

**DEPICTION OF EXTERNAL RACIAL CONFLICTS IN COLSON
WHITEHEAD'S THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD****S. AJAY KUMAR**

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Abstract

Even though racism is an old concept research, there are ideas can be explored relevant to modernity and newer perceptions. This paper investigates Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* on external racial conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. Whitehead depicts the cruelty of slavery and Racism in Cora's life so she journeys towards freedom. Slavery apprehension, slavery and racism are the novel's main conflicts. The Novel takes place in a time when the African Americans were not treated as humans. By examining the character's motivation, to achieve freedom conflict is used to show the path to freedom. In response to conflict unlike the older generation, who had to make a difficult escape, the younger generation had an interesting method of escape. Slavery generation is an intriguing method of emancipation. Conflict serves as the catalyst for sustainable change and it begins with Cora's decision to flee the Plantation. Ridgeway, the main antagonist and slave catcher, is pure evil. The paper mainly focuses on conflict between Cora and Ridgeway continues until the end. Cora, however, never gives up. Her fight for liberty, which symbolises her race's determination to achieve equality and to end slavery.

Keywords: Racism, Slavery, Freedom, Conflicts, Afro-American

Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* is mainly focused on racial conflicts of those people who lived during those times. Conflict can be identified on different perspectives like race, gender, culture, language, colour etc. Based on these aspects any writing can likely portray the realities and frequently used in narratives to convey a deeper sense of the characters' motivations, values, and flaws.

The Underground Railroad depicts Cora's roles centres around freedom, slavery and racism. The writer has demonstrated the mental and physical pains and sufferings of the slaves that is vividly described through Cora.

Racial Conflicts between blacks and whites are fuelled by their social-community differences. Generally, people believe that the white race is superior to all other colour. Conflict is not restricted to whites and blacks or only slaves. Cora and other slaves went through similar ordeals. The disagreement that naturally occurred between slaves was of them to quarrelling over a plot of land. There was a land competition between Cora, Ava, Blake, and other black women. Another conflict arose involving Cora and another slave named Chester, Cora wished to safeguard him and she was able to protect himself from the employer's beating, but Cora's valiant actions had a negative` outcome. In terms of physical punishment received by both them. Conflict also arose between Slave owners and abolitionists Secretly They created a network from operating called the underground rail road and helped slaves to escape from their cruel masters when they are caught all who are involved are punished for harbouring of slaves.

Colonization in America is a long historical journey. The Europeans first came to the America to establish a new colony. As a result, this continent was dubbed the New Earth. They attempted to eradicate Native Americans. Specifically, Indians, through the use of military force, annihilation, ostracism as well as the construction of the reservation area. Following the acquisition of territory, European colonies created a new order and align themselves to advance the country's economy, as well as the slavery contributed to the Industrial Revolution.

Slavery originated in Africa; slaves were brought in because they were thought to be more profitable than Europeans at lowering labour costs. The majority of people in the 17th and 18th centuries black slaves worked on tobacco, cotton, and other crops sugarcane was grown in the

South Carolina. Arrangements in the Virginia, Maryland, and other states in the South are rural Georgia and North Carolina.

Slavery occurred to fulfil the need for labour. Black people are exploited because they are considered to have a strong physical and body resistance to be employed and are also considered very effective and do not require high costs to support them. The large number of slave labour needs resulted in legalization in those days. As a result, the growth in the number of black populations in America has also increased. The black population census carried out in 1860, in the South American region, precisely in Georgia, reached 43.7% of the total population of its citizens.

The beginning of the novel shows the pain, suffering, cruelty of slavery clearly. This novel is similar to the traditional slave testimonies by the likes of Solomon Northup 's 12 years of slave and Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Escaped from Slavery and was Later Freed). The book the underground rail road it mainly focusses on the protagonist struggle for freedom, similar to the other two books but the subtly language used in the novel and detailed description combine to create a world that is entirely convincing. All those books give us the clear image of the life of slaves when they worked in plantation and the struggles the faced during the 17th and 18th century.

The novel The Underground Railroad majorly focus on a slave named Cora, a black girl who has been a slave to the Randall family since she was born. Cora's mother was only fourteen years old at the time of Cora s birth. Her mother escaped from Randall estate, leaving Cora, who was only ten years old at the time, alone. Cora was subjected to terrible treatment as a slave in general. She is frequently beaten for insignificant reasons, or even for her employer's pleasure and satisfaction. Not only is she subjected to torture by her owner, but she is also competing with her fellow slaves for dominance. A male slave named Caesar once approached her and offered her the chance to escape together through the "underground network." Caesar asked her to travel to the north so that they could escape the cruelty of slavery.

The exact origin of the name "*The Underground Railroad*" is unknown. What is known is that by the 1830s, both those who supported slave escapees and those who were upset by the loss of slave property began to refer to runaways as part of an "Underground Railroad"

network. The "Underground Railroad" described a regionally organised activity with no clear core, and it Sometimes it existed openly in the North, but it was more often hidden beneath the surface of daily life in the South. Upper South, as well as certain cities in the South. Wherever the Underground Railroad existed, it provided local assistance to those in need. Slave runaways escorting them from one location to another. Others would carry the passenger further along. Until they arrived at their final destination.

