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**The Representation of Racialized Police
Violence in Richard Wright's *The Man Who
Lived Underground* (2021)**

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the Requirements for a **Master degree in English Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

To my parents,

To Farid and Syfax,

To Sarah and Moussa,

To Manel,

To Lytecia and Amelia,

To Tinhinane and Lina,

To Fatima and Lila,

To Samir and his wife Nadia,

To Lydia, Sabine, and Dina,

And to Lou.

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Abstract

This investigation is a part of a contemporary critical debate about race, culture, and literature. The present research is a study of Richard Wright's novel *The Man Who Lived Underground* in the light of New Historicism and Critical Race Theory. The novel was punished in 2021 after eighty years of censorship and it explores the issues of police violence and racial prejudice. The purpose of this study is to examine the anatomy racialized police brutality and its representation in the selected novel. The conclusions reached through our study will lead to a better understanding of how race bias, racial profiling, and police abuse in USA are intertwined and institutionalized.

Key Words: Police violence, systemic racism, New Historicism, Critical Race Theory, African American Literature.

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List of abbreviations

The Man Who Lived Underground: MHLU

“Memories of my Grandmother”: “MMG”

Critical Race Theory: CRT

“In America, it is traditional to destroy the black
body—it is heritage.”

Ta-Nehisi Coates.

General Introduction

I. Background of the Study

African American literature is as much interesting as its history. This literature reflects a tragic history of discrimination, disfranchisement, and criminalization. African Americans' stories and history still affect the contemporary reader. Slavery gave birth to a unique literary genre: slave narratives, which documented the physical and psychological violence experienced by slaves and former slaves. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) is a story that describes brutality, resistance, the importance of education and knowledge, and the yearning for freedom.

African American literature is in many ways a representation of experiences lived by black people from slavery until now. In the early twentieth century, writers like W.E.B. Du Bois tried to capture the meaning of being a black person in America. Du Bois, who introduced the concept of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), said: "One ever feels his twoness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (8). Later, other writers began to contest with their words for parity and justice and denounce racial violence and criminalization of African Americans.

Among the common issues discussed in African American literature since the abolition of slavery, we find police cruelty and systemic racism. Many American authors like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin engaged in writing about these issues. Wright's novel *Native Son* (1940) and his memoir *Black Boy* (1945) have been for many scholars and readers considered the first literary documentaries which have mirrored the real conditions of the black community mainly in the South. Among Wright's unpublished works is the less famous novel *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1941) which explores the questions of police violence and racial prejudice. It is important to know that the novel was rejected for publication

by Harper & Brothers at that time. Consequently, Wright had to adjust the novel to publish only a portion of it. The novel was reduced to a short story which appeared in his collection *Eight Men* in 1961. Last year, on April 20th, 2021, and for the first time, the work was published at its full length.

Richard Wright was one of the first writers who discussed segregation and racial injustice in early twentieth-century United States literature. His works gained fame and were influential in his deep descriptions of the segregated life in the south under Jim Crow laws. Among these works are *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), which is a collection of short stories, *Native Son* (1940), and *Black boy* (1945). Milton Moskowitz declared in his article "The Enduring Importance of Richard Wright" that these novels made Wright the first who exposed the persecutions in the South with "such emotional power" (58) and even helped to steam the way to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.

Writers defined Richard Wright's perspective and influence differently. They differed in the way Wright presented the black person in the context of the racist society, and how he was reflecting the African-American experiences. For instance, James Baldwin disagreed with Wright's idea that literature could be a weapon, a means of protest. In his "Everybody's Protest Novel", Baldwin criticized Wright's *Native Son* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the simple image they gave of the black person, and their denial of its purity and beauty. In Baldwin's view, Wright destroyed the representation of the black race in his fiction mainly in the character Bigger Thomas. Baldwin stated that Bigger's fate is the outcome of his acceptance of being the way others defined him: a criminal. He further said that the novel failed to be a protest novel because it denied the humanity of black people (23).

In "Black Boys and Native Sons" (1963), Irving Howe said:

The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies . . . Richard Wright's novel brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence, that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture. (354-355)

In his study of Wright's perspective regarding Baldwin's attack on him, Howe argued that Wright's portrayal of terror and violence in the black person was because they represented his world which in many ways formed him. He further argued that the violence of the oppressor instills in the oppressed fear, hatred, and anger which then drove him into embracing that violence towards the oppressor himself (355).

Our selected novel deals with police brutality and systemic racism against black Americans. It is a story of a black man named Fred Daniels who is accused of a double murder that he has not committed. Unfortunately, Daniels is found to be the first black man near the scene of the crime that the police encounter. He is arrested by three police officers: Murphy, Lawson, and Johnson and is brought directly to a police station because they believe strongly that he is the criminal. Once at the police station, Daniels is tortured by the police until he loses consciousness. They beat him force him to confess the crime of the white couple. Being out of control and with all the physical pain he was feeling, they also force him to sign a document in which he confesses the crime. The paper is brought by the District Attorney, and with the other three officers, they push him to sign that state. Later, Daniels succeeds to escape to the underground by entering a manhole that leads to the underground in which he stays for three days. Once there, Daniels questions existence and reality, he seeks to define his own identity,

and he gives new meanings to things considered highly Important in the above world. In the darkness of his cave, money, diamonds, golden watches, and other items are made for decoration and have no value to him. He gains a kind of knowledge and reality about the world and wants to share it with people aboveground. Indeed, Daniels comes back to the above world to the three policemen. They burn the confession paper and grant him freedom; still, Daniels insists to take them to his cave to see his discoveries. When they finally accepted to accompany him to the sewers, Lawson shoots him dead when he was descending to the sewers. The reason why he kills him is because Daniels represents a threat to them because he knows the truth of the American democracy. Daniels dies with this secret and with his bitter experience without seeking justice like many real cases in the history of African Americans in the United States

II. Problem Statement

An examination of police violence, black criminality, and systemic racism in Richard Wright's unpublished novel *The Man Who Lived Underground* relying on New Historicism and Critical Race Theory. If the issues of the novel are relevant in both the context of the novel and in the contemporary period, I suggest that racial bias in police departments still plays a role in their practices and that equality for African Americans is not fully achieved.

III. Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

A. Objectives of the Study

This study explores the issue of police violence, black criminality, and systemic racism in Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* relying on New Historicism and Critical Race Theory. The former explores the socio-historical and political context that the novel mirrors and the latter is significant for the concept of systemic racism in the criminal justice system in the current times. Using New Historicism, this paper strives to show how literature can inform about

history like nonliterary works. Additionally, this analysis aims to show the relevance of the novel despite the eighty years of censorship. By doing so, it highlights the fact that racism in the criminal justice system and in police practices still exists.

B. Research Questions

- How did the author of *MWLU* depict racial prejudice and police brutality in the 1940s?
- How can a 1941 novel be relevant in 2021?

IV. The Significance of the Study

Even though the *MWLU* has been studied as a short story, its full version remained unpublished for eighty years. Being published in 2021 in its complete version, and up to my knowledge, the *MWLU* has few dedicated studies. The present research is an analysis of the novel as a whole focusing on the issue of police violence and implicit racism both in the era of its creation and the time of publication.

V. Rational and Criteria for Primary Text Selection

The protests which followed the death of George Floyd in the USA and all over the world and my passion for black literature have triggered my interest to read protest literature. The Black Lives Matter movement reignited academic research on police violence and racism. Consequently, it had a tremendous impact on my choice of topic of research. I discovered Richard Wright's novel by chance when doing research on the matter. While reading the novel, I was surprised to learn that George Floyd's case was not an isolated incident. Richard Wright, in fact, had warned against police violence in his novels many decades before George Floyd's death.

VI. Literature Review

As mentioned above, *MWLU* was censored for eighty years. The review of

literature is based on studies conducted on themes related to the novel—works that explore violence and discrimination against African Americans.

Baldwin, one of the black writers whose words still affect and reflect the experiences of African-Americans, wrote an essay, entitled “A Report from Occupied Territory”, in July 1966, about the issue of police violence and false accusations against blacks. Baldwin attempted to describe living in Harlem that he described as an “occupied territory” because it was controlled and surrounded by police. He argued that the role of the police in the black community was to keep them down to achieve whites’ objectives, and the law was made to protect citizens. Baldwin shed light on Harlem Six: a group of young men who were accused of crimes they did not commit and were beaten deadly by police. Additionally, he showed how the black community was on a daily basis a target of police and how black Americans were mistreated and under the threat of being killed.

Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote a memoir in a form of a letter to his son entitled *Between the World and Me* (2015). It is a book that explored the issue of police violence, fear, and racism in the American society. Its title derived from Richard Wright’s poem “Between the World and Me” and Coates used a section of the poem as an epigraph of his memoir. The two works express an intense fear—as an impact of violence—that creates a curtain between the world and the authors. In his book, Coates tried to capture and describe the way of “[living] within a black body” (12). For him, the black body has gone through brutality since its arrival to the United States. He said: “White America’s progress, or rather of those Americans who believe that they are white, was built on looting and violence” (6). In this sense, Coates explained that black people’s bodies in the United States were made to be “breakable” (18). Furthermore, Coates was touched by the death of Prince Jones who was killed by the police and he referred in his memoir

to police shootings of black teenagers—such as Eric Garner, John Renisha McBride, Tamir Rice— to explain how the black body could be easily destroyed (9). He said, addressing to his son: “the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body . . . The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions” (9).

In his article “Experiences of African-Americans as Reflected in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* 1940” (2016), Fatchul Mu’in investigated the representation of the conditions of African-Americans from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1940s. The researcher Mu’in relied on interdisciplinary and expressive approaches to provide a description of the experiences of African American community through a study of the main character Bigger Thomas and an examination of the interactions between whites and blacks to show the impact of injustice on their everyday life. Bigger's story, according to the researcher, is a reflection of the discrimination which exists in law and depicts the injustices in legislation as well as the difference in judgments between whites and blacks (63). In addition to the impact on the political, cultural, social, occupational, and educational spheres, white dominance affects “law protection or law enforcement” (69). He added that whites tended to maintain their supremacy and to keep the image of African-Americans as criminals through the use of violence such as lynching (69).

