



**SUBJECTION OF BLACK PEOPLE TO RACIAL
TRAUMA AND MASS INCARCERATION; A CRITICAL
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE MEMOIR *CHASING
ME TO MY GRAVE (2021)***

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Abstract

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of *Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)* is presented in this study. The posthumously published memoir of Winfred Rembert, to explore how Black individuals are subjected to racial trauma and mass incarceration through systemic racism embedded in dominant discourses. Using Norman Fairclough's CDA model alongside Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Delgado, Stefancic, and Martinez, the study interrogates the linguistic and ideological structures that frame Black identity within narratives of criminality, subjugation, and psychological trauma. The analysis reveals how institutionalized white supremacy operates not only through physical oppression but also through discourse that normalizes surveillance, policing, and incarceration of Black bodies. By examining Rembert's lived experiences and his expressive testimonies, this research highlights the deeply entrenched nature of racialized trauma and contributes to ongoing academic efforts to expose and challenge structures of racial injustice.

Keywords: *Racial Trauma, Mass Incarceration, Winfred Rembert, Chasing Me to My Grave (2021), Critical Race Theory, Systemic Racism*

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1. Introduction

Despite legal strides since the Jim Crow era, systemic racism remains embedded in U.S. institutions, resulting in racial trauma and disproportionate incarceration of Black Americans, 1 out of 3 black men has been to prison (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). In his memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021), Winfred Rembert recounts specific instances—such as being stopped and arrested at gunpoint by sheriff’s deputies at age sixteen, coerced into ten-hour days picking cotton under threat of violence, and convicted on false testimony—that exemplify how discourse and institutional practices enact racial subjugation.

This study addresses the research question: How does dominant discourse in *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021) reproduce and justify racial trauma and mass incarceration of Black bodies? By analyzing three concrete episodes of unjust arrest, forced field labor, and wrongful imprisonment, we foreground lived events to illustrate systemic racism’s discursive mechanisms.

The historical social and cultural differences between the Black and White people is the justification of the superiority of White over Black. This superiority is exerted and practiced by White people through their everyday speech and action. *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021) is one of the best instances of Black representation in American culture inspired and part of the Black lives Matter movement. The work addresses long-standing prejudices about black people and their trauma. He immediately discusses how such sins are prevalent in American society. The author has fairly justified the subject of racial prejudice.

Jones, R. H. (2012) Discourse analysis is the scientific study of language. It falls within linguistics, much way phonology, semantics, and syntax do. Discourse analysis examines how phrases and utterances fit together to form a text or conversation, as well as how that interaction fits into our social environment. The four major tenets of discourse analysis are language ambiguity, social context, social identity, and modes.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Black people are incarcerated, exploited, suppressed and traumatized in the White community. The exploitation is an unending process of superiority and inferiority complexes such as racial trauma, where the black race is psychologically and emotionally distressed in White communities. The memoir contextualizes incarceration of the black people for their black skin. The researcher has focused on such issues in the text and has

used Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional model as a methodical framework and Critical Race Theory for analysis of racial discrimination.

1.2. Research Question

Q1: How Black people are stereotypically subjected to racial trauma and mass incarceration in the memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021)?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study pinpoints how language shapes and normalizes carceral violence provides actionable insights for educators designing anti-racist curricula, policymakers reforming criminal justice rhetoric, and activists challenging oppressive narratives. This focused analysis bridges trauma studies, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and prison abolition scholarship to reveal discursive sites of racial injustice.

1.4. Delimitation of the Study

The researcher has delimited the textual analysis of the memoir to racial discrimination and mass incarceration in the memoir *The Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021) by Winfred Rembert. Researcher has used Critical Race Theory as a theoretical Framework to analyse the exploitation of Black people. Researcher has also used Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological framework to support the main framework

2.Literature Review

A number of critics and researchers have put their views on racial trauma discrimination, discursive ideologies and mass incarceration. Some of relevant literature produced by various linguists and theorists, as how language shapes and represents concepts of black and white difference are discussed in the following lines.

2.1. Racial Trauma and Mass Incarceration

Racial trauma—defined as cumulative psychological harm from ongoing discrimination—manifests in symptoms akin to PTSD (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019), which Rembert describes through recurring nightmares of police chases and flashbacks of prison cells. Empirical research shows one in three Black men experiences incarceration (Wildeman & Wang, 2017), correlating with community health crises and intergenerational distress. These studies underscore the scale of trauma that memoir discourse must navigate.

Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019) claims that incidents of risk connected to actual or perceived experiences of racial prejudice are referred to as racial trauma or race-based stress. Threats of harm and injury, instances of humiliation and shame, and seeing other people of colour harmed because of actual or perceived racism are a few examples.. Black people are the ones most discriminated against than any other ethno-racial group, this leads to many mental issues and symptoms similar to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) This results in symptoms as heart palpitation; anxiety; stress; hypervigilance to threat; flashbacks; nightmares; avoidance; suspiciousness and headaches. Although these symptoms are similar to PTSD but racial trauma differs. For instance racial trauma is an on-going everyday torture to the people of color whereas PTSD are the affects after a trauma. In addition to psychological and physical effects, racial trauma causes hidden wounds, Yehuda (2016) discovered a link between epigenetic changes in the exposed parent and the child with parental trauma. They came to the conclusion that this research provided insight into the intergenerational impacts of severe psychological and bodily trauma. . Furthermore, trauma from racial discrimination from any of the reasons i.e. colonization, slavery, genocide, micro-aggressions, dislocation also have integrational effects, meaning the experience and their reaction to the perceived psychological wound is integrated in the psyche of the individual and the individual person to the whole community. Therefore, it affects the physiological and psychological health of the entire community. Their findings on hypervigilance guide our attention to Rembert's present-tense narration in the memoir and validates their conclusions.

Kirkinis, K., Pieterse, A. L., Martin, C., Agiliga, A., & Brownell, A. (2021) discusses that people of Colour are more likely to experience trauma and traumatic stress, particularly in response to racial discrimination and race-based stressors. Researchers have discovered that people of colour had greater rates of traumatic stress than the general population, with racial discrimination being a significant predictor of trauma-related symptoms. People of Color tend to experience higher levels of stress associated with life events compared to Whites. The impact of stressful life events on people of Color remains unexplained even after considering potential buffers such as acculturation, socioeconomic status, education, mental health, and frequency of stressful events. Carter's theory of race-based traumatic stress posits that race-based traumatic stress is a unique form of trauma, linking racial discrimination to traumatic stress. People of Color who experience racism report higher levels of anxiety, guilt/shame, avoidance/numbing, and hypervigilance, sharing some symptoms with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Given the body of evidence on the connection between exposure to racism and increased stress levels, higher rates of trauma reactions, and adverse health effects associated with racial discrimination,

the article suggests that it is essential to explore racial discrimination as a potential factor contributing to trauma.

Wildeman, C., & Wang, E. A. (2017) in their research article examines the impact of mass incarceration on health and health disparities in the black population in the United States. Mass imprisonment, the term "mass incarceration," coined by sociologist David Garland, refers to historically and relatively high rates of incarceration that are so concentrated among certain populations that incarceration has become a regular stage of life. The study found that over half of black women and one in three black males have a family member or extended family member incarcerated. The health of both present and former prisoners shows that while incarceration can cause physical health to deteriorate while incarcerated, it can have detrimental impacts on both physical and mental health once released. Furthermore, the literature on the family and community effects of mass incarceration show negative mental and psychological health impacts on the families and children of incarcerated men majority of which are black, raising concerns that excessive incarceration may harm the entire community in the USA.

Roberts, D. E. (2003) in his article discusses the transformation of racial repression in the United States, from slavery and segregation to the growth of the prison system. The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a shift away from the "separate-but-equal" doctrine, recognizing the immorality of segregation. However, over the last three decades, the significant increase in the prison black population has been seen as a normal response to crime rather than outright discrimination. The consequences of mass incarceration in African American communities are morally unacceptable and disturbing. The harms caused by such heinous acts of mass incarceration causes damage to social networks, distorts norms, and undermines social citizenship for black people, serves a repressive political purpose that contradicts democratic values. Furthermore, affirmative action in the criminal justice system and substantial investment in inner-city neighborhoods must be taken to build local institutions, support social networks, and create social citizenship. The hope is that new empirical research will emphasize the importance of addressing this moral issue before the unchecked expansion of prisons erodes the sense of justice among most Americans.

Pettit, B., & Western, B. (2004) shows the impact of mass imprisonment on black non-college men. First, imprisonment has become a common life event for of black men, with about 30% having gone to prison by their mid-thirties in 1999, a threefold increase compared to 20 years earlier. Second, race and class disparities in imprisonment are significant and have remained stable, with young black men having 6 to 8 times higher incarceration rates compared to young whites. Class inequality has increased, and the

slavery of the past has taken the new form of mass incarceration and servitude in prison for black men, with prison records nearly twice as high as before. The high imprisonment risk of black men represents a distinct life course for socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, indicating a key institutional influence on social inequality. Mass imprisonment emerges as a critical social division, deepening disadvantage and cleaving the life paths of poor minorities from the well-educated majority in the US.

2.2. Critical Race Theory

Martinez, A. Y. (2014) suggest that critical race theory (CRT) was created for the rights of the black race in 1989 as a response to the failure of critical legal studies (CLS), which failed to identify the significant role played by race in the legal system. The power disparity, which combined the problems of racism, race, and power, attracted attention after it swept through US law schools. A body of law addressing the role of racism in American law was produced by Black scholars who worked to end racism and all forms of discrimination.