Legend has it that a Kentucky runaway slave by the name of Tice David's swam across the Ohio River with slave catchers, including his old master, in hot pursuit. After they reached the other side near the town of Ripley, Ohio (a busy "station" on the Underground Railroad) Tice eluded capture. He was probably aided by good people who were against slavery and wanted the practice ended. These freedom sympathizers were known as "abolitionists." The angry slave owner was heard to say, "He must have gone off on an underground railroad." The need for secrecy was paramount as there were severe penalties for slaves and those who helped them to freedom. Therefore, railroad terminology was used to maintain secrecy and confuse the slave catchers.

The novel represents the life of the main character as a slave who wants her social status to be a free woman. she wants her life to be free from torture and control of others. she also fought for her life so that it did not end in vain and wanted to have a better future. The problems discussed are limited by focusing on whatever forms of oppression experienced by the main character and the efforts made by the main character to achieve the status of, freedom and out of slavery.

Cora was driven by her desire to be free from the oppression she received; she was determined to flee to the North. Her escape moved from one city to another to protect herself. She met a variety of people during her journey towards freedom. Finally she had succeeded in heading towards the North region, an area where blacks were treated more fairly than other region in South.

The main character in the novel '*The Underground Railroad*' by Colson Whitehead is a young slave girl named Cora. Colson Whitehead portrays Cora as a slave who battles for her life and want to live as a free women in the world. In the novel the things, she witnesses

during her escape and the people who she meets have a huge impact on Cora. Those events which she experienced by her has made her change herself to her environment.

The main character has dark skin from a physiological standpoint. Cora is a woman who doesn't know her age because she does not know her own birthday and year of her birth, Cora guesses that she is currently somewhere between sixteen or seventeen years old at the time of her escape. Slaves like Cora shares many of the same physical characteristics like they are mostly thin and fragile and lack in nutrients. They put in long hours every day in the cotton plantation Their bodies deteriorate. Due to a heavy workload and a lack of sleep is the constant hunger because they are only fed once a day. They are constantly punished if their works displease their master.

A slave has no social status of their own. Their life is completely dependent on their masters. Clothing, food, health, rights and even their lives are completely owned by their owners, they are treated as possessions and not treated as humans. Cora social status is determined from her family history of slaves like her mother and her grandmother who worked in the same plantations.

Each thing had a value and as the value changed, everything else changed also. A broken calabash was worth less than one that held its water, a hook that kept its catfish more prized than one that relinquished its bait. In America the quirk was that people were things... If you were a thing—a cart of a horse or a slave—your value determined your possibilities. (7)

In terms of psychology, the character is Cora was a slave who was an obedient slave to her master. Cora was depressed since she was a slave. she didn't want to be treated badly by her masters as a result of her trying to shield a young boy she suffered her employer's punishment, she tried as hard as she could to keep her cool. Every slave suffers, their master's cruelty as a result of slavery and persecution. They experience a significant amount of retardation, trauma, and apprehension, Cora is a hard worker she much as feasible and avoids the problem as much as possible because of the terror that she has been through her cause of her Employers have an impact on employees' mental health.

The protagonist is a dynamic and evolving character. This can be evident in the shift in attitude of the employees. From the start to the finish of the story, the main character is introduced at the start of the story who does not intend to flee for any reason. But fearing for

her life, she attempts to flee from the plantation. She is terrified of the risks that she is about to face. At the end, she escaped with Caesar. She visited numerous cities and spoke with the public and noticed a shift in attitude.

The main antagonist is Ridgeway. Ever since he was a teenager, he has tortured and hunted African Americans. Ridgeway excelled at a work as slave catcher, it was difficult up north than it was down south. He and the other slave catchers went after slaves who “convinced themselves they were free” (78). His biggest failure was Mable and later when he found out that Cora escaped. He promised Mr. Randall that he would return her back to the Plantation. Cora, on the other hand, never gives up in the fight against Ridgeway, only to flee. Cora's quarrel with him is eventually settled when She puts her life on the line to fight back, and she continues to flee from his in multiple occasions. Underground Railroad is a term used to describe a network of Cora escape, on the other hand, continues to strive for freedom towards the end of the story.

As soon as these formidable whips appeared, I was seized by both of them, and roughly divested of my clothing. My feet, as has been stated, were fastened to the floor[...]. With the paddle, Burch commenced beating me. Blow after blow was inflicted on my naked body. When his unrelenting arm grew tired, he stopped and asked if I still insisted I was a free mam. I did insist upon it, and then the blows were renewed, faster and more energetically, if possible, than before.

The article is similar to the novel '*The Underground Railroad*'. Due to the colour of black skin, Solomon Northup was treated as a slave. When he tries to convince them that he is free not a slave. He was beaten and forced to accept that he is not a free man but as a slave. This incident is coinciding with the novel '*The Underground Railroad*'.

