings in 2020 and 999 in 2019. Even though Black people accounts for 13 percent of the U.S. population, they were in 27 percent of those fatally shooting last year. This means Black people are twice as likely as white people to be shot and killed by police officers. A study from Harvard T.H. Chan School also shows the same picture as Black Americans are 3.23 times more likely than white Americans to be killed by police.

The novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas has been one of the most used literary text to uphold police brutality on black community in America. The text shows how Starr's old friend Khalil would give her a ride from a party but on the way, a white cop with the badge number 115 would stop them and from there things took a hellish turn. Khalil would ask why they were stopped but the cop would order him out of his car, search him and when he tried to check on Starr, one-fifteen would shoot Khalil killing him in the spot. Based on this incident, the entire country would be in uproar as protest would erupt in Khalil's name but many would label him as a thug, drug dealer and even a gangbanger. Starr who was the witness at scene would find her

self under fire from the police and the drug lords as they wanted to keep her mouth shut. Unlike other novels or books that I covered so far, this novel actually takes place in the 21st century and so it tries to highlight an ongoing problem. This novel does a great job at doing so as we have time and time again how a simple traffic stop would turn into a full-blown shootout. Sometimes the suspect would survive with severe injuries while other times, he would not even make it to the emergency room. Through CRT, we see how blacks are stereotyped to be criminals and this stereotyping is socially constructed to oppress the blacks.

Now before I delve into the real-world incidents, I want to touch upon the subject of how the police are allowed to carry weapons and legally use deadly force but why can the general population not do the same? Many would simply answer that they legally use lethal force to neutralize threats and protect the innocent but what about the time the police themselves are the threat, just like in the case with Khalil. Should we not be able to protect ourselves from the threat? The short answer is no while the long answer is Weber's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Max Weber tells us how the state is created where the authority has a monopoly on the legal use of force. The state can get away with imprisoning, shooting, and even killing but people cannot do the same as it would result in severe consequences.

The very recent event that caught my attention was the incident with Patrick Lyoya that happened in April of 2022. The 26-year-old black man would be stopped at traffic based on improper vehicle registration. The officer at charge would order him out of his car and then after a conversation, both would go to a scuffle on the ground. During this time, the body camera of the officer would turn off but the passenger in Lyoya's car would be recording the incident which shows the cop shooting Lyoya at

the back of the head (Ulcinaite). Based on this incident, protest has sparked among the people similar to Khalil's. They demand the name of the police officer to be public while also removing him from his position. This event mirrors the incident of Khalil from Thomas's text as how both involves unjustified use of lethal force leading to the death of innocent black men. This is just one example as this has been happening forever and it will keep happening until some necessary changes have been made. Many people would bring up the argument how blacks are behind the most felony crimes in America compared to any other races but the truth is other countries like Canada, UK, France also has a large black population but the overall crime rate in their country is nowhere close to the US. For example, up to 10 percent of France's population is estimated to be black but in 2021, their crime rate was 1.14 per 100,000 population. While the black population in US is 14.2 percent while the same year, the crime rate was 6.81 per 100,000 population which is more than six times. This goes to show how the assumption of blacks committing more felonies is socially created stereotype. Again this socially constructed stereotypes supports CRT even further.

Next I want to cover *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely which also has a special take in police brutality as it covers the alternating voices of two black high school studentst. This is comparatively a new novel as it was only in 2015. One of students is Rashad Butler who was brutally beaten by a police officer in the suspicion of attacking a woman. Rashad along with his friends was going to attend their classmate Jill's party and for that Rashad was shopping for chips in Jerry's mart. But things turn for the worse when a lady bumps into her making him drop his bag of chips. When store owner checked the bag, he thought that Rashad was going to steal those chips. When the police officer guarding the store checks on the matter, he thinks that Rashad was assaulting the women. The officer would not give the black student a

chance to explain himself as he would take him outside where Rashad was beaten restlessly. When Rashad tried to move, the officer accused him for resisting and started beating him even harder. This goes show many American's have an established preset in their mind where in any situation or tension, blacks are considered to be the guilty one right of the bat. Over here, the cop considered Rashed to be the troublemaker despite not knowing the full story.