In his study entitled “The Projection of Racism in Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*” (2016), Azeez Darbaz Sadeq explored the concept of violence against African-Americans during the era of Jim Crow using instances from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. He started by giving an overview of segregation and describing how whites were trying by violent means to erase the black race. He argued that African-Americans have gone through cruel situations mainly in the south because they attempted to gain their social rights (69). In *Black Boy*, Wright narrated his

experiences with whites and how he was raised in a violent environment both at home and outside. According to Sadeq, Wright described through his own story how the Jim Crow laws affected black families to the point that they used to defend themselves using also violence to survive (78).

Additionally, 13th is a documentary produced by the filmmaker Ava DuVernay in 2016. She interviewed several authors, critics, and lawyers such as Angela Davis, Michelle Alexander, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. among many others. DuVernay traced the history of racial injustices against African-Americans and how it has developed in the contemporary era into new means of oppression. Additionally, she provided many real examples of black persons including kids who lost their lives because of the racial prejudice of police officers. This documentary endeavored to expose that mass incarceration and police brutality in the United States replaced slavery and the thirteenth amendment was made to enslave black people again but in prisons and the proof is that they represent 42% of incarcerated people. Michelle Alexander said: “It seems that in America, we haven’t so much ended racial caste, but simply redesigned it”. The interviewees pointed out that black people were always, and still, regarded as criminals and falsely accused of committing crimes, and more likely to be murdered than other people.

“Black Lives Have Always Mattered! Two Protest Novels of Violence, Inequality, and [Oppression]: Native Son and Go Tell It On the Mountain” (2021) by Bakşı Yalçın Olgahan is a comparison between Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940) and James Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953). The study demonstrates that Wright, before writing his other novel, was trying to raise consciousness and expose the consequences of inequality in the United States (173). The actions of Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of Native Son, are the outcome of the uncontrollable environment of brutal violence that African-Americans could not hold or dominate (175).

According to my literature review, several studies focused on the themes of racial violence and police brutality against African Americans, but none has explained the relationship between systemic racism and police violence in Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground*.

VII. Structure

The present research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter "Methodology and Theoretical Approach" aims to explain New Historicism and Critical Race Theory. The chapter refers to notions and concepts that are related to our topic. The second chapter is entitled "The Roots of 'Racialized' Police Brutality". Its purpose is to place the novel in the socio-historical and political background highlighting the history of police violence and racial prejudice. The last chapter is entitled "Ideal Topography for an Aggravated Assault in Wright's Novel". It explores the issues of police racial practices and black criminality as well as systemic racism from new perspectives. The main findings are summarized in the General Conclusion.

Chapter 1: Methodology and Theoretical Approach

I. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of New Historicism and CRT and explains the key concepts, goals, and principles. Because our study is context-oriented, we have opted for two widely known theoretical practices: New Historicism and CRT. The following sections will fully concentrate on methodology and theories as well as theorists' conception and understanding of power, violence, and racial prejudice. It should be underlined that both New Historicism and CRT interested in the marginalized groups in the society.

II. New Historicism

New historicism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and brought new important concepts and principles to the realm of literary criticism. The major difference between New Historicism and Historicism lies in the way both see history and literature. 'History', as a term, cannot be easily defined or explained exclusively. In contemporary literary studies, history can be understood differently by authors, critics, or researchers.

According to Old Historicists, any literary work must be analyzed in relation to history but not as an isolated element. History affects literature and not the opposite; as a result, literature exists and is analyzed within history. The latter is placed in the background and literature in the foreground and this means that a work of art cannot exist outside the historical environment. M. A. R. Habib, in *A History of Literary Criticism* (2005), claimed that works of art from an Old Historicist perspective "are determined in both their form and content by their specific historical circumstances, their specific situation in time and place" (760). Old Historicists believed that there was only one history and only one meaning of a particular event or period in history

New Historicism gives equal importance to literature and history. According to proponents of New Historicism like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, and Michel Foucault, literary texts can function the same way as non-literary texts stating that history itself is a text and literature can also reveal a historical fact or a certain truth (Habib 761). Pramod K Nayar in *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* (2010), argued that we have access to history through texts written by historians, and the latter were also influenced by the environment that surrounds their lives and context. Accordingly, the writing of history involves as well the subjectivity of the historian in the same way literature requires the subjectivity of the author. This means that literature affects and is affected by history.

Habib added that the literary text is “not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses – religious, political, economic, aesthetic – which both shaped it and, in their turn, were shaped by it” (761). New Historicism supports the idea that culture, politics, religion, history, and literature are not unified but interrelated social constructs with equal importance and function, and they are referred to as “discourses”. These various discourses help to give meaning to the text about external factors. Literary works, in view of what has been said so far, are analyzed by considering the political, economic, and cultural contexts that stimulated their production. At this point, it should be reminded that the life experiences of the author can be very essential to unravel the text's meaning.

Additionally, Nayar elucidates the ideas that New Historicism shares with Marxism mainly in social relations since New Historicism gives importance to the marginalized in a particular society. Referring to the “other” and the “subaltern” in a society leads to the existing differences between classes and between racial groups. Whenever there is a marginalized group, there is automatically a dominant group. The shared ideas of the mentioned theories lie in the

way cultural forms (history, politics, or literature) of a specific historical time support the dominant group or try to rebel against it.

New Historicism considers culture as a text, but culture in its turn, as Nayar clarifies, consists of many forms —such as history, literature, or art. A new historicist study yearns to relate these traces and show how they contribute to shaping the cultural meaning and yet the meaning of the text.

Greenblatt called the analysis of these traces “Cultural Poetics” (which is a synonym of New Historicism) in his essay “Towards a Poetics of Culture” where he tried to define New Historicism. Greenblatt said in this essay that he would “situate [New Historicism] as practice” (1). As the title suggests, Greenblatt aimed to apply a poetic analysis on culture which is itself seen as a text. Thus, as mentioned above, culture consists of many forms, one of them is literature, that has the same quality and can be analyzed in the same way. Poetic analysis lies in placing the text in its context and seeing how it came to exist and what influenced its creation. Therefore, this theory is about the relationship between text and context, society and art, and artists and their works. In the above mentioned essay, Greenblatt referred closely to the Marxist Fredric Jameson’s and the poststructuralist Jean François Lyotard’s theoretical views of capitalism and its effect on art and society. Capitalism in the view of Jameson broke the unity and created differences and distinctions in the world—such as “the public and the private, between the social and the psychological, or the political and the poetic, between history or society and the ‘individual’” (2). On the other hand, Lyotard thought that capitalism unified the world in one single language. Both writers strived to give a general explanation of the role of capitalism but Greenblatt found out that their visions were contradictory. Greenblatt suggested that their definitions of capitalism were about “the historical relation between art and society” and between cultural and non-cultural discourses. However, as Greenblatt stated, both Jameson

and Lyotard did not reach one satisfactory answer to their question on capitalism (5).

Greenblatt gave an example of the relationship between art and politics, and the link between the artist and his creation. In Greenblatt's terms, art and politics, fiction and reality, official documents, and artistic writings, are related to each other though they are different discursive spheres. These discursive spheres, according to New Historicism, are given equal importance without isolating or ignoring any one of them. Greenblatt concluded this essay by noting that "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (12).

In another essay, titled "The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare", Jan R. Veenstra examined the relationship between text and context as presented by Greenblatt in his essay "Towards a Poetics of Culture". Veenstra argued that Greenblatt aimed to show that meaning did not lay in the text and language only but it was more complex than that (175). Through his analysis, Veenstra stated that a text does not only mirror the social context but also "informs and sometimes even conditions the historical process" (180). Veenstra further explored the relationship between the individual and the text. He referred to Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and argued that a self is fashioned "first, in submission to an 'absolute power' or authority (such as the Church, the State, or the Family) and, second, in relation to the Other, the stranger, a category other than authority and branded by the latter as demonic, heretical, subversive, marginal, and so forth" (181). In Greenblatt's view, as stated by Veenstra, the individual recognizes himself when submitting to an authority that controls his movements such as politics, religion, or family. In other words, Greenblatt tried to show how the person recognizes his individuality by a particular discourse. Thus, the person can be a construct of the context and or environment he lives in. This situation

is to be explored in our corpus in the last chapter.

Louis A. Montrose in his essay “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture” set forth the main and basic changes that New Historicism brought to literary criticism. He stated that what was new in this theory was its recognition of the author’s significance in literary analysis—his life and personal experiences—and its refusal to distinguish between literature and history (18). He further indicated that the new historicist’s interest in history and historical authenticity led up to a “shift from history to histories” (20). There is no absolute credibility of the past and historians themselves are the products of society and culture. Therefore, writers of history may as well be subjective in their works as an author of a literary work. Montrose further clarified that any text had to be analyzed as a product of the social world and also as “socially productive” because it is produced to be read and consumed by others (23). Another important idea mentioned by Montrose is the necessity to historicize the past and present. This indicates that history does not only mean “Past” but it also means “Present”. Moreover, Montrose brought up the term “subject” and stated that it did not mean the “individual” because a “subject” is shaped and constituted by the society—by its ideologies, beliefs, and values—which “ultimately exceed their comprehension and control” (21). He positioned here the “subject” not as self-made but as socially and culturally conditioned.

A literary text can be used to influence ideologies or subvert power and it can be viewed as a kind of resistance. Louis Montrose in the same essay referred to subversion and containment as another key element in New Historicism. He referred to Jonathan Dollimore’s and Alan Sinfield’s views of this concept. He argued that there were people who subvert and those who agreed with a particular ideology. The former group includes those who oppose the dominant ideology and take action to make changes and the latter includes those who support the dominant class (21). Montrose concluded his essay by stating that by using this practice of reading texts,

we bring to “ourselves a sense of our own historicity, an apprehension of our own positioning within ideology” (31).

A. Power and Violence

New Historicism inherited from Michel Foucault the concept of power/knowledge. Even Greenblatt mentioned in his essay “Towards a Poetics of culture” that Foucault influenced and “has helped to shape [his] own literary-critical practice” (1). Foucault began to develop his ideas about the notion of power in the 1970s. This concept influenced greatly new historicists in their analysis of society and literature. It would be interesting to explain what Foucault meant by the power to understand how he made a relationship between power and violence which is important to the analysis of the novel.

