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***The Repercussions of Inegalitarianism and Racial Disparities on Individuals'
Self-perception: An Analysis of the Film of Just Mercy (2019)***

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master's in
literature and civilization

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my incredible mother, Fouzia BOUSALAH, whose unwavering love, support, and encouragement have been the driving force behind my academic journey. Her strength, resilience, and wisdom have shaped not only my character but also my approach to challenges and achievements. This dissertation is an acknowledgement to her for always believing in me. Mom, no words seem adequate to capture the depth of my gratitude and love for you. She has had a profound impact on my life, guiding me and motivating me every step of the way. She is the light and my biggest inspiration.

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Abstract

In 1960s America, racial segregation was still ongoing, and black people were still being discriminated against and being classified into certain stereotypes. However, the complexities of racial discrimination and systemic injustices have been significant issues that have brought critical attention to America's racial equality in general, and the criminal justice system in particular. Accordingly, the film *Just Mercy* portrays such intricacies. The film, directed by Destin Daniel Cretton and released in 2019, is based on Bryan Stevenson's memoir entitled *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. Therefore, through the analysis of the characters, this dissertation tends to scrutinize how racial bias affects the legal system. In this regard, the critical race theory will be applied to showcase how white privileged individuals abuse their position to manipulate justice to serve their own interests. Most importantly, this work traces the agonizing impact of racial inequality, as projected via the undue justice legal system, on the way characters perceive themselves and the world around them. The film clarifies that the complexities of systemic injustices contributed immensely to the feelings of unrest, regardless of blacks' struggle to attain an egalitarian and just society. Additionally, it discloses that characters' internal struggle can be traced back to the impact of being at the edge of two identities, American and African, that are, in most cases, contrasted.

Key words: Racial Disparities, Racism, Egalitarianism, Self-perception, Manipulation of Justice.

Résumé

Dans l'Amérique des années 1960, le racisme était toujours présent et les Noirs étaient toujours victimes de discrimination et de stéréotypes. Cependant, les complexités de la discrimination raciale et de l'injustice systématique étaient des questions importantes qui ont suscité une attention critique à l'égard de l'égalité raciale en Amérique en général et du système de justice pénale spécialement. En conséquence, (La Voie de Justice) met en évidence ces complexités sociales. Destin Daniel est le réalisateur du film, sorti en 2019, qui s'inspire des mémoires de Bryan Stevenson et relate une histoire de justice et de rédemption. Dans cette thèse, l'analyse des personnages permet d'analyser l'impact des préjugés sur le système judiciaire. Dans cette optique, nous exposerons, la théorie critique de la race (ethnique) sera expliquée afin de démontrer comment des individus blancs puissants abusent de leur position pour manipuler la justice afin de servir leurs propres intérêts. De plus, le film relate l'effet douloureux de l'inégalité raciale et, par le biais d'un système judiciaire injuste, la façon dont les personnages se perçoivent et perçoivent le monde qui les entoure. Le film démontre que les complexités de l'injustice systématique ont contribué de manière significative aux sentiments de colère et de ressentiments des Noirs, indépendamment de leur lutte pour parvenir à une société fondée sur l'égalité et la justice. En outre, il met en évidence que le conflit interne des personnages peut être dû à l'influence d'être à la frontière de deux identités, américaines et africaines, souvent opposées.

Mots-clés : Disparités raciales, racisme, égalitarisme, perception de soi, manipulation de la justice.

ملخص

في أمريكا في الستينيات، كانت العنصرية لا تزال مستمرة وكان السود لا يزالون يتعرضون للتمييز وتصنيفهم في صور نمطية معينة. ,الا ان، تعقيدات التمييز العنصري والظلم الممنهج كانت من القضايا المهمة التي لفتت انتباه النقاد تجاه المساواة العرقية في أمريكا بشكل عام، ونظام العدالة الجنائية على وجه الخصوص. وبناءً على ذلك، يصور فيلم ' Just Mercy ' مثل هذه التعقيدات. الفيلم من إخراج ديستين دانيال كريتون وتم إصداره في عام 2019، وهو مستوحى من مذكرات بريان ستيفنسون و هي قصة عن العدالة و الخلاص لذلك ومن خلال تحليل الشخصيات، تميل هذه الأطروحة بالتدقيق في كيفية تأثير التحيز العنصري على النظام القانوني. وفي هذا الصدد، سيتم تطبيق نظرية العرق النقدية لإظهار كيف يسيء الأفراد البيض ذوي النفوذ استخدام مناصبهم للتلاعب بالعدالة لخدمة مصالحهم الخاصة. والأهم من ذلك، أن هذا العمل يتتبع التأثير المؤلم لعدم المساواة العرقية، كما يظهر من خلال نظام العدالة المححف، الطريقة التي تنظر بها الشخصيات إلى نفسها والعالم من حولها. ويوضح الفيلم أن تعقيدات الظلم الممنهج ساهمت بشكل كبير في مشاعر الغضب والاستياء لدى السود، بغض النظر عن نضالهم من أجل تحقيق مجتمع قائم على المساواة والعدالة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يكشف أن الصراع الداخلي للشخصيات يمكن إرجاعه إلى تأثير وجودها على حافة هويتين، أمريكية وأفريقية، متناقضتين في معظم الحالات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفوارق العرقية ، العنصرية، المساواة، التصور الذاتي، التلاعب بالعدالة.