A similar incident happened very recently in January 2023 which mirrors what happened to Rashad. A 29 year old black man named Tyre Nichols was pulled over for reckless driving. The police reports tells us that Nichols ran away as the officers would pursue and apprehend him but the body camera footage says a different story as Nichols did not run as he was initially approached by the cops. The officers would hold Nichols to the ground and use sentence such as “I’m going to beat your a–” and “I’m going to tase your a–,” but Nichols would remain calm throughout all of this and would reply “You guys are really doing a lot right now” (Rojas et al.). Nicolas would break free from their grasp. As he ran away, an officer would deploy a stun gun on him. Later in the footage, several officers were present as two of them held Nichols down, a third would kick him in that condition, a fourth officer would pick up the suspect and strike him in the face and the torso with a baton. As Nichols falls to his knees, several officers kneel and lean over him, while another appears to stand a few feet away, watching. Just like Rashed, Nichols is also a victim of police brutality who used violence with any proper justification. Normally police in USA are allowed to use force in many cases such as the officer fearing for his life, the suspect possessing a weapon and so on but it was not justifiable in either cases.

I briefly want to talk about the aftermath of Rashad and Nichols's incident as both would end up in the hospital after getting thrashed by the police. Rashad would survive his encounter with a broken nose and fractured ribs but the same could not be said about Nichols as he would pass away several days after the traffic stop. This goes to show how the fate of these men could have been much better if it were not for the unjust use of violence which I further explained in Weber's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

Moving on, I want to cover a recent 2017 novel *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone which again showcases how the police assumes any black man involved in any incident to be the suspect and are ready to take action without any justification. This text brings up a black student named Justyce McAllister who was helping his very drunk ex-girlfriend, Melo Taylor, from driving herself home late at night. As Justyce struggles to get Melo into her car, the police arrive. The cops misreads the situation and without any justification, they would grab Justyce, handcuff him, push him to the ground, hit him, and swear at him. Melo's parents arrived at the scene but the police were still not ready let Justyce go. The next day when Justyce arrive at school, he thinks how his run in with the authorities could have easily ended in a bad or in a fatal way but he somehow survived. This goes to show how one bad encounter with the authorities can turn any person's life upside down and this is even more true for blacks due to the ongoing stereotype and mind presets.

In 2014, a young teenager named Michael Brown was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri and this event is actually parallel to what happened to Justyce. Brown along with his friends would be walking down the streets but officer Wilson would stop them for unspecified reason and go on an argument with them

from his Police SUV, during which Wilson would fire at them twice. Brown and Johnson tried to leave but Wilson exited his car to pursue them while at some point Brown turned back around to face Wilson and the officer then fired 12 shots and six of them would hit Brown (BBC News). Wilson claimed he fired in self-defense as Brown charged him, which his friend Johnson denied. In November of that year, the grand jury would refuse to charge officer Wilson with any crime and he would be found innocent.

I would say the incident of Michael Brown to be an extension of what happened to Justyce McAllister as Justyce mentions how his encounter with authorities could have easily ended in a tragedy for him but he luckily got away with minor damage but the opposite happened to Brown who run in with the authorities went horribly which lead to his death. This goes to show one moments you walking down the streets, minding your own business and the next moment a cop stops you for no apparent reason and shoots you to death. This is what African-American's have to live with and not much have change since 2014.

Now I want to cover a fairly recent novel, *Tyler Johnson Was Here*, by Jay Coles, which again shows us that police brutality toward blacks has not changed much over the past decades. It was published in 2018 and covers the death of Tyler Johnson. Tyler and his twin would attend a party at one of their friends homes. But that party would not have a good ending as the police would raid the place, and during the raid, Tyler would get shot. His brother would witness his shooting, which left him terrified and traumatized. Since it was a fairly recent real story, Tyler's death would spread like wildfire on social media, especially on Twitter, using hashtags to uphold what happened to Tyler.

Now normally, I would draw comparisons with real-life incidents that are similar to the novel, but Tyler's story is not fiction to begin with. The text "Tyler Johnson Was Here" alone serves as a literary text and a real-world recent incident. Tyler's incident might not get labeled as police brutality, as many might call it misjudgment as it was not intentional. The police might have misidentified Tyler or caught him at a moment when he posed a threat to the police. But like I said, the police or authority has a monopoly on violence as they can legally use it while you or the people cannot. Why could Tyler not defend himself from the so-called "misjudgment or wrong identification" from the police? Why did he have to pay with his life for someone else's mistake? The answer is obviously Weber's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Due to this reason, police brutality among blacks almost stayed the same despite so much time passing by.