In his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) , Foucault explained what the term “power” means. According to him, power is everywhere and can occur at any moment in many ways (93). It exists in social relationships which he referred to as “force relations” (93). For example, people’s behaviors in everyday life depend on the reactions of society. Power in this sense is anything that can influence anyone when he intends to do something and it manifests itself as an implicit force. For example, the way we speak, dress, or behave depends on values and norms established in society. Foucault gave the example of sexuality and explained how power dictated what is forbidden and what is allowed. Additionally, it is anything that attempts to establish a particular ideology and to control individuals or a group of individuals. This ideology can function as a law or as a rule which people are not aware of applying which circulates as knowledge. According to Foucault, power relations “are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibrium . . . and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations” (94).It is what is accepted and believed to be true in society. Power in this sense

exists within social relations—for instance, between ethnic groups, parents and children, or men and women. Hence, this concept is to be used to deal with racism and racial prejudice that constitute the power that exists between whites and blacks as described in the novel.

In his essay “The Subject and Power”, Foucault clarified his ideas involving power about subjectiveness. Here, his focus is on the subject—by which he meant to be under the authority of something or someone (it can be religion, king or president, culture, or society). Anything that makes a human being become a “subject” of a certain power. Foucault believed that people were positioned within relations of power and these relations are about the social meaning that exists between the marginalized and the dominant. For example, the meaning of insanity in relation to sanity, or the meaning of legality in relation to illegality. He further added that to unravel these meanings, “we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (779). Furthermore, the different struggles that exist in society are struggles over the forms of power—such as ethnic and religious struggles, or exploitation (781). According to Foucault, this power

applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, and impose law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (181)

The analysis of power relations, therefore, is rooted in society. There are several forms of power, and to analyze these forms they must be put in their social context (793). Moreover, Foucault argued that “Every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle” (794). The idea is that in a struggle over this power that subjugates us, it exists a strategy, a strategy that requires two confronting sides and leads to domination(795).

In “Violence and the Materiality of Power”, Torsten Menge explores the relationship between violence and power in which violence can be a form of power. He relies on the contrasting views of Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt concerning Power/violence. As it is known, violence and power are not identical and cannot be defined the same way and both Arendt and Foucault agree on this basic point. Yet, while Arendt considers the two concepts opposite, Foucault stresses the link between the two. Menge aims to demonstrate how violence can be a source of power shedding light on Foucault’s perceptions. He states that Arendt believes that violence cannot create or maintain power because not every institution of power uses violence as a mean to be so (4). On the other hand, Foucault believes that power is often derived from the use of violence (11). Menge uses Foucault’s analysis of public torture in his book *Discipline and Punish* as an example of how this act can control and threaten the population who in their turn, out of fear, control their actions. Menge said: “While power and violence talk may be semantically different, they can be used, at least in many cases, to describe the same thing” (11). The idea is that violence and power are not identical and violence is not the absolute and direct way to generate power but this does not mean that violence can never maintain power or has never been a major mean to establish several kinds of powers. Using torture as an example of maintaining power, Menge argues that the torturers aim to “make the victim submit or at least to make it seem as if she submits” (16). Moreover, Menge points out that the social context of the violence is important to consider to find out whether it is a way of creating power or it is not (18).

III. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

In dealing with race, crime and discrimination, it is important to mention the movement that deals with them. Racism and oppression that target minorities in the United States led up to

a set of principles and a new understanding of race known as Critical Race Theory. In their book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic defined the theory and explained its ideas and purposes. In the 1970s, scholars, activists, and lawyers claimed the need for new approaches for the reason that the accomplishments of the Civil Rights movements in the sixties were being ignored. Moreover, according to Delgado and Stefancic, CRT was influenced by the early writings of Du Bois, Fredrick Douglass, and Civil Rights activists in addition to philosophers like Foucault and Derrida. Movements such as Critical Legal studies and Radical Feminism were as well very influential and played a major role in the development of this theory. Additionally, in the same book, Delgado and Stefancic gave the basic principles of the theory. One of the most important tenets which are related to this study is the belief that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational— ‘normal science,’ the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Delgado, Stefancic). Furthermore, color-blindness, for critical race theorists is rejected and claimed that it can “remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination” (Delgado, Stefancic). Another related feature is that racism is socially constructed and “race and races are products of social thought and relations” (Delgado, Stefancic). For that, society chooses to follow certain established beliefs and myths about a particular race— for instance, the myth that African-Americans are inherently violent and criminals—and reject their “personality, intelligence, and moral behavior” (Delgado, Stefancic). Similarly, critical race theorists are interested in the narratives of minorities. The voices and stories of the oppressed can be a means to express and share their visions about law and society in relation to racism. A final significant idea that is supported by critical race theorists is that racism is systemic. Systemic racism also referred to as institutional racism is about the racism that is embedded in law and institutions. It refers to those racial disparities that exist in education, politics, wealth and class positions, housing, incarceration rates, and police killings

rates (Delgado, Stefancic). The last feature is the most related to the analysis of MWLU. Using these ideas of racial injustices in police practices which exist today in the Criminal Justice System, the analysis shows how the novel tells a story not only about the 1940s but also about the present time. Thus, this analysis shows as well the persisting racial prejudice both in society and in state systems.

Institutional racism is an expression first used by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in their *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967). In this book, they define racism by giving it two meanings. The first is “Individual” or “overt” racism (4). It is about direct violence between races which can result in death or injuries. The second type is subtle and “covert” (4). This type of racism cannot be seen or identified, it is not visible so that one can describe it easily: it is part of the law and institution of the United States. This is seen, as mentioned before, in wealth, incarceration rates, or education. According to Carmichael and Hamilton, racist ideas pervade the society and “a sense of superior group position prevails: whites are ‘better’ than blacks; therefore, blacks should be subordinated to whites” (5). Thus, institutional racism in this sense lies in the over representation of African Americans concerning the rate of police arrests and killings. The statistics do not prove that this is an act of racial injustice but when considering the history of racism in the United States, these numbers do tell something about discrimination in police departments and other institutions. Likewise, Joe R. Feagin in his *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (2006), claims that “systemic racism is far more than a matter of racial prejudice and individual bigotry. It is a material, social, and ideological reality that is well- embedded in major U.S institutions”(2).

IV. Conclusion

This chapter articulated the major relevant tenets of New Historicism and CRT and

clarified the concepts on which this analysis relies. It defined the two theories and relied on the original works of the concerned theorists. The importance of the socio-historical and cultural context is to be taken into consideration to stress the influences of the writer. Moreover, it showed the importance to consider the experiences of the author to unravel the text meanings. Foucault's concept of power in relation to violence, subjectiveness, and domination have been as well defined in this chapter. Additionally, the concept of systemic racism, one of the major tenets of CRT, is chosen to be crucial for the analysis of the MWLU for the issue of police racial violence.

Chapter 2: The Roots of “Racialized Violence” Police Brutality

I. Introduction

To understand better the nature of police interaction with African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s along with the political and socio-historical context of the novel, it is worth mentioning some historical accounts, reports, and documents. Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944) referred to the “Negro problem” and the relationship between the police and the black people. He stated that police officers did not represent only racism in laws and police systems in the south, but also the racist white community. He also examined the police behaviors and philosophies and argued that it was difficult for African Americans to deal with or change the deep-rooted racial thinking especially in the era of Jim Crow where inequality was legal and trials were unfair. The following parts explain the roots of police cruelty and gives examples of the most popular cases of lynching and torture mainly in the first half of the 20th century.

II. The Thirteenth Amendment, the Abolition of Slavery, and Jim Crow

On December 18, 1865, slavery was officially abolished under the 13th amendment. The new law says that slavery or any kind of forced servitude is illegal except as a punishment for a crime. By the end of the civil war, African Americans including children were arrested in mass and forced to work in prisons to restore the economy of the South (DuVernay).

However, as Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* said, “after the death of slavery, the idea of race lived on” (26). White southerners rejected former slaves as equal citizens and did not accept having equal rights or any interactions with other races mainly freed slaves. Later, white southerners claimed to establish new ways to control African-Americans and to maintain white supremacy. This period was known as Jim Crow and was characterized by intense segregation and violence in the South targeting colored people mainly African-Americans. The

laws known as the “separate but equal” doctrine were the decision of the Supreme Court called Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. These laws consisted of separating races in almost all aspects of everyday life such as public accommodations, schools, hospitals, buses, and even resting rooms. In fact, these laws were made to legalize segregation and promote the faith of whites that they are inherently a superior race (Alexander 34). Accordingly, violence against African Americans increased when they started to violate these laws. African Americans were beaten by the white citizens, police, or lynched and killed in front of an audience. The laws forced African Americans “back to a system of extreme repression and control, a tactic that would continue to prove successful for generations to come” (Alexander 32).

III. The Ku Klux Klan and racial violence

The Ku Klux Klan was a secret organization originally founded by six well educated men in around 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee. It was initially created for entertainment and then transformed to a terrorist organization. The transformation was the result of white southerners’ fear of the newly freed slaves during post-civil war era. They were terrorizing minorities and the Jews committing horrible atrocities. In fact, the Ku Klux Klan appeared in three different periods with different purposes. The first was formed after the civil war when the white population rejected the freed slaves. With the consent of the law, the groups of the night patrols were authorized to punish any person who tried to violate the law (Baudouin 7-8). This period saw the beginning of the practice of legal discrimination and the lynching of African Americans by the white population (Baudouin 15). In 1915, the second klan was revived with the realization of the movie “The Birth of a Nation” in 1915 by D. W. Griffith. The movie was considered to be a contribution which led to bring back the Klan again (Lennard 616). In the movie, the Klan was praised and depicted as saviors of the country, as well as the white supremacy. The black

individuals were portrayed as rapists, murderers, and given an animalistic image. The notion of criminality was also one of the essential themes of the movie and the black male was believed to be guilty. During this period, the Klan targeted blacks, Jews, Immigrants, and Catholics (Baudouin 20). Many tentative of kidnappings and whippings were occurred against African Americans. Their acts of violence and ways of punishment without any process of law meant that they did not strive to do justice in their country and also this suggests that they might have been protected by the law itself. That is to say that these group of white supremacists were simply violating the law, and the latter did not attempt to intervene or dismantle this terrorism at that time. In this period, the Klan was supported by millions of Americans. Gaining this public popularity, they had integrated the social affairs and state and local politics. Several members were appointed to different official offices (Baudouin 22).