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General Introduction

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General Introduction

The frequency of discriminatory acts in America and in the criminal justice system, in particular, based on race is one of the main problems that still exists today. Two noteworthy instances are segregation, which is one of the main ways that inequality spreads. It put into effect a set of “Jim Crow” laws that denied people’s basic rights and imposed racial segregation in public areas, namely schools and transportation. On the other hand, another case existed that is exemplified by the war on drugs, which began in the 1980s. This war characteristically impacted black communities in the sense that it increased the rate of arrests and incarcerations among people of color. But because of the war on drugs, police enforcement in the US frequently targets individuals of color, who frequently reside in impoverished neighborhoods, for stops, searches if not to say direct accusation.

It is safe to say that due to the fact that proof of racial bias must be provided and admission is necessary to enter the courtroom, attesting racial discrimination is quite challenging. For that reason, there are not many instances of racial bias in the criminal court system. Accordingly, ending the drugs war that is believed to be the driving force is more than needed to eradicate racial bias in America’s justice system considering that it is the primary cause of the high arrest, incarceration, and detention of millions of people of color, who are nominated as enduringly second-class citizens. As she went through the journey of history, Maya Angelou stated: “History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, it need not be lived again.”(Maya Angelou P14). Black Africans, according to Angelou, have a long history marked by ups and downs. Over the years, they have demonstrated resilience and bravery in the face of adversity like slavery and colonization. Black people in the face of difficulty served as a foundation for significant movements like the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter.

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This work addresses and examines how the *film Just Mercy* portrays and challenges many aspects of the criminal justice system, including racial disparities, systemic injustices, internal struggles faced by characters. As well as, their resilience and resistance to the existing injustices. In this vein, the following research questions are intended to be addressed: How does the film *Just Mercy* depict and address racial disparities, systemic injustices, and inegalitarianism in America, and mainly within the criminal justice system? In what ways does the movie depict the inner conflicts of individuals whose lives center around counterattacking and resisting the injustices existing in the legal system. Finally, how does the film interrogate the idea of convergence interests, specifically when it comes to the struggle for justice for those who are marginalized in a predominantly white society?

This dissertation puts forth several hypotheses in an effort to address the aforementioned interrogations. First, regardless of all measures taken to eradicate segregation and ensure equality in America, the film *Just Mercy* depicts and tackles the inescapable racial disparities, systemic injustices, and inegalitarianism inside the legal system. This is to say, that segregation between different races is still extant, in spite of the claims that enchanted the success of Civil Rights Movements in ensuring equality. Probably, marginalized groups in America cannot enjoy equal and egalitarian treatment, or, to be more exact, are condemned to wretchedness as long as they live in a white-privileged society.

The purpose of this study is to examine how black people have continued to struggle for equality and justice throughout history. In spite of the hardships and adversities encountered, starting with the abolishment of slavery and reaching the Civil Rights Movement, they kept fighting to arrive at a point of reconciliation of their distinct identities. Accordingly, the movie *Just Mercy* has been selected as the latter tends to raise awareness about racial discrimination in America, with a specific focus on the legal system. The film has

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shown that America's legal system is manipulated by politics and the interests of certain people who use power to ensure their rights. Most importantly, the film emphasises the internal conflicts of those who are racialized, victimized, and often imprisoned mistakenly on the basis that they are born guilty and how these issues affect the way they see themselves and, above all, impact the way they perceive the world around them.

Literature has always served as an inspiration for the film industry, as shown by the numerous adaptations of classic novels and stories. One example is the adaptation of *Just Mercy*, a movie adopted from a memoir entitled *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. The work offers a captivating narrative that delves into deep sociological and psychological themes and shows the story transitions from the pages of the book to the big screen. *Just Mercy* is such an impactful film; it opens your eyes up to important societal issues that are often overlooked or denied to be debated in historical narratives.

In addition to addressing the primary issue of this dissertation, which is the unfair treatment of African Americans in the legal system, including wrongful convictions due to racial bias, the work focuses on the manipulation of truth and justice for personal gains and its impact on an individual's identity. There are a number of studies that have been conducted on this topic. In this context, Brevani (2009) envisions that actions are often controlled by a powerful system, commonly a government, which regulates community activities and establishes norms for living. Additionally, racial discrimination remains a pressing problem in many countries and entails unfair treatment or abuse of individuals or groups based on their race or ethnicity. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander (2010) portrays America's criminal justice system as an apparatus for social control that has overemphasized specific racial groups through practices like mass

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imprisonment and racial profiling, resulting in significant disparities in incarceration and sentencing.

American history also shows how race has been a vital cause of systemic persecution. During the colonial era and the period of enslavement, Africans were used as slaves and systematically persecuted. Douglas A. Blackmon uncovered “convict labor” or “modern slavery” after the Civil War, noting that even though forms of racial oppression might progress, systemic abuse remains fundamental. This brings us to racial mistreatment, which involves the application of power over others on the basis of race or ethnicity (Cudd 23). There has been significant systemic racial persecution within the African-American community in America. Although the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s made some progress, new challenges emerged in the 1980s, including disparities in the criminal justice system, a lack of quality education for all, and economic disparities. In this context, James D. Anderson’s *The Education of Blacks in the South 1860–1935* (1988) discusses how systemic educational inequalities have limited opportunities for African American communities and served to maintain racism. Further, the ill-treatment has continued by law enforcement officials through racial profiling and abuse of power that led to persisting maltreatment during the decade of President Reagan’s time.