Now if we look anywhere, whether it is the literary texts from authors such as Thomas, Reynolds, Kiely, Stone, and so on, or the real-life incidents from people like Micael Brown, Tyre Nichols, Tyler Johnson, and so on, or the statistical data from the US Census Bureau, Harvard, The Washington Post, and so on, You cannot deny that police violence is still persistent among blacks in America. A lot of the times this violence occurs due to the stereotype of blacks being wrongdoers and CRT tells us how this socially constructed element is holding the African American community back. By analyzing this through literary texts, we were able to understand the suffering of people like Tyler Johnson and Michael Brown, who were unjustifiably killed. A statistics- or numerical-only approach would not let us understand or feel the pain of the victims.

Mass Imprisonment of blacks and the Power of Literature

Mass incarceration is literally a term used in the US to refer to the country's high rate of imprisonment for both adults and youth. Now the correctional facilities in the US do house a lot of inmates of different skin color but that number and ratio is actually the highest for blacks. The black population in America is 18 percent but as of 2023, 38.6 percent of blacks are locked behind bars (Federal Bureau of Prisons). A literary analysis for this is also necessary as many might not know what actually goes on behind the close cells of prison in America.

The first text that comes into my mind is *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander as mass incarceration is at its core. Alexander brings up how the authorities use the excuse of war on drugs to enforce traditional, as well as new modes of discrimination and oppression. In the author's own words "a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow". What she is trying to say over here is that the system America follows to serve justice and incarcerate criminals is racially biased but it is disguised in a such a way that it does not appear as so. Moreover, this system is a very similar pattern to the infamous Jim Crow law. As a result, Alexander labels this legal current system as the "New Jim Crow"

Before I get back into the text, I want to briefly talk about the old Jim Crow law that came into existence after the civil war. It is a collection of laws with the sole purpose of legalizing racial segregation as it would deny them the right to vote, hold jobs, get an education, or other opportunities. Defying Jim Crow laws can often lead to arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence, and even death. This law would also state in

detailed when, where, and how formerly enslaved people could work, and for how much compensation. It also forced black citizens into indentured servitude, control where they lived and how they traveled, and to seize children for labor purposes. This law came into existence right after the civil war immediately after the ratification of the 13th amendment which abolished slavery and it last until 1968.

The author tells the reader that the “New Jim Crow” is a resurrection of the old one. Similar to the class Jim Crow, It sweeps people, especially people of color, into the criminal justice system, brands them as criminals and felons, and then releases them into a permanent second-class status where they are stripped of basic civil and human rights. Basically where the old law would strips blacks from basic rights and needs, the new one will do the same by putting them behind bars. I have already mention how CRT tells us that racism has been embedded in different aspects like laws and regulations. The same way the “New Jim Crow” is the result of that intergration.

The old law forbid blacks from voting. According to the “New Jim Crow”, you cannot vote if you are in prison. The classic Jim Crow does not let you hold jobs or position as blacks are only limited to working as chauffeurs, butlers, maids and so on. The new one lets you do jobs that available inside a prison like prison janitor, prison chef and so on. During the old Jim Crow era, education was not allowed for the colored people and the same is happening in the new era as educational support is literally non existent inside.

More or less, you could say that history is repeating itself. From my perspective, this so called “New Jim Crow” is very real as it is embedded with the justice system. To find further evidence of it’s existence, one can just simply look at

the prison population as it speaks for itself. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, as of 9 December 2023, blacks makes up 38.6 percent of the inmates while the number for white is only 57.3 percent. Now compared this to ratio of the general US population where Whites make up the 60 percent of the entire country while blacks make up only 18 percent. For white, the percentage of nation and prison population is very close being 60.1 and 57.3. But that number for the African American is a day and night difference as 18 percent in population and 38.6 percent in prison. This statistical data further proves CRT's point

Now the question that arises from this statistic is that how is it even possible? The report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows us 60 percent of the felonies are committed by the white man and woman. The answer to that question is already given by Michelle Alexander as it is "New Jim Crow". The "New Jim Crow" is comparable to the USA's invasion of Iraq. US convinced it's people that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and ruled by a dictator. So it is their duty overthrow Saddam Hussein and establish democracy. But their true intent was obviously gain controls of the countries oil reserves. The same way the justice system was able convince people that the blacks are gangsters, gangbangers and even murders in order to justify their imprisonment. But the truth is that they just want keep them indirectly oppressed.