Crenshaw, K., & Gotanda, N. (1995) discusses the idea proposed by Derrick Bell. According to Bell, racial advancement in the US frequently only happens when it serves the interests of the majority white population. In other words, racial advances are more likely when they coincide with the perceived self-interests of those in power. Derrick Bell, a pioneering figure in Critical Race Theory, played a crucial role in shaping the movement's early development. He was one of the first scholars to advocate for a race-conscious approach to legal analysis and critiqued the limitations of traditional civil rights strategies. Bell's work emphasized the value of narrative and storytelling in illuminating people of color's experiences. Bell's work on interest convergence, which emphasised the notion that racial improvements frequently take place when they line with the interests of the dominant white population, was one of his major contributions. This concept challenged the prevailing belief that legal progress inevitably leads to racial justice.

Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2001) say that the key members of this group, including Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Kimberlee Crenshaw, proposed the idea of colour blindness and asserted that racial differences must be disregarded in order to maintain equality and normalcy in all institutionalised discrimination against racial minorities. The CRT was born out of the failure of CLS and liberal civil rights ideas to play a positive role in racial beliefs in Professors and students at US law schools' experiences with American cultural institutions. When white Harvard administrations refused to hire a second black teacher after Derrick Bell left the school in 1980, students at Harvard Law School rebelled and organised a course on race and law in 1981. This was

the first major turning point in the development of CRT. Derrick Bell created the idea of organised racial politics for academic study. He is credited with developing CRT in his book *Race, Racism, and American Law*. This seminar examined American law from a racial perspective. The original idea that brought the CRT's scholars together focused on how race is treated in law from a critical standpoint. The liberal ideas of what courses should be sufficient for inclusion in the core curriculum were questioned by this course, giving CRT scholars the chance to express their own opinions. The CRT demonstrated how the law shaped race and affected racial relations in society.

Existing CDA research (Van Dijk, 2008) examines media portrayals of Black criminality, yet few studies apply CDA to memoir narratives that blend personal testimony with cultural critique. This gap limits understanding of how memoir language naturalizes surveillance and punitive practices.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Janks, H. (1997) argues that the foundation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the notion that language use reflects social behaviours that are connected to certain historical contexts and serve various goals. CDA aims to understand how discourse is related to power relations by examining how texts position or are positioned by individuals or groups, and whose interests are served or negated in the process. Fairclough's model for text analysis, processing analysis, and social analysis which are the three components that make up CDA. These dimensions allow the analyst to focus on linguistic elements in the text while recognizing their historical determination and social constraints. The strength of Fairclough's approach lies in its multiple points of analytic entry, enabling the identification of patterns and disjunctions in discourse things require explanation, interpretation, and description.

Dijk, V. (1998) approach like Fairclough's method, makes an effort to relate the macrostructure of society to the microstructure of language. Van Dijk, however, emphasises social cognition as the mediating element between text and society rather than discursive practice. He views social cognitions as socially shared representations of social structures, groups, and relationships, as well as mental processes including learning, inferencing, interpretation, and argumentation. Additionally, the micro-structure and macro-structure of the text are differentiated. While language usage, discourse, verbal engagement, and communication are at the micro level, power, domination, and inequality between social groupings are at the macro level. Dijk has used his discourse analysis method on media texts. He thinks that the rhetoric around racial and ethnic relations is one of the places where inequality is reproduced. A general theory of the relationship

between discourse and racism has been created as a result of Dijk's research on the subject. The major point of his work is that "racism is a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse". Dijk's critical discourse analysis, focuses on the representation of ethnic minorities in news reports, the press as part of the dominant power structure marginalizes ethnic minorities by portraying them as problematic and threatening. He points out that minorities are quoted less often, even when the topics concern them directly. He distinguishes between two primary forms of power: persuasive power derived from authority or knowledge and coercive power based on force. He created the "ideological square" as one of four concepts for analysing ideology, which emphasises good aspects of the in-group and bad aspects of the out-group, meaning that the in-group represents the aggressor and the out-group represents the marginalised. The discourse-cognition-society model of ideology is the main emphasis of his socio-cognitive approach, which looks at how society, discourse, and cognition interact to create representations and exert dominating force. Dijk's study seeks to expose the discursive structures and tactics employed to uphold hegemonic authority, as well as to explicitly state the ideological component of "Us versus Them."