Hence, some prior thoughts provide insights into how racial discrimination is portrayed in movies. Isabel Pinedo’s analysis of “Ethical Creatures at the Intersection of Prejudice and Horror Film” (2020) reveals how horror films could address prejudice significantly. Despite different theoretical perspectives, this research points to the ability of popular culture to examine power relations. In her 2022 publication “The Philosophy of Bigotry in Modern Hollywood Movies on Netflix”, Briandana and colleagues bring up how race prejudice remains a feature in most Hollywood films today, showing why it is not easy to

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get rid of bias, as it always re-appears anyway. Additionally, Dezelin Brigitha's study on racial segregation depicted in "12 Years a Slave" provides useful information concerning an age-old slavery issue and the ill-treatment meted out to blacks, among others. Similarly, Yusrina Rahmatillah's study entitled "Exploring Prejudice Towards African Americans in the Movie Selma" involves a discussion about systemic racism, personal predicaments, and internalized discrimination.

It is worth pointing out that the notion of intersectionality was first publicly introduced in 1989 by Kimberlee Crenshaw in a paper at the University of Chicago Legal Forum, entitled *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. She enlightens that intersectionality is an allegory for understanding the various forms of inequality. Additionally, researchers, namely Patricia Hill Collins and Ibram X. Kendi have further expanded the concept of intersectionality by displaying how people's lives are often charted by oppressive systems. *How to Be an Antiracist*, written by Kendi in 2019, sheds light on how laws, regulations, and even principles can normalize racial differences. Following the same line of thought, and in her book entitled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), Collins comments on Crenshaw's work examining the possible intersecting factors such as race, gender, and class in shaping systems. Nonetheless, Derrick Bell's *Race, Racism and American Law* tackled the concept of 'Interest Convergence'. Derrick postulates that racial variances may appear covertly via institutional policies and measures. A lot of theoreticians of Critical Race Theory, to be specific Kimberle Crenshaw and Richard Delgado, illuminate that racism is prevalent in nations no matter how people hide their interests and their manipulative tactics.

Furthermore, a close analysis of the issue of racism was conducted by Dominique Marquette in 2020, in which she scrutinized the films *Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and *Just*

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Mercy (2019). Marquette inspects how media representation in racialized communities affects the public's perspective on race. It is necessary to note that while the above studies have presented valuable research, not enough research has examined how these films help us understand racism, unfairness, and the struggles of minorities such as African Americans in real legal situations.

As mentioned beforehand, the research tends to focus on the film *Just Mercy* using a Critical Race Theory. The latter is used with a view to showing the reality of the criminal justice system in America. Put another way, this approach is embraced to see how different dynamics; to be precise, race and power structures may shape a nation's legal system. Hence, it leans towards portraying how justice can be twisted for personal gains and how different aspects of a person's identity, such as race and gender, can affect their experiences and the legal verdict, or how their experiences of struggling with two identities can help progress and develop their characters. As well, a historical approach is implemented to examine the different historical, social, and political conditions that shaped America's racial history on the basis that the work offers a critical interpretation of the current state of blacks in America, especially after the allure that prevailed after the proposed achievement of the Civil Rights Movement. This research can bridge the gap between what we see in films and what is happening in real life: black's struggle to attain an egalitarian and just system.

Structurally, this dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first chapter focuses on the historical background of the struggles of blacks over the years, from slavery to the Black Lives Matter movement. As it explores concepts of segregation and institutionalized discrimination. To do so, a theoretical background, including the origins and development of Critical Race Theory is embraced, along with the pioneering thinkers and scholars who shaped America's legal system. The second chapter points out to the character's endless and

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fateful struggle towards attaining egalitarian treatment in society and in court, in particular, as far as the movie is concerned. Correspondingly, the chapter cross-examines the differences involving factors that tend to shape America's legal system. Last of all, the third chapter is devoted to the analysis of self-perception through double consciousness as well as the characters' progression through intersectionality.

Chapter I

Voices of Resistance: The African American Struggle for Egalitarianism

Introduction

A long and challenging period that African Americans have experienced in the US is marked by mistreatment and discrimination at the hands of white Americans. The subjugation began during the early colonization period and has persisted until the mid-nineteenth century. In addition to being sold as slaves, many Africans have been forcibly separated from their homeland and subjected to harsh treatment while their fundamental rights have been denied. Slavery dehumanized African Americans, causing society to view them as objects and strip them of their humanity, impacting their lives in various ways.

I. Mapping the Historical Evolution of Slavery in The United States

Many significant events have been studied in various reports about the history of slavery in the United States. In 1619, the initial African slaves reached Virginia, which marked the start of slavery in the United States. Around 20 enslaved Africans were brought to the British colony of Virginia, which had a lasting and positive impact on the nation's growth and development. (Simba Malik). As well, John Rolfe describes the arrival of the first African slaves in 1619 in the following words: "[...] about the last of August, there came to Virginia Dutchman of War that sold us twenty Negroes." (John Rolfe 58). In this prerogative, it is safe to say that the word "Negros" seems like a causal word to him, as if he is not talking about real people; it actually illustrates how black people were treated.