We talked about novels, books, poets and so much else but now I want to bring a memoir from an African American inmate named *Solitary* by Albert Woodfox with Leslie George. This inmate is obviously Woodfox himself while George helped him with the writing. Woodfox would actually experience four decades solitary confinement as he would spend 23 hours everyday in a 6 by 9 foot cell in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. The memoir begins with the author waking up

in his birthday and getting released from prison. The first thing Woodfox does after getting out is visiting her mother's grave. Her mother Ruby Edwards, who had him when she was 17. She was "proud, determined, and beautiful" and instilled in Woodfox the importance of keeping his word.

Woodfox's life was marred by poverty and discrimination which forced to join the crime life. He would arrested for stealing a car and fleeing police, although he did not steal the vehicle, and was still sent to Angola prison. According to Woodfox's description, Angola as a brutal place where assault and rape were like a pandemic and the guards were all white and was called 'freemen'. They had the power of life and death in their hands and they had no respect for life". Luckily for Woodfox, he was able to established a reputation for being tough, which protected him from the worst of the abuse by other inmates. But the mistreatment from guards and prisoners was to the only issue as Angola pretty much had every problem imaginable. There were no fans on the tier, there was no access to ice, no hot water in the sinks in the cells, prisoners in CCR were not allowed to make phone calls, pest infestation was also a thing.

When it comes to discrimination, wrongful conviction is the first thing as Woodfox along with his three prison mates were convicted of the 1972 murder of a prison guard, Brent Miller. They believed their false conviction and subsequent treatment were punishments for their Black radicalism. Moreover, this murder was overturned by the US appeal court as his conviction was secured. In 1993, he was reindicted for the same murder while it was led by an all white jury.

This text show the harsh condition of American prison from the perspective of a black man. This gives us idea of what is actually going on inside the correctional

facility. First of all, the unfair convictions of Woodfox needs to be addressed as it show how the blacks are right from the start considered guilty. The saying “Innocent until proven guilty” does not apply to them as instead it is opposite which is “Guilty until proven innocent”. I want bring up the case of Raymond Flanks as this man lost pretty much everything due to the racial bias of the justice system.

According to the national registry of extortion, Flanks arrested two days after Christmas in 1983 as he was being charged with the murder of Martin Carnesi. The murder happened during a failed robbery and the victim’s wife was able rember the murder driving old blue car and having white blotch on his face. Flanks drove fresh new blue car and he did not have any botch on his face. Detective John Dillmann fully asserted that Flanks was the suspect despite having mismatch with the testimony. But regardless Dillmann falsely testified that Carnesi’s spouse told him the perpetrator’s only notable facial characteristic was a mustache and this information was hidden from the jury. Flanks was found guilty and spend 40 years behind bars. He was 20 during his arrest, 60 was his age when he got out (National Registry of Exonerations). This shows how racial disparity can destroy a man’s life. The texts of Woodfox and Butler showed how police officers, prosecutors and even judges were racially biased but Flanks even shows that even Detective possess this type of thing. The man not only lost more half of his life behind bar but also the chance of higher education, starting a family, having a successful career and many more just like David Sparks. Even though Flanks lost everything, he was still grateful as his name got cleared. The story Flanks is a living example which shows the implantation of racial bias in the legal system

Flanks is not a rare case as many blacks would also have a similar fate like him. Jerry Davis wrongfully convicted of first degree murder also spent 40 year behind bars, Thomas Raynard James lost 30 years also for a false conviction, Maurice Hastings spent 38 years in the can for a wrongful conviction of rape. As of this writing, some black man is still rotting inside a penitentiary for a crime he did not do.

If this type of incident does not make you believe that mass incarceration was created to hold back and even ruin black lives, nothing will. But despite this being nightmarish scenario, this is just scratching the surface. Woodfox brings up assaults and rape in the Angola penitentiary which was an everyday occurrence. What if I tell you that this has not changed much as infamous lines like “Don’t drop the soap in there” exists due to stuff like this.

According to a statistics by Rainn, an estimated 80,600 prisoner are victim of sexual violence every year. Among them 60% of all sexual violence against inmates is perpetrated by jail or prison staff while 50% of them were illegal and nonconsensual (Rainn). Combine that with the fact that 38.6 percent of the prisoners are black, then you know many innocent blacks are a victim sexual exploitation. To counter this, the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 was initiated but it was complete failure as the number of sexual assaults remained the same (Rowell-Cunsolo, 54-62). A study titled “Exposure to Prison Sexual Assault among Incarcerated Black Men” by Tawandra L. Rowell-Cunsolo, Roderick J. Harrison and Rahwa Haile did an experiment where they question randomly 134 incarcerated black men among 54 percent admitted to hearing about sexual violence inside the prison while 16 percent of them directly or visually witnessed it (54-62). Now when it comes to “Don’t drop the soap” it happens in the showers as all the inmates showers together in one big room. But this type of

incident are more about power imbalance rather than anything else as the most powerful and dominant prisoners can create an unofficial prison gang and have their way inside. This group is also safe from any sort of sexual violence that goes on. In the memoir “Solitary”, Woodfox told us he was able to establish himself tough guy or dominant which prevented him from any sort of situation like this. But not everybody was as lucky as Woodfox.