Jahedi, M., Abdullah, F. S., & Mukundan, J. (2014) discusses CDA approach of Wodak's (2001) She uses the triangulation concept, which entails combining many multidisciplinary techniques, in her examination of the link between discursive practices and social institutions. For example, she integrates historical, socio-political, and linguistic viewpoints while examining the discursive construction of collective categories like races, countries, and ethnicities. Additionally, this multidisciplinary approach employs a variety of data collecting and analysis techniques that span other genres. Four context-based dimensions are taken into account by Wodak's triangulatory approach: (1) the immediate internal co-text of the language or text; (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses; (3) the social and sociological variables, as well as the institutional frames within a particular situation; and (4) the larger socio-political and historical context in which the discursive practices are embedded and connected. Wodak advises concentrating on five main issues while examining writings about races, ethnic groups, countries, or national identities: 1. Referential Strategies: How are people referred to and named in language? 2. Predictive Strategies: What attributes, features, and traits are associated with them? 3. Argumentation Techniques: How do certain individuals or social groupings try to defend and legitimise the exploitation, discrimination, repression, and exclusion of others? This entails analysing the reasoning and argumentation techniques employed and spotting any errors. 4. Perspectivation and Framing Techniques: Which viewpoint or perspectives are used to represent these namings, attributions, and arguments? This entails examining the

ways in which information presentation affects how the topics under discussion are perceived. 5. Intensification and Mitigation: Are the corresponding discriminatory statements expressed explicitly, more strongly, or less strongly? This focuses on understanding how language choices can soften or intensify discriminatory expressions.

Paltridge (2006), there are some hidden meanings in texts that are not immediately obvious to us. Critical discourse analysis is a method that can help us delve deeper into the text to discover these hidden meanings. Discourse is a social construct that is also laden on the social, economic, racial, and political levels. Therefore, CDA examines and analyses these discourses to determine their implications, goals, and context. It genuinely demonstrates how language use and social context interact. To understand how ideologies, cultural differences, gender, race, and identity are created and manifest in texts, CDA studies these topics. In a text, CDA also analyses the political and social issue. Ideologies are created through debate, and they can serve as a widespread knowledge of an individual. CDA not only examined these discourses but also provided an explanation.

Jehadi, M. Sathi, and J. Mukundan (2014) talked about how the language that makes up our community, culture, and identity is what CDA is all about. It offers a reflection of all socially acceptable values and conventions as well as an explanation of the texts related word meanings. The integrity of texts and relationships between society and CDA are regulated by specific principles that determine how CDA operates. Race and ethnicity concepts are shaped and framed by society, not by individuals, but rather via inheritance and practice down through the millennia. As a result, CDA is a research paradigm with a variety of methodological approaches rather than a theory. It is impossible to overlook Fairclough and van Dijk's contribution to the elucidation of the CDA idea. They took a sociocultural perspective, explaining CDA as a social practice of using pre-made preconceptions to define language and culture.

Burgdorf, J. (2021) describes how in the memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021), From Rembert's birth mother's abandonment to the forced labour in the cotton fields and the abuse of prison wardens, the racial and economic brutality of white supremacist ideology is shown as a living history. Rembert's desire to share his experiences in a white society that at times desired his death and at other times preferred his silence and obedience.

Muehlenhaus, I. (2021) argued of the remarkable piece of work of Rembert has shown in *Chasing Me to My Grave*. Rembert recalls vivid sights of Black life on Hamilton Avenue in Cuthbert, Georgia, when he first had a glimpse of a world beyond the cotton fields. Rembert vividly depicts in a joyful and heartfelt tribute to Cuthbert's Black community and the people, including Patsy, who gave him the courage to revisit a

traumatic past, he discusses the promise and peril of Civil Rights protest, the brutalities of incarceration, his quest for his mother's love, and the epic bond he found with Patsy.

2.4. Gaps and Contributions

From the analysis of the various critical reviews, it's evident that less substantial work has been done on the memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)*, apart from mere reviews and comments. This research evaluates the memoir for accounts of discursive and stereotypical racist profiling of people of colour in White society, their mass incarceration and the trauma they face as a result of it. It will focus on the deterioration and exploitation of Black people at the hands of white people through their discourses and stereotyping. The researcher has analysed the memoir *Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)* from this perspective.

Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1995): Highlights how law and culture perpetuate racial hierarchies via concepts like interest convergence and whiteness as property.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA (1989): Analyzes textual (vocabulary, grammar), discursive (production, distribution), and sociocultural (power relations) dimensions.

By integrating CRT with Fairclough's model, this study closes the gap by revealing how Rembert's memoir discursively constructs Black subjection and resistance within specific carceral contexts.

3. Research Methodology

The current study is qualitative in nature. *The Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)* by Winfred Rembert is based on racism where the main character Winfred is exposed to the brutality of White Community. Researcher has used Critical Race Theory as a theoretical Framework to analyze and explain the discrimination of Black in the White Community researcher will also use Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology to support the main framework.

3.1. Research Design

The current research is qualitative in nature wherein the descriptive method has been used for analysis. As there is no need for statistical data. So, Logics and reasons are the main tools with the researcher to analyse the data.

3.2. Data Collection

Researcher has used two sources for data collection that is primary data collection and secondary data collection. Primary data includes *The Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)* by Winfred Rembert, CRT and CDA. Secondary data contains different books, research articles and journal and so forth.