IV. Lynching, Torture, and the Emergence of Police Cruelty in the 20th Century

Lynching, the public punishment for criminals, was practiced by the white population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States. It consisted mostly of killing individuals suspected of crimes without any process of the law. Because of this cruelty and barbaric murdering, Andrew S. Buckser referred to lynchings as “rituals” (11) in his “Lynching as Ritual in the American South”. Moreover, in lynch law (1905), James Elbert Cutler argued that groups of white executors took the black victims “from the officers of the law, and execute them without any process at law, or break open jails and hang convicted criminals, with impunity” (1). The victims were either hanged, shot, or burned alive (cutler 191). Lynching was not an official law but rather a public practice that the law did not attempt to illegalize. Additionally, these groups of executors attempted to prevent trials, attack prisons to avoid any fair judgment, and torture victims to gain confessions before killing them (Buckser 17).

Many activists and organizations denounced lynching by organizing meetings and conventions. Ida B. Wells, for instance, was one of the activists who condemned the practice of lynching. In her speech of 1909 “Lynching, our National Crime”, delivered at the National Negro Conference, she described the atrocities of lynching and exposed the truth of the false accusations. She called for the law to put an end to the practice of lynching and to protect American citizens' lives and argued that “rape” was just an excuse to convince people and encourage the mob to terrify the black people.

In 1916, W.E.B Du Bois published “The Waco Horror” in *The Crisis* where he wrote about Jesse Washington's case. The 17 years old black boy was accused of murder and then tortured and burned in front of the people of Waco who participated and encouraged the lynching. Du Bois published shocking photos along with the text to raise consciousness and provoke anti-lynching protests.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) published in 1919 a book entitled *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States 1889-1918*. The book exposed the huge number of the killed African-Americans and strived also to show the population the racial violence against the black community. The anti-lynching campaigns aimed to raise the public consciousness about the hypocrisy of the American law. Their efforts resulted in the decline of this barbaric act, and by the end of the 1930s, the proportion of lynched victims started to decline.

However, the black community in New York had to deal with police brutality in the era of Jim Crow. They have been the victims of police abuse until the present day. Taylor Clarence in his book *Fight the Power African Americans and the Long History of Police Brutality in New York City* (2019), tried to show how the police targeted minorities mainly African-Americans

and how they challenged this issue. In New York during 1940s, activists and editors of several black newspapers and magazines—like People’s Voice, New York Age, Amsterdam News, and The Crisis—contributed to raising public consciousness about police abuse against African-Americans because of racial prejudice. Journalists and writers wrote detailed reports of cases where black citizens were victims of police violence and false accusations, but the end of lynching did not prevent the killing of African Americans nor the false convictions. There were unfair trials, guilty verdicts, and death penalties against innocent black men.

V. Cases of Police Violence During Jim Crow

A. The Scottsboro Case

In 1931, nine black young boys accused of two white women named Victoria Price and Ruby Bates. The boys were aged between 13 and 21 and they were arrested and brought to Scottsboro jail for trial. The accusation of raping two white women, at that time, was enough to send a black man to prison. Within three trials beginning on the 6th of April, eight of the defendants pleaded guilty and were sentenced to death. The speed of their trial, police beatings, and people’s claims for death sentences were other examples of lynching practices of the previous decades. Michael J. Klarman claimed in his “Scottsboro” that Communists and the International Labor Defense (ILD) referred to this case as a “legal lynching” (qtd. In Klarman 385). For these reasons, the ILD decided to take this affair and their efforts led to granting new trials to the defendants. Despite the evidence they provided for their innocence, in 1936 four remained in prison for long period, four were released. Later, in 1943 and 1944, three of them were released but later two were sent back to prison (one of them was released again in 1967 and proved to be innocent), another escaped in 1948, the last one was released in 1950 (Klarman 411-413). Silvan Niedermeier in his *The Color of the Third Degree: Racism, Police Torture, and*

*Civil Rights in the American South, 1930-1955*², claimed that this case is “a prime example of the replacement of lynching violence by the institution of the criminal justice system” (15).

B. Brown, Shields, and Ellington Case

Ed Brown, Henry Shields, and Arthur Ellington are three African American young men accused of murder. Ellington was first brought by a group of white men including the Sheriff Cliff Dial the day before his arrest. They tortured and whipped him to make him confess the crime. On the following day, he was arrested by deputy Dial and brought to the county jail. The two other young men were also tortured by Dial in the Meridian prison until they confessed having committed the crime (Niedermeier 33-34). The three men admitted that they were forced to confess the crime by showing the bruises of the injuries on their bodies. Despite their declaration and evidence of physical violence, a guilty verdict was announced and they were sentenced to death. However, the three defendants had the chance to appeal their case to the Supreme Court because the fourteenth amendment was violated and their confessions were taken by force. Eventually, Ed Brown, Henry Shields, and Arthur Ellington were spared from the death sentence but imprisoned for ten, five, and three years respectively.

C. The Case of Dave Canty

Dave Canty was also beaten and whipped by police officers to obtain a confession. He was accused of robbery of two nurses in Alabama in 1938. The two women were attacked and one was killed and the other was injured. A few days later, Canty was arrested and sent to Kilby

² *The Color of the Third Degree* is a book translated by Paull Allen Cohen, published in 2019. Originally written by Silvan Niedermeier in 2014, in Germany, entitled: *Rassismus und Bürgerrechte: Polizeifolter im Süden der USA 1930– 1955*.

prison. After being questioned by the police, Canty confessed that he committed the crime. Later, he detailed the events of his torture by identifying persons who witnessed the torture, and insults. Additionally, he showed the jury the scars he had on his body. After Canty's testimony, several witnesses including police officers testified against Canty and said that he confessed his deed without violence. The defendant's allegations were denied and he was found guilty and sentenced to death (Niedermeier 41-47). After several appeals to the U.S Supreme Court and attempts by NAACP to prove his innocence, Canty was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.

D. The Case of Quintar South

Quintar South was a victim of police brutality in 1940, Atlanta. He was sixteen year-old accused of breaking into the gym at Clark University. The case is described by Niedermeier as "a shocking case of police brutality" (89). The boy was beaten and burned in his arm and neck by a police officer with a tacking iron to confess that he broke into the gym. This case had generated white attention that were outraged and helped to claim justice for the boy.

The aforementioned cases are some examples of the infamous cases of injustice and forced confessions in the United States. Understanding such cases is important to know why police officers were accusing black people without any proof. Even with evidence, they were almost all the time believed to be guilty because of the myth of "black criminality"— a black person is the synonym of murderer—and it is worse when racial prejudice came from law officials who are supposed to protect and maintain justice.

NAACP fought also against coerced confessions in the 1930s by publishing articles with real images reporting the facts of the cases and exposing the lawlessness of justice officials (Niedermeier 59). Among many other cases, NAACP contributed to denouncing the real stories of the cases mentioned above, and also was involved in the process of the trials. It has also

contested to spare many black defendants from death sentences (Niedermeier 59).

VI. Cases of Police Violence in the Era of Colorblindness

One of the purposes of this paper is to show how a 1942 novel mirrors a 2021 society. Cases of racial prejudice and police brutality still happen in the contemporary United States. The racism in police departments and police practices are referred as systemic racism. Interestingly, in “The Near Certainty of Anti-Police Violence” Ta-Nehisi Coates stated: “In black communities, the police departments have only enjoyed a kind of quasi-legitimacy”. The *MWLU* was published a year after the death of George Floyd, a victim of police racial prejudice and violence and this shows how the novel’s story is still living in the present time.

George Floyd, a 46 years old black man suspected of using a counterfeit bill in a convenience store, was killed by a white police officer who held his knee on his neck for more than seven minutes on May 25, 2020. Videos were immediately published on social media after the incident. Reporters, visual investigators, and video journalists of the New York Times —like Haley Wills, Evan Hill, and others—stated that their videos showed “officers taking a series of actions that violated the policies of the Minneapolis Police Department and turned fatal, leaving Mr. Floyd unable to breathe, even as he and onlookers called out for help”. Likewise, in another article, Matt Furber and other reporters claimed that Police Department data showed that “African-Americans account for about 20 percent of the city’s population, but they are more likely to be pulled over, arrested and have force used against them than white residents” and “black people accounted for more than 60 percent of the victims in Minneapolis police shootings from late 2009 through May 2019”. The videos of George Floyd, reported by The New York Times and by the social media, made the population rise for a protest against police killings of unarmed men. Protesters from several states and around the world call for justice and the reform of the criminal justice system in

a movement “not seen since the civil rights protests of the 1960s”, stated by New York Times in the article “How George Floyd Died, and What Happened Next”. Even the peaceful protestors received violence from the part of the police—using rubber bullets and tear gas. Robert Greenstein, former president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, joined the protest for justice for George Floyd against the police killing of colored people, especially black communities. He said, “we simply must reckon with this history and end these disparities if our nation is ever to make good on its promise of freedom, dignity, and a fair chance for everyone”.

Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year black man was another victim of a police killing in 2020. Ibram X. Kendi, a writer for The Atlantic, wrote: “[Arbery] could have been me running down the streets” and he addressed the Americans who think they knew him just because of his color and said: “They don’t need to figure out who I am. All they see is what I am. A black male. And what I am pronounces who I am. A criminal. The embodiment of danger. The producer of fear”. He added that in these cases, the aggressors were the black men and the police officers believed they were defending themselves. This self-defense, in his view, is not for minorities or women but it “has been colonized by white men”. Yet, for black people, fear identifies their everyday life and it is difficult to live where they are suspected all the time because of their race. Kendi concluded by saying “what I am—a black male—should not matter. Who I am should matter”.

In the same year, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old woman was shot by the police in her apartment on March 20. This incident led as well to protests and several marches. Other victims of police killings are Michael brown 18 years old in 2014, Treyvon Martin 17 years old in 2012, Walter Scott 50-year-old in 2015, Philando Castile 32-year-old in 2016, Dante Wright 20-year-old in 2021, to cite a few. Catherine Halley published in JSTOR Daily “Institutionalized Racism: A Syllabus” following the death of George Floyd. She stated, “institutional racism . . . is what

connects George Floyd and Breonna Taylor with Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Emmett Till, and the thousands of other people who have been killed because they were ‘black in America’”.