Though Africans played a significant role in America's war of independence, yet their struggle continued even after the liberation, as they were not fighting to liberate America, but rather to liberate themselves as well. Strangely, the struggle did not as they kept fighting their masters who found ways to racialize them based on their skin color. After the colonies

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declared their independence, a call was made to provide soldiers to fight in the continental army. African Americans answered to fight, however, the commander of the Continental Army¹ and a slave holder himself issued orders denying African Americans from serving in the army. Moreover, the British issued a proclamation² stating that they would give freedom to African Americans who would serve in the British army. This proclamation inspired many Africans to flee and fight for their freedom; they also served as spies during the war. In spite of the efforts devoted and the sacrifice to save the nation, yet the refusal to grant full equality to all citizens severely influenced the war's outcome (American Revolution Facts). In addition, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, another significant event that shaped the history of slavery, was considered by many to be one of the most immoral and horrific periods in human history.

The impact of slavery did not affect slaves nor their children but also the economy and history of many nations in the world. For instance, the crops grown in the new colonies, namely sugar cane, tobacco, and cotton, were labor-intensive, and since there were not enough settlers or workers to accomplish the demanded task, Europeans offered African kings manufactured goods, firearms, and rum in exchange for slaves. Naturally, African rulers did not hesitate to sell them to enrich their own lands and fortify them against enemies, but supplying the Europeans 'tremendous demand caused strong competition, which fueled the war. The Slave Trade had devolved into an arms competition, with slaves subjected to

¹ The Continental Army, established by the Second Continental Congress in 1775 and led by General George Washington, was the unified military force of the Thirteen Colonies during the American Revolutionary War. (https://www.army.mil/article/40819/washington_takes_command_of_continental_army_in_1775)

² Lord Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775 promised freedom to enslaved Africans who joined the British army, leading many to serve as soldiers and spies. Despite their contributions, African Americans were denied equality post-war, underscoring the irony of their fight for freedom in a nation that continued to oppress them. (<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/lord-dunmores-proclamation-1775>)

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unspeakable brutality: they were shaved to prevent lice and branded before being shipped to the Americas. The sailors assaulted women and children while keeping them above. (The Transatlantic Slave Trade Initiative)

On the other hand, in 1819, Missouri applied for recognition as a slave state. It immediately it faced opposition from Representative James Tallmadge from New York, who proposed the Tallmadge Amendment, which illustrates that there was a system of Gradual Emancipation³. The Tallmadge Amendment announced: “And provided that the further introduction of slavery or involuntary servitude be prohibited... and that all children born within the said state, after the admission therefore into the Union, shall be free at the age of twenty-five years.” (Rep. James. Tallmadge). Hence, Missouri will release anyone born after it joins the Union at the age of 25. This would have compelled Missouri to implement a Gradual Emancipation Program.

On the other hand, states want to keep the number of slaves and free states equal. The prospect of Missouri becoming a slave state sparked a contentious discussion about slavery and its implications for all future states as well as the destiny of the country, escalating already high tensions in Congress and the country at large. Political power was the main point of contention in the argument. The balance of power in Congress would be upset by Missouri's admission as a slave state. Congress then put up a different proposal in order to maintain steadiness. In exchange for Missouri becoming a slave state, Maine's Northern Territory would become a free state. Consequently, the agreement guaranteed equal representation to both the North and the South. Subsequently, the agreement's second

³ Gradual emancipation refers to legislative measures enacted in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to end slavery gradually, often by setting future dates for emancipation or freeing children born to enslaved mothers once they reached a certain age. (<https://connecticuthistory.org/gradual-emancipation-reflected-the-struggle-of-some-to-envision-black-freedom/>)

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component prohibited slavery on the remaining land Louisiana had acquired; however, it did not eradicate slavery in states where it was already in practice.(Amanda Onion, Missy Sullivan, Matt Mullen and Christian Zapata.P25)

The Civil War was also America's greatest revolution, the new nation's regions expanded, but in different directions, with the north still having a large agricultural area. African slavery laid the groundwork for social and economic life in the American South in the early nineteenth century, with wealthy farm owners controlling millions of black workers, denying them education, and controlling their family lives. All through the Civil War, slavery remained legal in the South, but the Northern States gradually abolished or eliminated it. The main concern during the establishment and division of the West into new states in the 1850s was what to do with all the land. In other words, the South desired that one of the Western territories become a slave state, while the North wanted the territories as free states. The Republicans, a newly created political party, opposed slavery in the Western regions in 1854. However, many white Southerners took offense when their candidate, Abraham Lincoln, won the US presidential election in 1860, reasoning that they should have been able to take their slaves with them. The Confederacy⁴ fought to maintain subjugation and the dominance of the elite. The Confederates fought, as Lincoln told Congress in 1862, to put 'capital' which is wealth measured in human beings, 'above labor in the structure of government'. Understanding these stakes, hundreds of thousands of enslaved laborers fled to the Union lines even before the declaration of Emancipation. Following the war, the scholar W.E.B. DuBois describes it as "A counter revolution of property", led by former

⁴the Confederacy was a group of Southern states that seceded from the United States during the Civil War. They formed their own government, known as the Confederate States of America.
(https://www.army.mil/article/40819/washington_takes_command_of_continental_army_in_1775)

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slaveholders and conservative businessmen, vanquished former slaveholders and radical Republicans. (Edy, Jill A.)