Now I did find information related to African American inmates who faced sexual violence during their time behind bars. But keeping ethical concerns in mind, I would not disclose their name or even talk about their related incident in a way to show respect and maintain their privacy.

Now I would like to take a break from the novels and books to read some short stories, and one of them is *The Goophered Grapevine* by Charles W. Chesnutt. This story follows an unnamed narrator and his wife, Annie, as they plan to buy a plantation that's overrun with wild grapes. They meet Julius McAdoo, who was a former slave on the plantation. The slave warns them that the plantation is cursed as he tells the story of the former owner, Dugal McAdoo, who used to produce grapes for wine. But the grapes were so juicy and delicious that many slaves would start stealing them. So a local conjurer named Aunt Peggy would perform a conjuring where she told the slaves that anyone who stole them would die within a year.

In today's world, you cannot use elements like curses or anything voodoo-related to deter people from stealing or doing any crime, as people have become less religious or faithful than they were centuries ago. So a new system of control or power needed to be implemented to prevent people from committing crimes, and this system is none other than Panopticism by Michel Foucault. It is used heavily in prison

keep them from committing any crime and this is also used in case of mass imprisonment

Now we need to know about Panopticon before Panopticism, as it was a building structure for a prison where the sole focus was to allow a single security guard to observe all the inmates in the building. It was originated by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, who suggested that this could also be applied to other institutions such as hospitals, schools, sanatoriums, and so on. The structure of the Panopticon has a rotunda with an inspection house at the center. From there, the manager or a security guard can watch the inmates without them knowing they are being watched.

Foucault takes Bentham's idea and runs with it by introducing panopticism, which refers to power through surveillance. A power that is maintained through visibility as a central authority observes a population, but the individuals being watched are not fully aware of their monitoring. If a person walks inside a building and sees the sight of "area under surveillance" or something similar, regardless of whether the person is being watched or not, he will try to keep from committing any crime. The same goes for the black ethnicity, as previously, curses or bewitching were used to keep slaves from stealing the harvest. Now blacks are being observed through surveillance cameras or any other means to keep them from committing crime.

Now a question might arise: panopticism or power through surveillance is not exclusive to blacks, as this also applies to other ethnicities in the prison. That is true, but blacks have often been subjected to more intense and systemic forms of surveillance due to racial profiling and systemic racism. This has led to a higher level of intrusion and control. For example, in many American shops, whether it is Walmart,

Target, or even a basic general store, a black customer is always kept under heavier surveillance compared to any other ethnicity. Sometimes the shop owner or the mall cop might constantly be following the person, making sure that he does not steal anything. Now, this is not my observation, as many studies and reports confirm its existence. According to research published in *The Guardian*, almost 90% of African American consumers reported having encountered racial profiling throughout their shopping experiences. Another study by DealAid.org found that 90% of customers who identify as black or African American have encountered racial profiling while making in-store purchases. This kind of behavior can be simply labeled as racial bias.

So in the same way, when the blacks in prison are doing basic tasks like reading a book, doing exercises, eating lunch or dinner, and so on, the guards will keep a heavier eye on that particular group of people. Many people might say that this is a good thing as it would deter criminals from doing any crime, but the application of panopticon or panopticism is flawed as one particular group will be heavily observed while the others will be observed lightly.

So we can see how blacks are also victims of getting massively incarcerated in a country that already imprisons its people more than any other region. But if we only looked at statistics like those from the US Census Bureau, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or any other information collected through surveys or interviews, we would have gotten our answer, but an emotional response would be impossible, and in the same way, understanding the victims' agony and misery would also remain incomplete. So, from a literary standpoint, we learned about the horror of the old Jim Crow and how it did not go away. Instead, a newer, refined version of this is in play in the 21st century, which the author Michelle Alexander labels the "New Jim Crow."