Adopting a qualitative, descriptive CDA approach, we selected three pivotal passages from *Chasing Me to My Grave (2021)*:

1. Unjust Arrest (Chapter 2): Rembert's detention by sheriff's deputies despite no evidence.
2. Forced Cotton-Field Labor (Chapter 5): Descriptions of labor under armed guards.
3. Wrongful Imprisonment (Chapter 8): Narration of daily prison routines following a false conviction.

3.3. Data Analysis

The researcher has used the Fairclough three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, the data that the researcher has selected from the text is studied. It has linguistic manifestations and deals with socially constructed discourse, as well as the production, consumption, and use of that discourse, all of which affect how texts are employed, circulated, and utilised.

3.4. Fair Clough's three Dimensional Model as Analytical Framework

Researcher chose three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis for the analysis of the text. Due to the fact that this model contains dimensions, it has three categories. The text dimension is the model's first dimension. Analysis of text at the word level comprises speech, script, and visuals, or all three. Discursive practise, or text production or text construction, is the second dimension. The third component, social practise, which is concerned with societal standards, is where this analysis is done, is done at the level of the text. In his book *Language and Power (1989)*, Norman Fairclough provides 10 questions for the examination of the text. The connection between a text and an interaction is called interpretation. Norman Fairclough provided six basic domains for interpretation, including social context, intertextuality context, the surface of the utterance, the meaning of the utterance, local coherence and text, structure, and researcher uses for interpretation. The connection between interaction and social setting serves as explanation. According to Norman Fairclough, social level, institutional level, and situational level are the three levels of social organisation that the researcher utilises to explain social impacts

of speech. The researcher will use this methodology to examine how racism is discussed in the memoir.

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the relationship between language, power, and ideology. The three dimensions of the model are textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Norman Fairclough model consists of three parts that is Description, Interpretation and Explanation.

3.4.1. Application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

1. Textual Analysis: Identify ideologically loaded lexis (e.g., "run for your life"), grammatical features (e.g., passive voice that occludes white agency), and metaphorical expressions linking past and present oppression.
2. Discursive Practice: Examine how Rembert's memoir disrupts mainstream narratives—through counter-narrative strategies like direct speech and testimonial framing—and how these passages circulate within broader Black resistance discourse.
3. Social Practice: Contextualize findings using CRT's interest convergence lens to show how discursive patterns legitimize carceral policies by framing Black bodies as threats to public safety.

This structured procedure clarifies how specific linguistic choices function across three analytical levels to reproduce or resist racial trauma and incarceration narratives.

3.5. Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a legal and intellectual movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily in the United States. It originated within the field of legal scholarship and aimed to address persistent racial inequalities and systemic racism in American society. CRT draws on the broader tradition of critical theory and legal studies but focuses specifically on the intersection of race and law. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a dynamic and influential framework that delves into the intricacies of racism and its systemic nature. At its core, CRT challenges the notion that racism is merely individual prejudice; instead, it investigates how racism is deeply embedded in legal, social, and institutional structures. Developed in the late 20th century, CRT emerged from legal scholarship but expanded into fields like education, sociology, and communication. Derrick Bell, a pioneer in CRT, introduced the concept of "Interest Convergence" in his book "Faces at the Bottom of the Well." This theory posits that racial progress only occurs when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group. Kimberlé Crenshaw's

groundbreaking work "Mapping the Margins" introduced the concept of intersectionality, highlighting how race intersects with other identities like gender and class, influencing experiences of oppression. Richard Delgado's "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction" synthesized key principles, emphasizing that racism is not an aberration but a foundational aspect of society. CRT's purpose is multifaceted: it exposes the structural racism often hidden beneath the surface, challenges normative understandings of law and society, and seeks to empower marginalized communities. It critically examines how legal systems perpetuate racial inequalities, from redlining to mass incarceration. By questioning the neutrality of law, CRT encourages scholars to explore how seemingly objective legal processes can reinforce racial biases. Through storytelling, counter-narratives, and an emphasis on lived experiences, CRT highlights the voices of marginalized groups and reframes dominant narratives. It pushes for transformative change by advocating for policies and practices that challenge systemic racism and promote equity. In essence, Critical Race Theory is a powerful intellectual tool for understanding and dismantling the intricate web of racism that persists in modern societies. By confronting the complexities of race, power, and law, CRT promotes a more inclusive and just world by interrogating deeply ingrained racial hierarchies and advocating for social transformation. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2002).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The memoir "*Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021)" by Winfred Rembert portrays the intricate interplay of racism, racial trauma, and mass incarceration. We can discern the underlying power dynamics and structural racism embedded within the social setup as Martinez discusses in his article that "A white police officer killed a black person at least twice a week in the US" (Martinez, 2014). The following passage opens with Winfred attempting to flee from the police as a young teenager. This imagery sets the stage for understanding the power imbalance and attempted incarceration of Winfred, who is pursued by the police despite of being a minor. The power dynamics as described by Fiarclough is evident through the implications of words used in the narrative of *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021),