The Proclamation of Emancipation was released during a period of extreme danger in the Civil War theater. When Abraham Lincoln joined the Free-Soil Party⁵ in 1854, it was primarily for economic rather than human rights concerns. The party opposed slavery's spread. The Republican Party under Abraham Lincoln announced emancipation at that time. In the context of world politics, Europe, particularly France, was about to acknowledge the south and offer assistance. The intention was to shift the emphasis of the conflict from the political ideology of federalism and state rights to the liberation of the slaves. Even though slaves were set free, apparently not all of them were free. In the context of the Broder states, this is a phenomenon of the civil war, being that they are slave states such as Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and the new foreign state of West Virginia, where it is allowed to practice slavery, but Lincoln kept them inside the Union. Nevertheless, it was to change the aims of the war, and emancipation was not intended to free all the slaves, but rather to hold on to that kind of political idea about how to win the war. (Editors, Emancipation Proclamation.P04)

In summary, African Americans experienced various forms of oppression, and these effects continue to be felt today, ranging from the horrific events of the Slave Trade to the aspirations of black Africans to achieve their freedom during the American Revolution. Despite Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of freeing slaves, the main aim was only to change the war's focus.

⁵ The Free-Soil Party was a political party in the United States during the mid-19th century. It opposed the expansion of slavery into the Western territories, advocating for "free. soil" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Free-Soil-Party>)

II. The Never-Ending Struggle for Racial Equality

After the Civil War ended and Reconstruction, African Americans continued to struggle for their ultimate rights as citizens. This was ongoing for almost a century. These goals were achieved by the mid-20th century with the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington, during which he declared, "One day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white notes and white girls," was one of the most significant events. Despite the frequent increase of brutality and violence, the television broadcast of this event began to transform Americans' perception of the Civil Rights Movement and increase their awareness. It was during this period of immense pain and sacrifice that the efforts of civil rights activists started to pay off. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 with the intention of desegregating government jobs and companies. Then, in 1965, President Johnson's passage and signing of the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965 marked a significant victory for Black Americans. African Americans endured a protracted struggle before receiving equal rights, despite the American Civil War in 1865, essentially signaling the end of slavery. Violence and legal constraints ultimately prevented Black voters though by 1870 all qualified male citizens could cast ballots. This separate but equal mentality was implemented in numerous Southern states; however, this resulted in the implementation of Jim Crow Laws⁶, which resulted in the treatment of blacks as second-class citizens.

⁶Jim Crow Laws were laws in the US enforcing racial segregation and discrimination, especially in the South after Reconstruction. They mandated segregation in public facilities, perpetuating racial inequality. (<https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>)

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Stretched to the 1900s, there was segregation in restrooms, transportation, schools, and other institutions. The NAACP⁷ was founded after World War I to put an end to white people's. The organization played a significant role in the Topeka, Kansas, Brown v. Board of Education⁸ legal dispute. This class-action complaint from 1951 appealed to the Supreme Court to rule against school segregation. (Kiger) The lawsuit led to the nation's first integrated school. Inspired by this decision, the Civil Rights Movement began planning well-known boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and other peaceful protests. In 1955, the Civil Rights Movement arranged the Montgomery Bus Boycott in support of Rosa Parks. Following his election, President John F. Kennedy urged the campaign to go on. The president chose to fully endorse the movement due to its severe brutality, stating in his speech:

A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all." Regardless of all the hard work from civil rights movements and different groups trying to tackle racial bias and unfairness, there are still plenty of challenges to face. (John Fitzgerald Kennedy)

Another movement rose thanks to three African women who first coined the phrase Black Lives Matter in 2013 following George Zimmerman's killing of an unarmed teenager, named Trayvon Martin. He did not face any charges immediately. A petition with over a million signatures and a public statement from then-President Barack Obama saying, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon" were the sole reasons it took 44 days for him to be taken into custody. We're going to get to the bottom of exactly what happens." (Stephanie Condon.) One year

⁷The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a civil rights organization in the United States.

⁸ Brown v. Board of Education was a landmark Supreme Court case in 1954 that declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. It was a significant victory in the Civil Rights Movement. (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Brown-v-Board-of-Education-of-Topeka>)

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later, a jury of six white women found Zimmerman not guilty on all counts. The acquittal sparked a new civil rights movement. The release caused outrage and sparked the birth of a new civil rights movement. However, it was not until August 9, 2014, that the term became widely recognized. A white police officer shot and killed Michael Brown after he begged the officer to stop, saying, ‘I do not have a gun; stop shooting.’ (Cassandra Vinograd)

In Missouri, the protesters were holding signs that read Black Lives Matter. However, the police response kept the slogan going for days, and the use of social media helped grow the movement even more, showcasing police brutality and racial inequality. The movement gained widespread attention after Eric Garner’s last words, “I cannot breathe” were caught on video saying it 11 times. Another shooting occurred only two months after Eric Garner’s death. The next victim was Michael Brown, 18 years old, an unarmed African American teenager who was shot and killed by the police. Correspondingly, Police brutality raged more and more after the protests of the movement. It was a cycle of killings, protests, and no criminal charges. (Nicole Pagowsky and Niamh Wallace).

In brief, despite the efforts of the movements and acts to overcome discrimination and segregation in the United States of America, fighting for egalitarianism is a long and challenging journey. Regardless of the obstacles faced, victories and progress achieved when fighting for egalitarianism are a testament to the resilience and determination of those involved. The impact of these efforts continues to shape society.