Further, the memoir of Woodfox showed us the horrors of prisons and what exactly goes on behind those walls. Woodfox had to spend 44 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. The same way we understood the pain of many real-life victims like Raymond Flanks, who spent 40 years behind bars when he was 60, In other words, his life was ruined. This kind of understanding is only possible from a literary standpoint while CRT helps me to drive that point home.

The Need for Addressing The Contemporary African American Issues through Literature

Now, after addressing all of the following issues with content, comparative analysis, and data analysis, why should someone use literature to address the problems that persist in the black community? I have already given this answer multiple times, but I will say it again, as literature can be used to understand and feel the pain and agony of certain individuals or groups of individuals. An entirely data-based or quantitative approach will not allow any interference of human emotions as it is strictly business. Now my paper is not entirely qualitative, as I also took the help of the quantitative approach, but it was not my sole focus as I put qualitative first and then quantitative.

Now the question that a lot of people might ask is: What is the point of understanding the pain and suffering of individuals from the African American community? Shouldn't a data- or interview-based approach be enough? The answer is quite obvious. For example, in 2022, an estimated 17.1 percent of the black population will suffer from poverty (US Census Bureau). When you put it like that, those 17.1 percent of the people are completely faceless, as we do not know them or about anything they are going through right now. But when I bring forth the story of Bigger from *Native Son* or the story of real people like Lewis or Sparks, you can understand what they are going through, and instead of treating them as numbers, you treat them as human beings. This alone makes a huge difference. So this is why I believe understanding the pain and suffering of individuals, whether they are black or from any other community, is important.

The last and most evident question is: why should anybody continue to address contemporary African American issues using literature? Beside all the reasons that I have given so far, I can only think of two more. The first is that I did my best to cover many notable writers from different time periods, but despite that, many authors were not able to make it to this paper, so if anybody is interested, he or she should continue from where I left off. The second is the lack of ethnography, as I do not live in America. So anybody who is currently or in the future residing in the US can easily add this method and use their personal observation to enhance their paper. Beside all of this, I really do not see any particular reason why anybody should not use this kind of approach to analyzing African American issues.

Now I have obviously utilized Critical Race Theory, or CRT, in my paper. Should everyone stick to this theory? Well, it depends, as CRT is powerful in addressing the systematic racism in different aspects of life in America. But then again, theories like structural functionalism, conflict theory, labeling theory, and so on can also be utilized for addressing contemporary black issues with the help of literature. And obviously, I used one part of CRT as that theory also aims to eliminate systematic discrimination, which can also be utilized in papers that aim to solve the issues that was upheld in this paper.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that African American literature can be a great tool in addressing contemporary problems in the black community, such as racial injustice, economic inequality, police brutality, and mass incarceration, that have persisted in America for a long time. Through this, we can not only show how these problems mostly remained the same throughout the decades but also show it while addressing the victims of these problems in a more humane manner. Through this, we can not only understand human pain and suffering but also resolve it so that no one ever has to be in that same position again.

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Appendix A: A Statistics showing the ratio of wrongful conviction between black and non-black inmates