4.1. Unjust Arrest

This paragraph is about the young man, seventeen years old, chased by police, arrested and locked him in a separate cell without any reason. Rembert says in his novel *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021)

I'm definitely going to do that picture, about me walking along that lonely railroad by myself, trying to get away from the police...up out of the bed real fast. There'd be ten or so people in the jail at any one time, and as it happened, I mostly knew everybody I was locking up. My job was to decide where to put them. (pp. 20)

Description:

1. How do words convey personal experiences and values?
 - The use of words like "crazy things," "running away from the cops," and "get killed" indicates a personal experience of fear and danger.
 - Ideological loaded words "Black", "White", "young man", "Police", "cell"
 - Over wording "Black", "cell"
2. How do words establish relationships between entities?
 - The mention of "official's car" and "sheriff sign" establishes a relationship between law enforcement and the protagonist.
3. What expressive values do words have?
 - Words like "scared" and "funny" convey a mix of fear and irony.
4. What metaphors are employed in the text?
 - There are no explicit metaphors in this paragraph.
5. How do grammatical features convey experiences and values?
 - Participant predominate "White predominate over Blake"
 - Agency "White cop"
 - Process real what they seem "Yes"
 - The use of past tense verbs ("stayed," "was doing," "heard") conveys a sense of recounting past events. The mention of struggling to "peep out the window" indicates a physical effort.
6. How do grammatical features establish relationships between entities?
 - Mode: Imperative, the use of direct speech with the sheriff calling out the protagonist's name ("Winfred! Winfred! Where are you, boy?") Establishes a relationship of authority and power.

7. How do grammatical features convey emotions and attitudes?

- The use of exclamatory questions ("like I was going to answer them!") conveys disbelief and a hint of defiance.

8. How are simple sentences linked together?

- The paragraph primarily consists of simple sentences linked together chronologically.
- Logical connectors "comma", "dash"
- Refereeing expression "he", "she", "they"

C. Textual structures:

9. What interactional conventions are used? Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others?

- The presence of direct speech from the sheriff and the protagonist's internal thoughts suggests an interactional dynamic.

10. What larger-scale structures does the text have?

The paragraph serves as a personal narrative, recounting experiences of fear, danger, and encounters with law enforcement.

In the context of racism, this paragraph suggests the experience of a marginalized individual who is constantly on alert and feels threatened by the presence of law enforcement. The language used reflects personal fear and a sense of defiance. The mention of the sheriff's car and the calling out of Winfred's name highlights the power dynamics and potential racial profiling that exists within the narrative

Interpretation and Explanation

The term Black ideologically refers to the dejected and down casted in White class. Such ideologies of discrimination are being created by White about Black. In the above passage the exploitation of Black people is being portrayed in the form of police brutality. White cop chasing a Black minor without any reason, incarcerate him and assigned him the task of putting other Black people in their cells, leaving the child with childhood trauma and scars for the rest of his life. It clearly shows that the White takes pleasure from such actions of arresting Black in order to exert their supremacy and control. According to Martinez the white cops consider it a duty to arrest at least two Black people in a week and then tried to kill them for no reasons as in the above paragraph White cop arrest Black for no reason.

This paragraph shows how black people were persecuted, hunted down and put into modern servitude in the Jim Crow South. Winfred is being pursued by the police for reasons unknown despite of being a minor.

Rembert says;

Back then I always stayed alert, running away from the cops. Mama thought I was going to get killed..... Even when I was asleep, if I heard the least little noiselike I was going to answer them! I thought that was funny. I don't know what made them think I was going to answer...I couldn't run out of the house because they were right there. I looked at the hole in the mattress. (pp. 22)

Description:

A. Vocabulary:

1. How do words convey personal experiences and values?
 - The use of words like "crazy things," "running away from the cops," and "get killed" indicates a personal experience of fear and danger.
 - Ideologically contested words, ‘‘running away,’’ ‘‘cops’’ and ‘‘killed’’
 - Synonymous words, ‘‘funny,’’ ‘‘laughing’’.
2. What relational values do words have?
 - Euphemistic expressions, ‘‘I didn't had a clear view of what was happening around me’’ indicating the inability of Winfred to clearly understand the racism.
 - The mention of "official's car" and "sheriff sign" establishes a relationship between police and Winfred.
 - Informal words, ‘‘whole lot’’
3. How do words convey expressive values?
 - Words like "scared" and "funny" convey a mix of fear and irony.
4. What metaphors are employed in the text?
 - There are no explicit metaphors in this paragraph.