III. The Repercussions of Institutionalized Racism

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Institutionalized racism occurs when racist policies and practices are built into the very institutions that a society relies on. It is about how racism has become embedded in the way these institutions' function. (Cambridge Dictionary). It arises if we have an organization, such as the police, where they have a set of policies that cause young black men, for example, to be stopped and searched more frequently than white men. As a result, they have an approach to a problem and a set of policies within that organization that cause an uneven outcome. It is a question of strategy to be able to make an intervention in the criminal justice system as an institution or a set of practices or discourses. To make an intervention, you have to be focused in order to actually make changes in those institutional practices.

The interrelation between institutional forms and systemic forms of racism is foundational to the way we navigate institutions generally. While it might have a strategy for certain sets of institutions, the wider discussion of how racism shapes their daily lives also needs to be expansive and open to the possibility that things we cannot see might have racial ideologies or inscriptions built into them, but we have to investigate in order to see that stuff. It is about unwitting results from organizations through prejudice, ignorance, and so on. which can be seen through disparities in when implementing the death penalty, higher arrest rates, and longer sentences. These problems appear in various forms and add to the overall unfairness experienced by these groups. The distinction among human races is evidently elucidated in the following claim, "the prison population has shifted significantly from mostly white to mostly black since 1967, leading to institutional racism and unfair treatment within correctional facilities." (Robert L Woodson n.p). It demonstrates that black individuals tend to get longer prison sentences than white individuals. Moreover, it indicates

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that black individuals have less opportunities for probation and parole, and they experience harsher punishments while in prison.

III.1. Disparities and Discrimination in the Death Penalty

The criminal justice system has played a major role in racial oppression throughout American history, at first slavery and the failure to provide blacks with equal protection later on. Black offenders in the criminal justice system have exposed deep-rooted issues of institutional racism. Race has an impact on everything, from police stops to the severity of the sentence imposed.; one of many of them is the death penalty⁹. Taking in mind the effect of racial biases on criminal justice, the following saying further explains the idea as cited

Even under the most sophisticated death penalty statutes, race continues to play a major role in determining who shall live and who shall die. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the biases and prejudices that infect society generally would influence the determination of who is sentenced to death. (Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun)

This seeks to ask and fight for equality and shows the persisting issue of discrimination in the application of the death penalty. It points out how this unfair discrimination and sentence can impact who receives the death penalty. In 2007, the American Bar Association published a report documenting the details of racial disparities that exist even in the execution of the death sentence, consistently showing that there is a major difference in the number of black inmates in comparison to white inmates, in addition to harsher punishment

⁹ The death penalty, or capital punishment, is the state-sanctioned execution of an individual as punishment for serious crimes, such as murder and terrorism, with its application varying worldwide. (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/>)

in terms of legal charges. Despite the fact that black individuals make up only around 13% of the total US population, they make up over 41% of the people on death row. (Prison Policy Initiative)

III.2 A Broken System: The Human Cost of Disparities

Over the years, the treatment of black community by the criminal justice system affected their perspective, scholars like Michelle Alexander and Angela Davis have tackled these issues related to racial disparities. For instance, Michelle Alexander, A well-known law scholar and social reformer feels that institutional discrimination against African Americans persists. Alexander examined the prejudices that Black Americans continue to face in her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. She pointed out that although the US Civil War abolished slavery, racial discrimination persisted legally under the Jim Crow Laws, which were common in Southern states and divided Black and White Americans in all spheres of society. Alexander disputed that discrimination has persisted in other forms because of recent developments in law enforcement. According to Alexander, the primary offender is the “War on Drugs” since cops disproportionately search young black guys and jail them for drug offenses that generally include violence. Black Americans who are freed from prison often lose important rights, like the ability to vote. In addition, background investigations frequently result in their exclusion from employment.

Besides, Angela Davis is a human rights activist, a scholar, and an author. She discusses racial disparities within the criminal justice system. Davis’s work sheds light on the intersection of race and incarceration, emphasizing the need to address these issues through her incredible book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* In chapter two of the book, Angela asserts:

"But it should be remembered that the ancestors of many of today's most ardent liberals could not have imagined life without slavery, life without lynching, or life without segregation." (Angela Davis 24)

Angela notes that while anti-black racism rooted the development of the modern prison system, it also impacted Latin, Native American, and Asian American histories, making prisons intrinsically racist. The book repeatedly emphasizes the crucial historical point that the prison system itself originated as a concept for reform. In the late eighteenth century, those who would today be considered anti-prison campaigners sought to replace the death penalty with a more humane form of punishment. moreover, Davis is illustrating how the prison system does not actually tackle the underlying issues in her statement:

Prisons do not disappear social problems; they disappear human beings. Relegating human beings to cages results in the disappearance of problems such as homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy from public view.

In this statement, David asserts that imprisonment does not serve as a solution to address the issues faced by individuals such as the homeless or drug-addicted; rather, it intensifies and hides these problems, particularly for those incarcerated. This especially affects black people because they are often targeted or easily discriminated against, masking the true issue.

Nonetheless, the significant disparities in the United States' criminal justice system, particularly the arrest rates. The United States has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners, even though they only make up 5% of the total population, and its

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criminal justice system shows signs of severe racial bias. Black or Hispanic people make up only 28% of the US population, but 56% of all prisoners. To be exact, 1 in 3 black boys, can expect to go to prison in the US in their lifetimes compared with 1 in 17 white boys. (Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System) It is not just about those in prison; rather, it is about the effect that it has on those individuals for the rest of their lives. Within one year of their release, nearly half of US prisoners return to prison, and within three years, two out of three face arrest. Nevertheless, a conviction can affect a citizen's ability to secure federal benefits or a job. Nearly 75 % of formerly incarcerated people are still unemployed a year after release. However, in 12 states, being convicted means you can never vote again.