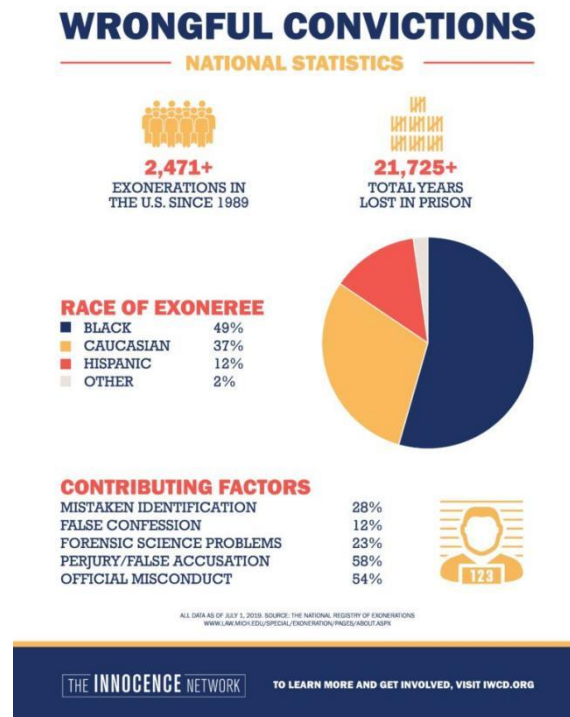


Figure 1: A Statics by the US Bureau of Justice

Appendix B: A Statistics showing the unemployment rate among different ethnicity

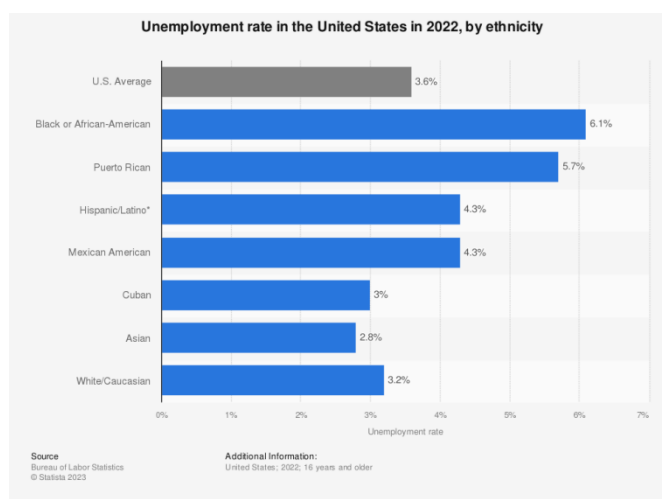


Figure 2 : Unemployment by ethnicity statistics by US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Appendix C: A Statistics showing the home ownership rate among different race