Both Cora and Ridgeway are the polar opposite of each other, their ideology of the world completely differs from each other. Cora believes in equality and every one treated with respect a safe haven where everyone can live happily. When Cora does not find any of those things in the plantation and fearing for her life she flees from Randall plantation, Ridgeway the slave catcher he does not even considers slaves as humans to Ridgeway they are just possessions. He believes that it was the white man burden to civilize the slaves and he believes that if all the slaves belong to the white man and he strongly believe that the niggers' main purpose is too severe their masters.

If niggers were supposed to have their freedom, they wouldn't be in chains. If the red man was supposed to keep hold of his land, it'd still be his. If the white man wasn't destined to take this new world, he wouldn't own it now.

Here was the true Great Spirit, the divine thread connecting all human endeavour—if you can keep it, it is yours. Your property, slave or continent. The American imperative (89).

Racial discrimination is seen throughout the novel. In South Carolina even though it is considered as a place where blacks could live freely it has a dark history where the black people were used as test subjects for the white man study. Even their body were dugged out of the grave for social experiment. Black women they are asked by white doctor's that if they are willing to remove their reproductive system, so that they couldn't give birth to babies the white doctors of those times they believed that the black people are polluting the society.

When Cora has escaped the harmful clutches of Ridgeway in South and when she unknowingly flees to North Carolina, there she witnesses the cruelty of Northern plantations. The slaves who try to escape from the master's they were hung as a symbol to instigated fear into to other slaves' hearts. In the North not only slaves even if a white family harbours slaves and if the rest of the town finds slaves under their protection, they are hung to with a slave to make an example. When Cora is found Hiding in the attic of Martin and Ethel house, they both were captured and hung as an example. The people in the north they strongly believed that the slaves are barbaric creature if they are left unsupervised. They could even join forces and kill start a mutiny, they believed that it is the white man burden to rule over the slaves.

Later in the novel, when Cora is shown living in the valentine farm a safe haven for all slaves and runways. She feels safe after a long time but it is soon reduced into a short period when Mr. Valentine & Roy they are both shot by white supremacist for their activities and action to make America a slave free nation. Later when Ridgeway finds her as the run for her begin once all over again.

Racism is shown throughout the novel as the white man whip to control, his slaves and instigated fear into their heart in the beginning of the novel. When slave named Big Anthony escape, he is caught and burned alive to make a statement by his master to the other slaves, that they are his property and they does not have any idea of escaping. Even Cora she does

not have a choice to escape when she is forced to make a choice between life and death. She chooses to live by escaping the plantation.

When Cora is reminded about her mother's escape, there are some minor difficulties in the narrative had occurred. She is both upset and enraged by her mother's abandonment and resents Mabel for leaving her behind. Cora learns to be strong as a result of this conflict and self-sufficient, but also learning from her mother's errors, she stands up for herself. She likes her independence, but she also sincerely loves and cares for others. Mabel had returned for Cora in the novel, but she died from a terrible snake bite. When she is bitten by a snake Mabel, on the other hand, accepted her death and said her final goodbyes to her daughter. Cora may not have been aware of her mother's death. She faces many problems, during her struggle to achieve freedom and faces losses of people like Martin, Lovey, Caesar and Royal all are killed trying to help or protect Cora. Each of those tragedies exemplifies racism's savagery and reflects innocent lives taken from a horrible era. Despite the fact that these disputes may not have been addressed since Cora's heart is never entirely healed, she continues to fight for what she believes in freedom. This is another example of African Americans struggle for freedom. Despite the losses and hardships, they encountered along the way, they maintained equality and nourishment.

The authoritarian and racist society of the south is the major and consistent enemy. Throughout the story, the adversaries show this civilization. The Randall illustrates many types of plantation proprietors who once existed. The ruthless racial slave, the money-driven businessman, and the apathetic working owner driver. Ridgeway is a symbol of the ongoing threat that African Americans faced during those periods. They have no way of truly feel the feeling of freedom or safety if they flee since someone will catch them, and their punishment is death. Slaves have a slim chance of achieving freedom.

People are forced to work as slaves and used for medical experiment as described in the chapter South Carolina. The next major conflict is escaping from South Carolina, and travelling ahead becomes impossible and She takes refuge cause the run-away slaves are being killed in South Carolina. once she leaves, she is forced to live in a small space over Martin attic for months because the rail road had been abounded. This results in a kind of imprisonment as Cora must sacrifice her freedom for her safety. once she is found, she is subjected to ridge abuse and is caged just as she stays in the attic, but no longer safe. Once

rescued Cora has a peaceful life on valentine's farm until she is found and attacked by Ridgeway her lover is murdered right in front of her, and she abandons all of her friends.

This time, however, she truly escapes her enslavement and finds freedom in the north. The majority of primary conflicts are resolved; however, not all of them are positive resolutions. By the end of the novel, Cora has escaped, but Lovey and Caesar have been killed. Cora has the impression that everyone she met while fleeing has suffered as a result of her. The most important point is the conflict of a racist society is not resolved, but Cora escapes the worst of society's consequences this is to show this could not be resolved in the novel without changing the historical record, the chronology of events surrounding slavery.

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