Stanford University researchers found that the 100 largest police departments in North Carolina conducted 4.5 million traffic stops in 2017, with a higher likelihood of searching black individuals than white ones. To make matters worse, during traffic stops, white drivers were more likely than non-white drivers to discover contraband. (Ingram, Christopher). In addition to the bail system, a 2011 study of bail in five large U.S. counties found that blacks received seven thousand dollars more bail than whites for violent crimes. Public-order crimes required bails of ten thousand dollars, whereas drug crimes required bails of fifteen thousand dollars.

IV. Exploring (In)egalitarianism

Segregation has been a key factor in perpetuating inequality throughout history. Starting around 1900, there was a significant migration of African Americans to industrial cities.

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Segregation¹⁰ is one of the principal mechanisms by which inequality is transmitted. Between 1900 and 1970, a significant number of African Americans moved to the factories of the Northeast, Midwest, and West. When black people move into American cities, one type of spatial division usually replaces another, leading to increased levels of segregation at the residential and neighborhood levels. When residents in white communities refused to rent or sell to African Americans on the basis of their race, it was considered institutionalized discrimination. Banks also discriminated against African Americans by refusing to lend them money to purchase properties. Finally, there was redlining, a kind of discrimination against black areas when banks and other financial organizations would draw a line around the community and declare they would not make any loans within that boundary.

Along with the 1968 Fair Housing Act¹¹ that banned discrimination in housing rental and sale; besides the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act¹² that outlawed discrimination in mortgage lending against individuals based on race, there has been a steady decline in the levels of black-white segregation. (Kimberly Quick and Richard D. Kahlenberg). Addressing these issues is crucial; this act align with the core values of egalitarianism by wanting to create a more just and safe society where everyone has an equal chance.

In order to establish an understanding of the enduring struggles of inequality, delving into the theory of Critical Race Theory can pave the way to uncovering segregation and disparities. In her interview with NBC, Kimberle Crenshaw, a pioneering scholar of

¹⁰ Segregation refers to the separation of individuals based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or gender, leading to unequal treatment and opportunities.

¹¹

¹² The Equal Credit Opportunity Act is a law that prohibits lenders from discriminating against credit applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or because they receive public assistance.

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critical race theory, explains and gives clarity to what the theory really is. In her words, the theory is:

A way of looking at a thing, looking at a race, and asking why, after so many centuries since Emancipation, we have patterns of inequality that are enduring and stubborn. The original purpose of critical race theory was to examine how the law contributed to the subordinate status of African Americans and indigenous people who were coming to our shores from Asia. It emphasized the importance of understanding this issue in order to intervene. This approach is a method of examining a situation, examining a race, it was crucial to comprehend this issue in order to intervene and understand why our republic's greatest hopes, enshrined in law, were not being realized.

Basically, she is stating that critical race theory focuses on questioning why inequalities have endured for so long despite all the efforts and contributions that have been made. Similarly, Ibram X. Kendi explores Critical Race theory in his book *How to be an Antiracist*, which is a branch of law and legal scholarship that was founded in the late 1980s by lawyers and academics such as Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Fredrick Douglass. Its goal is to address the power of racial disparities in the legal system. These academics saw that something was wrong and that they needed to tackle the regulations and institutions that they believed to be the root of these persistent inequities.

It is worth noting that the term gained attention after massive protests following the killing of George Floyd. However, in September 2020, researcher and journalist Christopher Ruffo used Fox news shortly after President Donald Trump's administration ordered Federal Agencies to stop such training, criticizing the anti-bias training occurring in Federal Agencies

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as a form of critical race theory, calling it "divisive in-American propaganda". Further, Frederick Douglass was a prominent figure in the fight for civil rights. He contributed to Critical Race Theory through his powerful speeches and writings, exposing racial inequality. In an 1852 Independence Day speech, he delivered in Rochester, New York, Douglass raised the question, "What to the slave is the Fourth of July?". Then, he proceeded to answer his question by saying, "The blessings in which you this day rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence [given] by your fathers is shared by you, not by me [...] What to the American slave is your Fourth of July?". Evidently, he challenges the audience and highlights the disparities by emphasizing the complex experiences between different groups in America. However, racists publicly employed a reverse CRT lens in the nineteenth century to explain the procedures that Alexis De Tocqueville¹³ and Frederick Douglass criticized.

Chief Justice Roger Taney made this assertion in the majority judgment of the Supreme Court in its 1857 Dred Scott ruling: that the Court ruled "A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a 'citizen' within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States" because "When the Constitution was adopted, they were not regarded in any of the States as members of the community, which constituted the State". As a result, they are not entitled to the unique privileges and immunities that citizens enjoy. (Origin and Meaning of Critical Race Theory)

¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) was a French political thinker and historian best known for "Democracy in America," where he analyzed the impact of democracy on American society and its institutions.

V. Towards Apprehending the Layers of Intersectionality Within Critical Race Theory

Kimberlee Crenshaw published a paper titled *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* in the University of Chicago Legal Forum in 1989, she officially introduced the idea of ‘intersectionality’. For her, intersectionality is merely a symbol for comprehending how various forms of disadvantage or inequality can occasionally compound one another to create barriers. White girls are not suspended as frequently as African American girls, which is likely a result of both gender and racial issues. Kimberlé challenges people to consider how gender and racial stereotypes overlap.