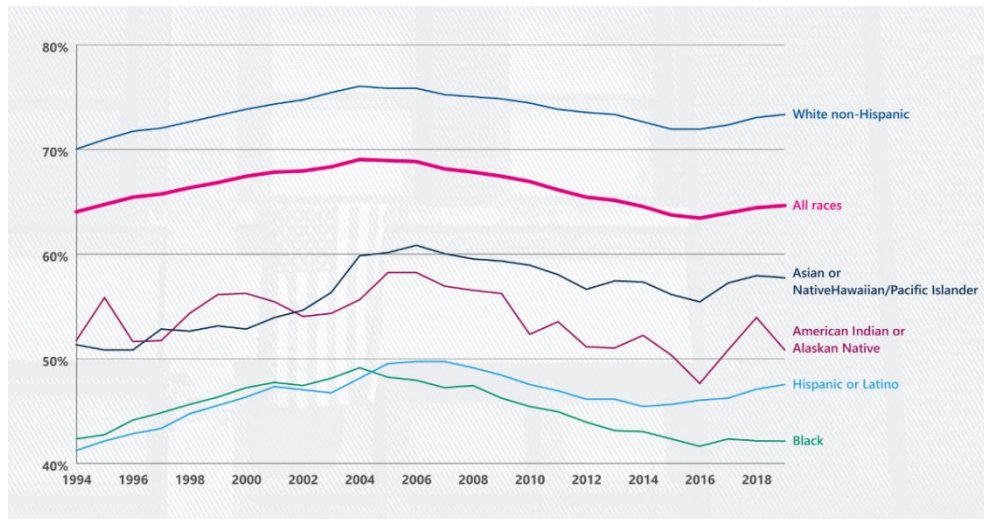


Figure 3: A statistics on homeownership rate by race by Census Bureau

Appendix D: A Statistics showing the ratio of race in the US population

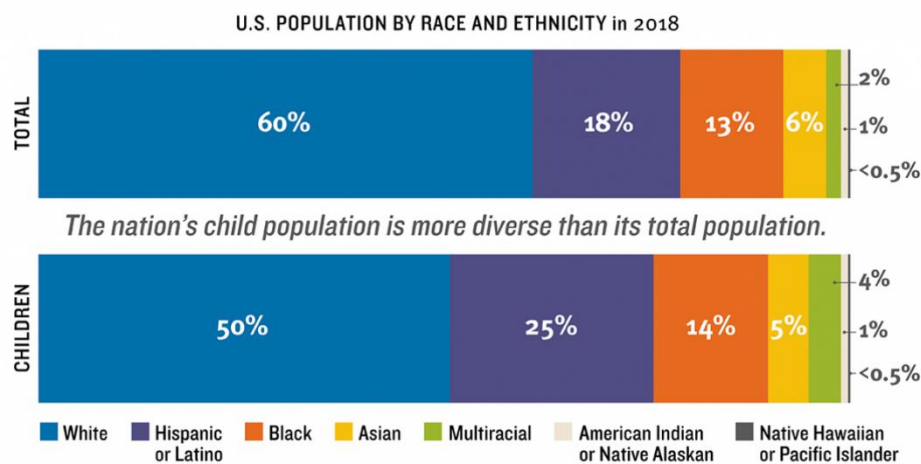


Figure 4: A ratio of US population by Race and Ethnicity by the Census Bureau

Appendix E: A Statistics showing the enrollment of a university by race

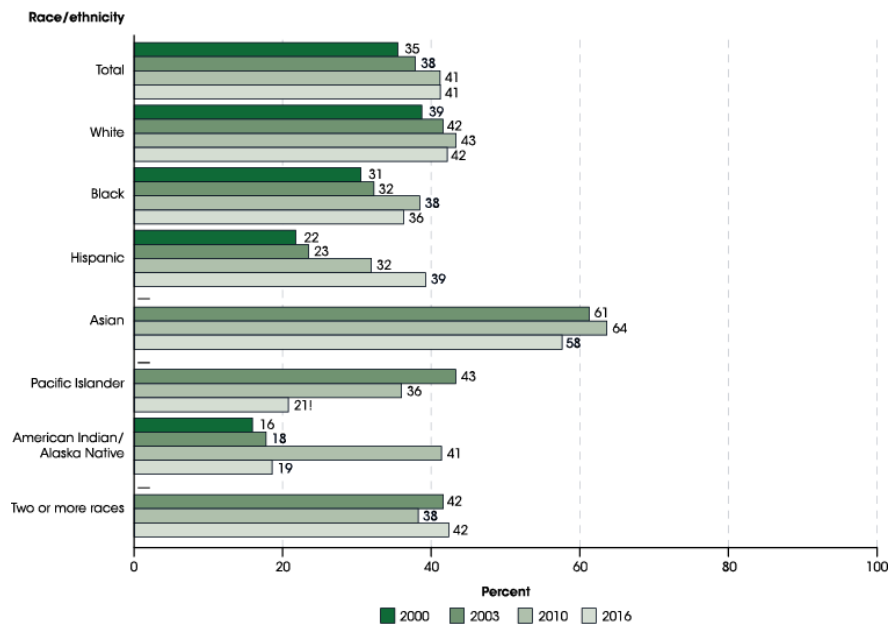


Figure 5: A statistics on college/university enrollment per year by race
(From California State University)

Appendix F: A Statistics showing ratio of the prison population by race



Figure 6: A statistics on the prison population by race

Appendix G: An Image showing how a Panopticon looks like



Figure 7: Panopticon by Jeremy Bentham (Panopticism)

Appendix H: An Statistic showing median rents in California

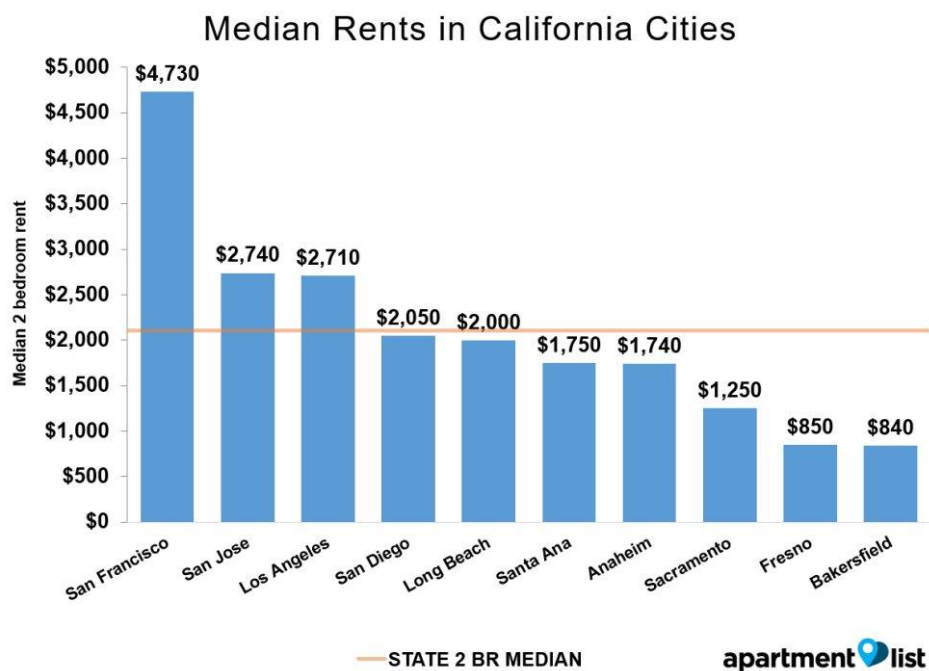


Figure 8 : Rental in California statistics by Apartment list