Additionally, the continuation of oppression in the United States was referred by Tanehisi Coates in his “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration”. He said: “Crime within the black community was primarily seen as a black problem, and became a societal problem mainly when it seemed to threaten the white population”. Writing in the period of colorblindness, Coates views that black criminality still plays a role and that crime is linked to the black community in the same way in Douglass’s and king’s times. In the above mentioned article, Coates referred to lynchings, mass incarceration, black criminality, and the criminal justice racial laws in order to show how racial violence persisted throughout the history of the United States.

VII. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the origins of racial violence against African Americans in the United States of America. It has demonstrated how racial violence persisted even after the abolition of slavery. The socio-historical background is important to prove the relationship between text and context. Furthermore, this chapter has provided real examples of injustices and police violence of the 1930s and the contemporary time which is an important step to show how the novel is relevant today. Thus, the cited examples show how the *MWLU* can be considered a work about systemic racism.

Chapter 3: Ideal Topography for an Aggravated Assault in Wright's Novel³

I. Introduction

Between 1910 and 1930, thousands of African Americans left the South to settle in the North mostly in Harlem, New York. In New York, they revived their music, dance, culture, and identity. This movement, known as Harlem Renaissance, gave birth to significant poets, playwrights, painters, actors, and dancers. Among these black artists: are Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Aaron Douglas to cite a few. These writers and many others were not indifferent to what was happening to their fellows; for example, Langston Hughes, ten years before the publication of Richard Wright's short story "The Man Who Lived Underground", published four poems entitled: "Justice", "Scottsboro", "The Town of Scottsboro", and "Christ in Alabama", and also a play entitled *Scottsboro, Limited* in 1932. The theme of racialized violence was so common, but only one writer has scrupulously explored the cause-and-effect relation between implicit racism and police brutality against African Americans.

In 1932, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in *The Crisis* magazine a section entitled "Courts and Jails", "[n]othing in the world is easier in the United States than to accuse a black man of crime. In the south, if any crime is committed, the first cry of the mob is, 'Find the Negro!' And while they are finding him, the white criminal comfortably escaped" (132). Du Bois showed that racial prejudice existed and that many black men accused or sentenced to death were innocent. He also reacted to the neglect of the black community about this issue. His essay was a call to the black people and mainly church members to hear the victims' stories and help them.

³ I borrowed the title of this chapter from Rachid Boudjedra's novel *Topographie Idéale pour une Agression Caractérisée* (1975).

II. Violence as a Form of Power

Before dealing with the concept of police violence, it is important to make a clear distinction between violence and racial violence. The two elements differ in the way they occur, the cause, and the outcomes they leave in the victim. Violence is an act of harming the body and inflicting physical pain for a certain reason. It can occur to anybody, at any stage of his or her life. In *World Report on Violence and Health*, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined violence as:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or have a high likelihood of resulting in injury death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (5)

On the other hand, racial violence targets a specific race community. It is an act of inflicting physical harm, but it targets a particular race community. It is the outcome of a racist ideology that emerges in a society where a group of people accepts and tends to marginalize another. In addition to physical pain, racial violence harms as well the person's dignity, identity, and humanity.

In Richard Wright's novel, the case of Fred Daniels, as many reviewers have argued, is an example of countless victims of police brutality. Moreover, it reflects not only the 1940s but also the contemporary time that is the context of its release. The moment when Daniels interacts with the police has changed his destiny. He is accused of killing Mr. and Mrs. Peabody who live near his workplace. On the one hand, violence is used to create power over him for oppression. That is to say, the police used torture to break Daniels and make him understand that he is under their control. Foucault said in his previously mentioned essay "The Subject and Power", "a relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities" (789). Daniels does not even have a moment

to defend himself or to speak for himself because he is under a situation of power and control. This affirms Foucault's view that power does not necessitate violence or any other means of force, but violence can be a way of creating power. Therefore, in this situation, the torture creates power over the victim. The fact that the policemen are armed also plays a role in producing power because Daniels is aware that they can shoot him if necessary.

Police torture takes place "outside the public eye" (1), as Niedermeier stated in his introduction to *The Color of the Third Degree*. In the novel, the officers brought Daniels to a police station and put him in a dirty room without windows described to be made for torture. Once there, the officers asked him questions as though they had proof that he was the murderer. Questions like "Why did you kill 'em?", or "Where is the hatchet? You used a hatchet, didn't you? What you did with the money you took from the desk . . . come, nigger, talk!" (23). At this moment, Daniels does not know exactly why they are torturing him, he doesn't know about the murder. He is just denying the accusations and the more he denies the more they beat him. Furthermore, the police accuse Daniels of raping Mrs. Peabody. Accusing a black man of raping a white woman was at that time a common and daily accusation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thousands of black men were accused of rape and lynched and tortured by a mob. In the novel, Daniels does not know exactly why they are torturing him, he doesn't know about the murder. He is just denying the accusations and the more he denies the more they beat him. The novel tells about and describes many aspects of racial discourse in the 1940s. Additionally, in 1984, the United Nations defined torture as:

Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a

third person has committed or is suspected of having committed or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. (qtd. in Niedermeier 5)

The description of torture in the above-mentioned definition is similar to Daniels's experience in the novel which mirrors many real examples. Indeed, he is enduring extreme physical pain for obtaining the consent of the murder. Additionally, as stated in the definition, it is an act of discrimination on the part of the police against a suspected black man for signing a confession without any fair process of the law.

Another important element as well that makes this relation of power intense in this situation is the race group of the characters in the novel. In the minds of the police officers, they have the priority to use their power over Daniels because of their profession and also their race. The latter is what makes their power implicit. Because of their skin color, the policemen know that they will not be punished for torturing a black man. It would be different if they were blacks because they do not have the power of being whites in American society. As Menge argued in "Violence and the Materiality of Power", power does not only exist when a person is armed and shows a position of being more powerful than the other but also if "other agents and their actions are suitably aligned with [that person]" (12). In the novel, the police do not create this power only because of their position or physical force but as well of their conviction that they are supported by the law. This confirms the words of Myrdal in his book when he said, "a white man can steal from or maltreat a Negro in almost any way without fear of reprisal, because the Negro cannot claim the protection of the police or courts, and personal vengeance on the part of the of

the offended Negro” (530).

It was the way suspected and accused black men experience torture in addition to being forced to confess crimes they did not commit. In Wright's novel, the white policemen do not reflect only the police practices in his time but also the prejudices that existed in the white community. As Myrdal stated, the policeman was “the personification of white authority in the Negro community” (535) and represented “the white law in the Negro neighborhood” (540). The contact between Daniels and the police reflects also the nature of the relations between white and black people. When Fred Daniels is suspected by the police, they see only a black man near the Peabody's house, and the only thing they have in mind is punishing him:

Their fingers tightened about his wrists, biting into his flesh; they pushed him toward the car.

“Want to get tough, hunh?”“No, sir,” he said quickly.

“Then get in the car, goddammit!”

He stepped into the car and they shoved him into the seat; two of the policemen sat at either side of him and hooked their arms in his. Lawson got behind the steering wheel. But, strangely, the car did not start. He waited, alert but ready to obey. “Well, boy,” Lawson began in a slow, almost friendly tone, “looks like you’re in for it, hunh?” (7-8)

Even if they have evidence, still there are rights guaranteed by the sixth amendment of the Constitution. For instance, it guarantees the right to a fair trial and to be represented by a lawyer in court. In the case of Daniels, the District Attorney participate in the unjust treatment

of Daniels. This characterized the relations between the black and the white in the early twentieth century and summarizes the interactions between the police and the black men.

Like in the cases of police torture that we have seen in the previous chapter, Daniels undergoes a similar experience in the novel. The officers know that what they are doing is illegal and no one will intervene, even the District Attorney who brings the confession paper to be signed. The Attorney says: "I've got something here I want you to sign, boy . . . I don't want these men to keep bothering you, see? So just sign your name" (24) and he added "Look, then . . . sign this paper. I wrote it all out for you. Just sign it and you can see your wife" (25). They take advantage of the state he is in so that they can get his signature. The police officers and the attorney keep insisting on him to sign the paper in that disastrous state:

He swayed and groaned. Times without number the thunderous voices cut into his ears and his brain and his blood. But he made no attempt either to read or sign the paper . . . Hot tears searched their way down his black cheeks; he swallowed and leaned forward, yearning for oblivion, yet telling himself that he had to sign the paper . . . He tried to focus his eyes again, but he could not. The harsh voices began again: "*sign the paper, boy*". (26)

Daniels ends up signing the paper with the help of the attorney because his body loses its strength. The paper signed is a confession of the double murder of Mr. and Mrs. Peabody. At the moment when he signs the paper, he does not know what the paper is about, and he does not know that this paper will change him as a person and cost him his life. There is no proof that Daniels did commit the crime, and he is not given a fair judgment. Being a black man is sufficient for the police to prove his criminality and even without evidence the police are persuaded that he is guilty.

The ending of the story as well portrays another issue related to injustice. At the end of the story, Daniels dies with his knowledge of reasonable thoughts that make him identify himself as an individual. However, Daniels dies after having an epiphany. Before his death, he became conscious of racism, his image as a criminal, and his inexistence in society as a human being. He is shot in the underground sewers by one of the policemen. Before his death, Daniels wanted to show them his cave and the items he took but they feared for their lives and suspected that Daniels had sent by someone else to denounce their cruel act. Lawson, the policeman, burns the confession and destroys the proof that Daniels is forced to sign. Before the tragedy, Lawson said,

we told the papers that he confessed to the Peabody job, then he escapes. The Wop is caught and we tell the papers that we steered them wrong to trap the real guy, see? Now . . . [he] shows up and acts loco. If he goes around squealing about that Peabody job, people'll say *we* framed 'im, see? (147-148)

They killed him because they did something inhuman and they did it deliberately. It is part of their everyday job to suspect, torture, and force a black man to confess a crime they knew he did not commit. When Daniels is killed, Lawson said: "You've got to shoot his kind. They would wreck things" (159). Even if he is innocent he is considered guilty: the guilt of being a black man. How can a man like Daniels "wreck things"? it is for the reason that he knows "things". Wright says in his essay "Memories of my Grandmother": "Fred Daniels is not killed for the really dangerous knowledge he thinks he possesses, but for fear that he might betray secrets of the police department!" (200). He knows that all what is happening to him is already planned. The district attorney and the paper he brings to be signed are part of their daily plan. Additionally, a conscious black man is a threat to the white authorities because their primary purpose is to keep him at the margins of the American mainly in the era of Jim Crow. In the novel, speaking about

Daniels' mental state when he has come back from the sewers, Murphy says: "These colored boys sure go off their nuts easy", and Johnson answers "it's because they live in a white man's world" (154). These words mean that African Americans are rejected in the white society. The United States is the white man's land and everyone else is excluded. Concerning the confession, Johnson says: "This ain't the first loony to confess to something he didn't do" (146). Thus, like many African Americans, Daniels is a depiction of their experiences. Thus, in *MWLU*, Wright tries to show what was happening to the black community in his era.