B. Grammar:

5. How do grammatical features convey experiential values?

- The use of past tense verbs ("stayed," "was doing," "heard") conveys a sense of recounting past events. The mention of struggling to "peep out the window" shows physical effort.
 - The dominating participant, "agency"
 - Agency "sheriff"
 - Narrator produced discourse in "Active"
6. How do grammatical features establish relationships between entities?
- The use of direct speech with the sheriff calling out the Winfred's name ("Winfred! Winfred! Where are you, boy?") establishes a relationship of authority and power.
 - Pronouns used, "I" and "them" when referring to oneself and the police.
 - Relational modality, "could" and "couldn't"
7. How do grammatical features convey emotions and attitudes?
- Mode: The use of exclamatory questions ("like I was going to answer them!") conveys disbelief and a hint of defiance.
8. How are simple sentences linked together?
- The paragraph primarily consists of simple sentences linked together chronologically and through "dashes"

C. Textual structures:

9. What interactional conventions are used? Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others? "No"
10. What larger-scale structures does the text have?
- The paragraph serves as a personal narrative, recounting experiences of fear, danger, and encounters with law enforcement

Explanation and Interpretation:

The black people have been the victim of brutality and persecution especially by the hands of the police, black people are subjected to presumptive stereotypes as savage and hostile and often targeted, shot down and tortured by the police which result in trauma and pain for the rest of their lives. Winfred is pursued by police and uses the word "killed", at such a tender age the young black boy is scared for his life. The police though

being a sign and monument of security and protection is a life threat for black people and solace for the white people. Such are the ideologies constructed in the society which marginalize and target the black people. According to CRT police over the course of history has targeted, killed and harassed black people just because of their race. (Martinez, 2014).

4.2. Forced Cotton-Field Labor

When I listened to Patsy's story about her relative, I thought: What's going through that man's mind when he's looking for a child that's his own seed to kill it? He don't want it to live, yet he laid down with that girl. What's going through his mind? I would love for him to tell me. The only way I can understand it is that he slept with the girl, but she was nothing to him. Patsy thinks he probably didn't want his wife to know.

I told her it wasn't just that. I said I was pretty sure he slept with some more women, including women of his own race that he wouldn't do that same thing to. He didn't want nobody to know he had a Black child. That was disgraceful to his race of people. He couldn't tell his friends. "But they were all doing it," she said. "That's what's disgraceful. It's not like he was the only one doing it."(pp. 54)

Description:

A. Vocabulary:

1. Experiential values of words:

- Ideological words "seed," "laid," "kill"
- Rewording "laid" for "raped"
- Synonyms "slept," "laid"
- The words "looking for a child to kill," "laid down with," and "slept with" convey experiences of violence, sexual relationships, and the complexities of power dynamics.

2. Relational values of words:

- Euphemistic expression "he laid down with that girl," "his own seed to kill"
- Informal words "slept" "laid"
- The mention of relationships between individuals, such as the man, the girl, his wife, and other women, reveals intersecting dynamics of race, gender, and power.

3. Expressive values of words:

- The speaker's inquiry about what is going through the man's mind reflects a desire to understand the motivations and thoughts behind his actions.

B. Grammar:

4. Experiential values of grammatical features:

- Agency clear “yes,” “White”
- Nominalization “seed”
- Sentences used “active”

5. Relational values of grammatical features:

- Mode “declarative,” “question”
- Relational modality “probably,” “wouldn’t,” “couldn’t”
- Pronouns “he, they” referring to White owners

6. Sentence structures and connections:

- Logical connectors “yet” and “comma”

C. Textual structures:

7. Larger-scale structures:

- The text touches upon the intersecting issues of race, gender, and power in interpersonal relationships, prompting critical reflection on how these factors shape individuals' actions and attitudes.

This passage highlights the ways in which race, gender, and other social categories intersect to shape individuals' experiences and social structures. In this text, we can interpret the Winfred's reflection and questions as an exploration of the complexities of power, race, and gender in intimate relationships. Winfred talks of the White plantation owner who raped a minor Black girl, he uses the euphemistic words as “laid” but in reality she was raped. Afterwards, attempts are made by the father to kill the very child born of that relation. This portrays that the Black people are considered worse than animals and abused at every turn of life. This behavior though diminished a little still exists in the western cultures in the form of White supremacist groups and media biases. The life, virtue and value of a Black person is nothing to such racist people. (Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 2001)

4.3. Segregation

My classmate Rita Etheridge went there with some White girls and tried to order a soda at the counter, but they wouldn't serve her. That's the way it was. The grocery stores even had a special soda they sold to the Black man. The Coca-Cola was a White man's drink. The Black man's soda was called Lotta cola. L-O-T-T-A. It was a six-teen-ouncer, bigger than all the rest of the sodas—big enough to look dumb.(pp. 81)

Description:

A. Vocabulary:

1. How do words convey personal experiences and values?
 - Classification scheme: Black racial trauma
 - Ideological words “serve,” “drink,” “White man's” and “dumb”
 - Hyponymy “drink and soda”
 - The use of words like "wouldn't serve her," "White man's drink," and "Black man's soda" conveys personal experiences of racial discrimination and segregation.
2. How do words establish relationships between entities?
 - Euphemistic expression “big enough to look dumb”
 - The mention of "White girls," "Black man," and specific soda brands ("Coca-Cola" and "Lotta cola") establishes a racial distinction and hierarchy.
3. How do words convey expressive values?
 - Words like "tried," "wouldn't," and "dumb" convey feelings of frustration, discrimination, and disdain.
4. What metaphors are employed in the text?
 - There are no explicit metaphors in this paragraph.

B. Grammar:

1. How do grammatical features convey experiences and values?
 - Dominating participant/Agent “White man”
 - Processes real? “Yes”
 - Nominalization “Lotta-cola”
 - The use of past tense verbs ("went," "tried," "was") conveys past events and actions.

5. How do grammatical features establish relationships between entities?
 - Mode: Declarative
 - The mention of different racial groups ("White girls," "Black man") highlights racial distinctions and power dynamics.
6. How do grammatical features convey emotions and attitudes?
 - Features of expressive modality: The use of negative contractions ("wouldn't") conveys a sense of refusal and discrimination. The phrase "big enough to look dumb" suggests a critical attitude toward the size of the soda.
7. How are simple sentences linked together?
 - The paragraph consists of separate, distinct statements

C. Textual structures:

8. What interactional conventions are used? Are there ways in which one participant controls the turns of others?
 - There is no explicit interaction between participants in this paragraph.

Interpretation and Explanation:

The use of the phrase "lotta-cola" as a cola for black people is a hallmark depiction of the stereotypical lens the black people are seen through by the white people, the aforementioned lotta-cola is large to the point of stupid looking as if meant for some savage, same practices still prevail in the White dominant society where certain jobs, foods, music and clothes are associated with Black people and looked down upon. Rembert's memoir of the Jim Crow south is a depiction of the segregated society of the American south but nevertheless a criticism and question upon the racism existing in the undercurrents of the modern world especially the American and White societies. . (Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 2001)

By comparing memoir excerpts with CRT principles, this analysis deepens understanding of how discourse operationalizes systemic racism and offers moments of resistance.

5. Conclusion

This CDA of *Chasing Me to My Grave* (2021) demonstrates that Rembert's narrative employs strategic lexis, grammatical constructions, and counter-narrative techniques to both expose and contest racial trauma and mass incarceration. By focusing on lived episodes of arrest, forced labor, and imprisonment, the study unpacks discourse

as a site of power where Black subjection is linguistically constructed. Black people in the whole text of the memoir by Rembert are subjected to racial mass incarceration on various occasions and quite blatantly, the character of Winfred as well as other cotton farm workers are enslaved by White police and cotton field owners. They are put into jails in such a large amounts and so frequently that Winfred seeing the police instinctively runs whether he is at fault or not. The propagation of ill-minded ideology of the White people to the people of colour is astonishingly high in the White societies. In addition to this, though discussing the times of the Jim Crow South of the 1960s the author alludes to the stories of the black men who were castrated, emasculated and even killed by White farm owners, black people were made bound to the cotton fields is the blatant mass servitude explicitly on the basis of skin colour.

Through the use of discursive linguistic tools and model i.e. the Norman Fairclough model the researcher has analyzed the prejudicial ideologies propounded in the memoir by White people and how these ideologies are employed to meet the ends of White racist and supremacists. The researcher through the analysis of the text at three levels that is; word, sentence and super structural levels has analyzed the text of the memoir in order to bring to light the prejudicial ideologies of considering the black people savages, lowlife, slaves, degenerates and sex toys is well established through the use of ideologically loaded words and other discursive factors as discussed by Fairclough's model explained in chapter. All such occurrences of racism and prejudice leads to both physical and psychological traumas to the characters of the memoir. The black women raped, their husbands killed and the babies born of the heinous act are not just disowned and abandoned by White fathers but even attempts are made at their lives.

5.1. Broader Implications & Future Directions

This study offers its implications in the areas of academia, policy and further investigation.

Policy Recommendations: Advocate for reform in law enforcement training to address biased language that frames Black individuals as threats.

Educational Practice: Integrate CDA modules into high school and university curricula to foster critical media literacy and anti-racist awareness.

Further Research: Conduct comparative CDA on other contemporary Black memoirs (e.g., Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped*) and multimodal protest texts (e.g., spoken word performances) to trace evolving discourses of resistance.

By grounding theoretical insights in specific memoir texts, this research advances interdisciplinary dialogue among trauma studies, prison abolition movements, and critical discourse analysis, offering concrete strategies to challenge systemic racism through the power of language.

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