III. The Criminalization and Demonization of Blacks

New historicists believe that power "was at the [center] of all social relations and this was reflected in the texts of the period" (Nayar). In the novel, power is between the white and the black person. This can indicate what kind of power relations existed at the time when the novel was written. The novel is the product of that period when the relations between black and white people were too fragile. Likewise, Foucault's theory of domination and subject is pertinent here and can help us understand the nature of the relation of power in the novel. Racial prejudice is not an institution or a visible system that controls these people but rather a power that generates ideas within the society and makes people, mainly whites, accept and believe their inner superiority and the inferiority of minorities.

Racism is power. It constrains and governs the life of its victims. The racial knowledge which circulates in the American society is that of black criminality. People believe, and still, that black people are born with this violence. Theodore Martin in his article "Crime Fiction and Black Criminality" examined the connection between crime fiction and race in the second half of the twentieth century and stated:

In a society governed by Jim Crow in the South, residential segregation and employment discrimination in the North, and black criminality as a national

fabulation used to justify both regimes, fifties crime fiction began to directly address the racial ideologies of crime that were more often left unstated in hardboiled detective fiction and film noir. (713)

Theodore Martin shed light on novels like Dorothy B. Hughes' *The Expendable Man* (1963) and Charles Willeford's *Pick-Up* (1955). He stated that the "story of the wrongly accused proved a particularly apt way to demonstrate how criminalization operates as a means of racialization: how the presumption of criminality is coextensive with the ascription of race" (716). In Hughes' novel, the black protagonist, unlike Daniels, is a wealthy civilized doctor. What the two characters share, is their racial origin which is sufficient for the police to suspect them more than other persons. Martin stated that "Hughes suggests that the process of being labeled black is inseparable from being labeled a criminal" (717). Furthermore, Martin linked the theme of black criminality to the work of Philip K. Dick *The Minority Report* (1956)—a fantasy novel about predicted crimes in a future society—and asserted that "[to] be falsely accused, to be unjustly perceived or predicted to be a criminal, is simply what it means to be subject to the police power of a white majority" (719). Similarly, the issue of black criminality is a central theme in the *MWLU*. If Daniels did not belong to a particular race community, the police would have not treated him in such a way. The novel helps to understand how being black is strongly connected with being a criminal. The belief that a black person is inherently suspected affects both the oppressed and the oppressor. The white person mostly fears for his life and feels himself in danger whenever he encounters a black person. This is because the white supremacists integrated this belief into their society and it has a strong function in everyday life. On the other hand, the black person is well aware of his labeled name "criminal" and live always as well in a fear of violence both from the police and the white community. Black criminality, though is implicitly expressed but its role and impact on society are very powerful, it constrains and

influences people's behaviors. Thus, though black criminality is not the absolute way of social thinking, it is part of the effective ideology that circulates in society.

Moreover, Martin in the same article analyzed some of Wright's works related to crime and fiction. In *Native Son*, Wright refers in several passages to the fact that a black person is believed to have committed something without any proof. Martin further articulated: "What is thus most profound and also most unsettling about *Native Son* is Wright's vision of black criminality as simultaneously ideological and insurrectionary" (715).

Black criminality is an ideology that can be considered the legacy of a deep-rooted racial society and it is the set of beliefs that govern everyday social relations and situations. In *The Outsider*, Wright attempted to reveal the outcomes of being put aside from society. Here, to be put outside is similar to be accepted to be a criminal whatever the black person does. This marginalization can lead to negative results. Martin claimed that in Wright's view "outsider and criminal are two words for the same thing: a method of racial domination that is made to resemble a feeling of freedom" (721).

In *MWLU*, Wright turned to a slightly different situation than Bigger's and Cross's cases. Daniels in this story is not guilty nor dangerous. Thus, the novel is about how black men were wrongfully accused of crimes they haven't commit and forced to confess it. According to Martin, Wright's fiction about crime and race "teaches us, finally, how to read the genre of crime fiction as one of the defining cultural forms of a postwar US social order" (724). Therefore, the novel informs us about the struggle of a black man and its connection to criminalization. It is a way to inform the world about the nature of living in a white community and the injurious life under Jim Crow laws. Daniels is probably a depiction of numerous real cases and victims of racial prejudice. This censored version of the novel is about Wright's vision about police brutality and racial prejudice which he contested by his words in the novel. Martin suggested that what "took

[Wright] to write about black criminality was not experience in being a criminal but only experience in being black” (724). Similarly, in *MWLU*, Wright attempted to link crime and race by choosing a black man and white policeman. From the very first pages, Wright reveals the race of the officers’ “white faces” (6). From their treatment of Daniels, the reader can deduce the race of the victim.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad states in his *The Condemnation of Blackness* (2010) that “African American criminality became one of the most widely accepted bases for justifying prejudicial thinking, discriminatory treatment, and/or acceptance of racial violence as an instrument of public safety” (4). Putting a black person in prison is perceived by the white population as an act of protecting their lives. This is why white people did not intervene but accepted this idea of black criminals. Fred Daniels’ innocence does not matter to the policemen more than punishing him and getting a confession. The more they arrest black men, in their belief, the more they provide security in the country.

What proves that the behaviors of the police are racist is that the true criminal in the novel is not a colored person. He was white noticeably. The officers inform Daniels that it is a mistake and that they arrested the murderer. This should not be called a mistake since their acts are intentional. Thus, this came just out of their prejudice of the black men considered dangerous. These racial prejudices still happen in the present period which scholars call systemic racism.

IV. Systemic Racism

Racism in the criminal justice system is one of the most discussed issues in the United States. Interestingly, CRT defines also the notion of “power” in relation to racism. In *Race Marxism: The Truth About Critical Race Theory and Praxis* (2022), James Lindsay said that, according to critical race theorists, power “arises from systems, and it oppresses”. Additionally,

he defined the theory by saying that “it is an activist movement based upon a motivated study of what it calls ‘systemic racism’ and how this phenomenon defines power and creates oppression in society”. The question to be raised here is how this novel tells about the concept of systemic racism. considering the CRT, the first part of the novel is about systemic racism in the United States in both the period of production and of publication. The issue of this novel is the white policemen and their racial prejudice. Wright exposes the kind of racism that is embedded in police behaviors at that time.

In the novel, racism takes two forms. The first form is the direct violence from white officers on a black man which was discussed earlier in this chapter. The second form is the implicit racial disparities that result from the embedded racism in state institutions and in this case, police departments, and the criminal justice system. Therefore, what are the implicit laws that exist in these institutions that cause racial disparities and yet police killing of people of color? According to the recent statistics concerning police killings provided by Mapping Police Violence data, black people are “2.9 times more likely to be killed by police than white people in the U.S.”. The analysis of T. DeAngelis showed that black people represent a disproportionate number of police victims comparing to white people. He added that “[his] study provides rigorous and compelling evidence of systemic racism in police killing across the United States” (8).

Critical race theorists have identified these issues by considering statistics to know the causes and to try to provide solutions. Delgado and Stefancic pointed out racial acts of police officers exist in their decisions to arrest, use of deadly force, sentencing, and other factors. Additionally, in his review of recent data “Racial Bias Still Exists in Criminal Justice System? A Review of Recent Empirical Research” (2021), Yu Du examined current racial inequalities held by law enforcement agents—namely police, judges, and district attorneys among others—

that yet affect people of color. What makes scholars pay attention to these racial biases is the disproportionate numbers of incarceration and imprisonment of colored people mainly in the black community. According to the researcher, statistics show that whites commit more crimes but the ones who have the highest incarceration rate are the black people. In the behaviors of police officers, the proportion of stopping whites is 9% and black is 6% but the rate of searching after being stopped is two times higher for black people. Consequently, one out of nine stopped black men would be arrested while one in seven whites would not. Yu Du argued that “this difference suggests a racial bias against Blacks embedded in police officer's discretionary behaviors” (87). In the case of the use of force and police killings, black people are overrepresented and they are 3.5 times more likely to be shot than whites. Additionally, recent studies showed that African Americans are overly represented to be subjected to the use of force than whites (90). Furthermore, other law agents such as prosecutors, judges, and attorneys play a role as well in identifying racial injustices in the justice system. Studies showed that judges' decisions are affected by the race of the defendants and recent data showed that blacks received the death penalty 4.5 times more than whites (97).

Likewise, Cassandra Chaney and Ray V. Robertson have analyzed police brutality statistics and people's perception of this issue, using Critical Race Theory, in “Racism and Police Brutality in America”. They stated that CRT is important for their study of law enforcement because it “captures how race is Structurally embedded within institutional structures, i.e., law enforcement, exacerbating the expression of White hegemony and ostensibly increasing the likelihood of disparate treatment of marginalized societal groups” (501). In their analysis, they found out that most of views on police brutality were against law enforcement and police conduct (498).

The Thirteenth Amendment is another law that was beneficial to the American authorities

after the Civil War. The amendment's loophole was directly used for specific purposes. That is to say, African Americans—children and adults—were arrested in mass for minor offenses and long sentences then were imposed hard labor in prisons. Thus, this was beneficial for the economy of the south at that time. In the media, they were depicted as drug users, gang leaders, rapists, and criminals. This helped strongly to insert the savage image of African Americans that would be accepted and believed easily by the population.

Thus, the issue of the 13th amendment touches the period when Richard Wright wrote the *MWLU*. Relating this to Yu Du's analysis of police behaviors in the present time shows how the novel is relevant today and that the law and the police still behave according to the ethnicity of the person they deal with. In the first chapter, we have seen the idea of Montrose concerning the relationship between the past and the present. For him, each one influences and shapes the other and literature can be a way of creating history. Thus, by this, we can have access to the events of a specific period. The novel takes us to the past and makes us consider the present.

The novel was written during the era of Jim Crow when racial disparities and inequality among races were legal. Systemic racism is shown in the practices of the police officers and their way of treating Daniels. It is obvious in the novel that the police behaviors held racial bias when they first interact with Daniels. They stop him, search him, and force him to enter their car. In their view, Daniels is prone to kill because he is black and carries the profile of a criminal. The police officers are described as cruel and brutal in their attitudes. They do not treat Daniels as an individual or a citizen but as a stranger to them as if he were an intruder in their environment. Their thinking is governed by racist ideologies and acts from racist impulse. Systemic racism lies in the decisions of the officers to stop and arrest Daniels in addition to their brutal torture. Another aspect of racial disparities in law agencies is the involvement of the district attorney in the affair. He is the one who brings the readymade paper of confessing a crime. He even tries all

the ways to convince Daniels to sign the confession. The practices of the police and the district attorney show the embodiment of racism in the law itself although they are the ones who are supposed to protect citizens. Considering the review made by Yu Du, the policemen's decisions in the novel seem to have resulted from the race of the man they deal with. Their decision to stop him and arrest him is influenced by the idea of the dangerousness of black people. It all turns around the idea of black criminality.

Furthermore, the novel informs about the racism against suspected black citizens in prisons. When Daniels arrives to the place where they torture him, a group of other officers gathered outside and one of them asked Lawson “He sign yet?” and he answered “Naw. We got to sweat ‘im” (12). This confirms the words of Myrdal when he said that torturing a black man to sign a confession had become “a routine device” (541). The question of the policeman proves that this is not the first time they do this and the question comes when he sees that the policemen arrest a black man. That is to say, in their minds being black and accused by the police means that there will be a forced obtainment of confession. Thus, this can seem to enforce the idea of systemic racism based on the police officers’ behaviors.

Being a product of its era, the novel was influenced by the political, social, and cultural discourses of the period of its creation. It has also projected its future by being a model of subversion. The novel carries the legacy of Jim Crow in many ways. It speaks about the daily life of black people and their experiences with the police and law agents. It is also about the systemic racism in the 1940s and in the present time that proves that racial bias in the Criminal Justice System still exists.

One of the incidents which have probably inspired Wright to write a novel about falsely accused black men and about using violence to gain a confession is the Scottsboro case of 1931. Specifically, the Scottsboro case is considered one of the most infamous instances of injustice in

the United States. Niedermeier stated that “the Scottsboro trial is an example of the continuity of racial violence within the justice system of the South” (15). As mentioned before, the boys recounted that after their arrest they were tortured and forced to confess that they raped the women. Their case gained public attention and support from writers and journalists. Richard Wright was one of the editors of the *The Daily Worker* newspaper in 1937. He was one of the ones who gave voice to the accused boys and pushed their case to be known. He wrote several articles in 1937 concerning the case to inform the public about the news of the trial. Articles like “Ask Aid for Scottsboro Defense Drive”, “Harlem Plans Scottsboro Defense Rally”, and “Harlem Spurs Scottsboro Boys Fight” where Wright called for the justice of the five remaining boys in prison. He wrote dozens of other articles to support the Scottsboro campaign to let the population know about their estate in prison and promote the call for justice.

Michel Fabre in *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright (1993)*⁴, said that “if Wright later alludes to the ‘Scottsboro Boys’ in his books, it is because he became so involved with the case at this time” (148). Indeed, Wright did allude in his novel to this issue of injustices in the criminal justice system. Being a black man born in the south and witnessing its cruelty, Wright saw how his community was being accused and tortured for nothing. The case is similar to Daniels’ story in the novel regarding the police cruel practices and the consent of the law officials. In his fiction, Wright depicted a graphic torturing of the accused Daniels and the crime scene of the murdered couple relying on his observations and the surrounded violence in his everyday life. The detailed description of torture does not appear only in this novel but also in many of his other works. In his work “Richard Wright: The Meaning of Violence”, David P. Demarest, Jr. claimed that:

⁴ *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* was originally published in French in 1973. Later, translated into English by Isabel Barzun in 1993.

The memorable moments in Richard Wright are violent—a throttled kitten, a fight with a snake, a lynching, a wife watching as her husband is murdered, a body dismembered, a razor fight, an old man shot in the back . . . A look at two of his well-known works—a poem “Between the World and Me” and *Black Boy*—suggests both the care that he lavished on the details of violence and the range of generalization he achieved with those details—about the human psyche in general, about race relations in America in particular. (236)

“Between the World and Me” (1935) is a poem written by Richard Wright about a man gazing at the remains of a burned body after a scene of lynching. The choking details in which he narrated the scene are similar to the style he used in the *MWLU*. In the poem, Wright identifies himself as the victim and describes his fear, the violence, and his pain. Demarest said: “No black can escape awareness of white violence; no black can avoid an identification with the victims” (237). A similar feeling is expressed in Wright’s *Black Boy* where he says:

Tension would set in at the mere mention of whites and a vast complex of emotions, involving the whole of my personality, would be aroused. It was as though I was continuously reacting to the threat of some natural force whose hostile behavior could not be predicted. I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings. (qtd. in Demarest 237)

Being a black man, a writer, and a journalist at that time, Wright knew the atrocities black people were experiencing when interacting with the police or even with white people. Moreover, the detailed and graphic descriptions of violence in his works were because of his growth in “a society created and maintained by direct, brutal violence” (Wilmot 18). Without being a victim

of police violence or white violence, Richard Wright is above all an African American, and this, does relate everything to the novel. The expression of fear and hopelessness, the description of violence, and the feeling of guilt is what black people used to feel even only when witnessing what the members of their community underwent every day. This is why in *MWLU* Wright says:

I HAVE NEVER WRITTEN anything in my life that stemmed more from sheer inspiration, or executed any piece of writing in a deeper feeling of imaginative freedom, or expressed myself in a way that flowed more naturally from my background, reading, experiences, and feelings than *The Man Who Lived Underground*. (163)

V. The Impact of Police Violence

As we have seen in the previous chapter, new historicists were interested in oppressed groups and their relationship to the dominant groups. Jan R. Veenstra in his essay shed light on the idea of being subjected to any kind of authority. For example, in the novel, the police represent the authority and the ones who generate power over Daniels who is in this case the “subject”. Another idea of New Historicism related to this concept is power relations and subjectiveness. Foucault analyzed the form of power that makes people subjects. According to him, the individual is determined by the relations of powers in the social environment. In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal asserted that “police brutality has thoroughly demoralizing effects on the Negroes” (541). “demoralizing” here can be defined as making someone lose his moral values or lose his sense of vividness.

Daniels is a simple naïve person who tries to obey and execute every order from the policemen. He answers with “yes” to almost every question because it is the answer he assumes will “please them” (9). The spontaneous answer “yes” comes out of his fear of the police because

he knows the meaning of being stopped. The power which the white police officers have over Daniels affected his actions and his decision making.

In the novel, Daniels is a subject of the white policemen's power that has affected Daniels' self. Because of this subjugation, Daniels is othered from the world and reality. He lives in a situation of extreme fear and finds himself compelled to hide from them in the darkness of the underworld. For Daniels, the light of the aboveground is darker than the blackness of the sewers. In the middle of the obscure prison-like underground, he feels free and safe. In the very first moments of Daniels in the underground, the "upper world was shut from sight and its sounds were muffled. The whispering rush of the water now droned louder, creating an illusion of another world with other values and other laws" (53), and he feels himself in security. This is the first time Daniels senses his disconnection from the world and is about to give new significance to a new world for him. Later, when he discovers that he is under a church and hears black men and women singing, he finds their actions ridiculous calling them "crazy people" (80) and he wishes to yell at them and say: "Don't do this to yourselves"! (63). From this, Daniels is no longer a part of the church of which he was a member when he was aboveground and he is about to lose the religious values he had before. When he observes the world from the outside, he acknowledges and perceives things distinctively and new realizations of the above world come to his mind as he no longer belongs to it. By doing this, Wright is positioning the black person in a spot where he can glance at his social living without being part of it. Wright is trying to make Daniels find himself outside his usual familiar environment to make his community notice how the imposed Christianity including the way of living prevented them as black people to be free in their minds and their bodies. Hence, Wright criticized the way African Americans, at that time, believed in all that is imposed by the white authorities and remained dependent on it out of fear and never questioned anything about their religion. Once again, Daniels hears the people in

the church singing, and a piece of new knowledge comes to his mind: “he was all people and they were he; by the identity of their emotions they were one, and he was one with them” (106). Even though he identifies himself with the others, this drives him to another consciousness and thinks that he has to “assert himself” (107). Here, he wants to accept his identity and to be accepted. In this case, the self is formed once Daniels positions himself as a member of his community and as a black man who is tortured for something he has not done. Both the church and the police are kinds of authorities for Daniels for he feels controlled by them. Even when he witnessed other persons being accused and tortured for nothing, he understood the way people could be marginalized and harmed as if they were valueless in American society. Thus, in the situation of Daniels, subjectiveness resulted in him realizing that he is a human being worth to be valued not to be humiliated and this is why he urges to “convince those who lived aboveground of the death-like quality of their lives” (107). In short, the experience of being controlled makes Daniels aware of his individuality, and above all, he realizes what is the meaning of being black in American society—that is a subject of white authority.

Additionally, Wright in the essay “MMG” asserted that he was going to places where he had never gone before. This freedom is lived only when Daniels is far from the racist and brutal society. In the underground, Daniels develops a curiosity about digging more and more holes so that he can enter other basements. This freedom of action to which Wright refers in the essay is lived only in the gloomy sewers. Besides, Daniels sees himself free only in the underground and this happened when he gained new knowledge about the value of his identity. Interestingly, in their conversation “Richard Wright’s *The Man Who Lived Underground* with Malcolm Wright, John Kulka, and Kevin Powell”, Malcolm Wright, John Kulka, and Kevin Powell discussed the release of the novel. Powell claimed that “you have to sometimes get uncomfortable and go to places you have never been before including the underground to actually find yourself”.

Once aboveground, Daniels goes to the three policemen to share with them his discoveries. He meets them but they react strangely. They want to make him forget the incident of torture by burning the confession paper and then announce to Daniels that he is free. However, freedom has no importance for Daniels anymore and he tell them “I’ll sign some more papers . . . I’m guilty . . . ” (142). The painful feeling of guilt is another impact of the brutal torture of Daniels. It has impacted the way he views life, the world, as well as his personality. In the novel, there are three situations of Daniels’ feeling of being guilty of something he ignores. He is accused of a double murder, the expression of guilt in religion, and the guilt of being a black man in a white society. Daniels is accused of killing a white couple without any proof against him. This situation has brought him new knowledge and understanding of guilt in religion as well. When he is listening to the church members singing “Glad, glad, glad, oh, so glad I got Jesus in my soul . . . ” (119), Daniels thinks that the people’s search for unattainable happiness is because they bear a guilt they do not know, and he questioned why this guilt is “so seemingly innate, so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so verily physical?” (120). For him, everyone is guilty and everyone is innocent. This thought comes to his mind when he witnessed the watchman tortured by the police because of the stolen diamonds, and Daniels assumes that:

no man could explain his innocent guilt . . . [and] though he were innocent, he was guilty; though blameless, he was accused; though living, he must die; though possessing faculties of dignity, he must live a life of shame; though existing in a seemingly reasonable world, he must die a certainly reasonless death. (127)

Regarding the third type of guilt, Wright said in “MMG” referring to Fred Daniels that:

Negroes in America are accused and branded and treated as though they are

guilty of something. They don't know what they've done to be treated so; all of which has made a lot of Negroes write a lot of impassioned books saying: "Look, here, I ain't done nothing. Give me a break, for Christ's sake!" So much for that theme. (204- 205)

The guilt that a black man carries in the United States is an aspect of the daily social life of the black community. In the novel, it touches even the personality of Daniels. It is different when a black man is killed in the United States because of the long injurious history of racial violence. When it comes to the behaviors of police officers toward a black individual, it is as well different because of the established image of black criminals that entered the minds of many in the population. In this novel, the black man is innocent when being far from the American society but guilty when it comes to living within the racist social environment in which the black man is always seen with accusing eyes. Fred Daniels could have been one of the Scottsboro boys, Canty, Quintar, or George Floyd.

Fear is a vital theme in the novel. Most of the time, it is felt with the presence of the police or a white person. The policemen are described with expressions like "Grey and blue eyes" (18), "white faces" (21), "white finger" (122), or "white fist" (18). The officers are the center of the black man's terror in the American society. They shaped his life and his identity; they impacted his personality, and they made him suffer from losing his loved ones. In the novel, mostly in every encounter with a white person—such as a "blue-eyed white girl" (123), "a white man and a white woman" (116), or hearing "white voices"—Daniels is expressing a panic or terror. All this tells about the white man's power in the black man's environment and the experience of violence they undergo every day makes them frightened by every encounter with a white face and blue eyes. Likewise, in his book *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates expressed the meaning of fear and violence in his life as an African American young man. Living

in the twenty first century United States, Coates stated in his book: “I had seen this fear all my young life, though I had not recognized it as such” (14). Therefore, the fear of losing someone or even losing their lives governed both writers’ life despite the fact that Coates is living in a different period from Wright. Coates further added that this fear was so deeply felt because “everyone had lost a child, somehow, to the streets, to jail, to drugs, to guns” (16).

In brief, the white violence created in Daniels a kind of disorder or meaninglessness that impacted his way of viewing reality. It has reinforced the sense of guilt and strengthened his fear of the white man in general. It also reveals how racial violence makes people dominated subjects. The *MWLU* captured the background of fear, guilt, racism, and police violence in the first half of the twentieth century Jim Crow; still, it has an impact in the first half of the twenty-first century.

VI. Conclusion

In addition to socio-political context, the experiences of Richard Wright as a black man, writer, and journalist have greatly influenced him in writing a novel about police brutality and the myth of black criminality. As argued in this chapter, power takes two forms. Racial prejudice is an ideology that circulates in society and it creates power and violence can also be a way of generating power and subjugation. Additionally, CRT shows that the novel is relevant in its period of release and can be analyzed using contemporary ideas about race and racism in the United States. Thus, in this analysis, we attempted to demonstrate how this novel is timely after eighty years of censorship.

General Conclusion

I. Summary of Findings

This dissertation has explored the representation of police violence and systemic racism in Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground*. As explained in the general introduction, the themes of police violence and racism constitute the main topics in many works by African American writers. In this research paper, I have tried to investigate Richard Wright's vision of police brutality and black criminality and how his novel can tell about history by giving importance to its context. Relying on the works of many scholars and researchers on this topic, I have endeavored to find similarities between the recounted history of police violence from the 1930s onwards and how it is depicted in the novel. Similarly, I have used current data on the racial bias that exist in the criminal justice system police behaviors and I tried to relate them to the novel.

In my analysis of racial violence in my corpus, I relied mainly on New Historicism and CRT. On many occasions, I referred to Greenblatt's and Foucault's works as well as Richard Delgado's book, to explain key concepts and ideas. Foucault's essays and books have been invaluable resources for the consideration of violence and power. To understand the roots and principles of New Historicism, I have examined influential resources, such as Greenblatt's "Toward a Poetics of Culture", and Montrose's "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture". For the understanding of CRT, I have consulted *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic to set forth the major principles of the theory and to foreground the practice of systemic racism in the novel to show its relevance.

In the first chapter, I have defined the two theories and explained their most relevant features to my analysis using some of the theorist's original works such as Foucault's "The Subject

and Power” and Greenblatt’s “Toward a Poetics of Culture”. To define CRT, I used *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic and other sources to explain its major characteristics.

The second chapter demonstrates the origins of racial violence from the abolition of slavery and its relation to police violence that used similar techniques to justify it. The study of contexts showed that the novel was greatly influenced by the events of its period of creation and that many real cases are similar to the story of the novel.

The analysis of our corpus from the lens of New Historicism and Critical Race Theory in the last chapter confirmed our hypotheses and proved Richard Wright’s stance toward police racial prejudice and systemic racism. Wright arguments of black criminality and its powerful role in justifying racial violence are reminiscent of Foucault’s concept of power and its relation to violence. The reading of the novel from the perspective of CRT provided evidence that the implicit racial bias in the current time is not a recent fact; Richard Wright’s novel which was written in the 1940s discussed, through the fictional story of its protagonist, how implicit racism and police brutality against African Americans were and still are present but not acknowledged by white authorities. Racial prejudice plays the role of power that constrains and dominates the daily life of the black man.

The Man Who Lived Underground was rejected by the publishers because of the graphic description of the police. Julia Wright, in a conversation with Amy Goodman titled “Richard Wright’s Novel About Racist Police Violence Was Rejected in 1941; It Has Just been published”, said that the white publishers refused to publish a novel with this detailed capture of white police violence. In addition to this, the novel was written by a black writer, the descriptions of police torture were too close to reality, and this can move the image of America at that time. In addition

to this, the racist police officers in the novel exposes the practices of the white supremacists in the United States during that period of the century. She added that one of the editors considers the first section “too unbearable too untenable too uncomfortable”, and for that, it was rejected. Interestingly, in the same conversation with Kulka and Malcolm Wright, Powell said that being an artist, he knows that censorship does not mean only not publishing a certain work of art but “censorship is also not supporting the full humanity of that person who is creating that content” also “that this lukewarm response hoping that you actually go away because I don’t want to deal with the truth that you are putting in front of me”. It seems that Wright’s novel was rejected because he was a black writer who wrote about white supremacists. The first section is an exposure to the truth of police brutality in the United States. Furthermore, Powell stated that the novel was prophetic in a way that it projected the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power, the Defund the Police, and Black Lives Matter in addition to art such as Hip Hop music. Moreover, in another conversation “The Man Who lived Underground” Powell discussed as well the novel with Julia Wright, C. Leigh McInnis, and other authors. He questioned about what would this section have brought if it was published in 1942 and that it is a tool to discuss race and racism in the United State. This possible discussion of 21st century racism using a 1940s novel is what makes this book timely and what suggests that police violence has not been taken so seriously.

II. Contribution to Existing Scholarship

This research plays a part of CRT, which is an emerging field of scholarship. While there are some studies dedicated to the study of our selected novel from different perspectives, this research is an analytical and critical reading of the relationship between race, culture, and literature. This study also contributes to the fields of Black literature, new historical scholarship.

III. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, but the most significant one is to use two critical theories to our corpus. The blending of New Historicism and CRT allows for a new questioning of the representation of implicit racism and police cruelty in fiction and a thorough and rigorous analysis of context. However, it is important to know that CRT is a new interpretive method that explores race and racism in many forms of expression. One of the weaknesses of CRT is the lack of a clear method of dealing with literary works.

Another limitation is the focus on only one novel instead of taking two or three literary works that best represent the era. Analyzing many texts will certainly lead to other interesting results.

IV. Implications for Further Research and Concluding Thoughts

The critical examination of Wright's novel needs not to end here. This novel has been a crucial element that can change the way many scholars view Richard Wright as an author. Many have misread and criticized him for his literary inclinations. This novel shows the beauty and purity of black people, something that James Baldwin criticized Wright for. Thus, the novel can be a chance for rereading Richard Wright.

It would be relevant to study other texts by other writers from different generations in greater detail. It would be interesting to compare and contrast different novels by European, African, and American writers to see how police cruelty is represented in different linguistic and cultural areas. Other interpretive methods could be used to discern the genesis and development of the issues and their representations in fiction.

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Résumé

Cette étude est une partie du débat critique contemporain sur la race, la culture, et la littérature. Cette recherche présente une étude détaillée du roman de Richard Wright *The Man Who Lived Underground*, écrit en 1941, en appliquant la Néo-Historicisme et la Théorie Critique de la Race. Après quatre-vingt ans de censure, ce roman a été enfin publié en 2021 et explore la violence policière et le préjudice racial contre les afro-américains. L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner la représentation de la brutalité policière dans ce roman. Les résultats obtenus lors de notre étude mènent à mieux comprendre comment les préjugés raciaux et les abus de la police aux États Unis sont normalisés et institutionnalisés.

Mots Clés : violence policière, le racisme systémique, Néo-Historicisme, Théorie Critique de la Race, littérature afro-américaine.