Moreover, Kimberlé Crenshaw initiated the campaign #SayHerName¹⁴ in 2014 by the two organizations she founded: the African American Policy Forum (AAPF)¹⁵ and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS)¹⁶. Crenshaw launched the campaign to increase awareness about the violence against black women and to give their voices a platform. Police officers killed black women, namely Tanisha Anderson, Aura Rosser, Megan Hockaday, and Michelle Cusseaux because they received insufficient media coverage.

Additionally, Audre Lorde covers various social issues such as sexism, racism, age discrimination, homophobia, and class inequality in her book *Sister Outsider*. Her emphasis on the idea of otherness and the power of embracing one’s identity as an outsider is what

¹⁴ #SayHerName is a campaign that highlights the often-overlooked experiences of black women who have been impacted by police violence and systemic racism. It aims to bring attention to their stories and advocate for justice and equity for black women.

¹⁵ The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) is an organization dedicated to advancing racial and gender justice by promoting innovative research and policy initiatives. They work to address issues of inequality and discrimination through advocacy and education.

¹⁶ The Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) is an organization that focuses on examining social issues through an intersectional lens, considering how various aspects of identity intersect and impact individuals' experiences within society.

makes her work distinctive. Here is an illustration that elaborates on her concept of intersectionality:

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.

(114)

It demonstrates how difficult it can be to feel comfortable with yourself when society only focuses on one aspect of you. It highlights the struggle of being judged solely on your appearance or other superficial qualities. It is like being confined to a box based on just one part of who you are, which makes it challenging to feel fully accepted for everything that makes you unique. Another important case that illustrates the inequalities based on race: "He choked me, pushed me forcefully into the tub, pushed me so hard into the closet that I hid my head against the wall, and I kind of passed out for a second." (Anderson Cooper)

This is the statement of Marissa Alexander in her interview with CNN, an African black woman, who fired a warning shot to frighten away her violent husband and received a 20-year sentence despite the fact that the husband was not even hurt and he was threatening to kill her. This case would have turned another road if Marissa was a white woman, and many articles illustrate the same thing, demonstrating that race, gender, and her financial status played part in her conviction. This case truly shows the discrimination against women.

VI. Understanding the Dynamics of Interest Convergence in Racial Progress

Derrick Bell, he became the conceptual founder of the movement and served as a visiting professor of law at New York University, having previously taught at Harvard Law School. It was his interest in the convergence concept that made him most famous. He formulated two clear rules that make up 'Interest Convergence' theory. Concerning rule one, he states, "The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with the interest of whites in policy-making positions. This convergence is far more important for gaining relief than the degree of harm suffered by blacks or the character of the proof offered to prove that harm." (Bell 69). The rule's meaning is that the changes themselves are not meant to advance the interests of black people, but rather to advance white policymakers. That is a key statement of rule number one, however, the Emancipation Proclamation is a good example of interest convergence on the basis that they ban slavery, but say if you were born after a certain date, you had to be an indentured servant until you were 25 years old.

Importantly, in the North, the enslaved constituted a group that was in direct competition with poor and working-class whites, so getting rid of slavery helped working-class white people because it meant there was less competition for jobs between them and enslaved individuals. So, by getting rid of slavery, it created more job opportunities for the working-class population. Plus, even when some Northern States did ban slavery, most of the time enslaved people had to buy themselves at full market value, which meant indentured servants. Moving on to rule number two, he demonstrates: "Even when interest-convergence results in an effective racial remedy, that remedy will be abrogated at the point

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that policymakers fear the remedial policy is threatening the superior societal status of whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes.” (69) Basically, when observing a consistent pattern of interest convergence that has been buried over time, the rule states that any racial remedy will be rolled back or cancelled the moment the social or economic status of whites is threatened. For example, with voting rights, we saw the implementation of poll taxes and literacy tests, as well as, of course, the Jim Crow Laws.

The concept of interest convergence suggests that racial differences can show up indirectly in sneaky ways through rules and practices in institutions. These indirect disparities are often hidden from plain view, or sometimes through manipulation. Various theorists such as Kimberle Crenshaw and Richard Delgado have examined the idea of interest convergence in Critical Race Theory (CRT). Derrick Bell utilizes this word to describe that racism is universal in their society because it frequently comes together or coincides with the interest in something needed or sought by a white individual or group. This exploration has provided insights into the importance of interest convergence in comprehending racial dynamics and social change.

VII. Exploring Dual Identities: The Intricacies of Being on the Fringe Within a Racial Community

Double consciousness refers to the personal experience of experiencing a division in your identity, making it challenging or unfeasible to establish a single, cohesive identity. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois discusses race in the United States. He claims that because American blacks have historically been oppressed and despised, it is difficult for them to reconcile their black and American identities. Furthermore, double consciousness drives

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African Americans to see themselves not only from their own unique perspective, but also from that of the outside white world. Du Bois used double consciousness as a theoretical tool to better comprehend the psychological divisions that existed in American society following the Civil Rights movement. However, the theory was employed in women's studies and initially introduced by Francis Peel in 1969, during the second wave of feminism through the work 'Double Jeopardy'¹⁷, to exist as a black woman. Although it is a systemic issue, double consciousness tends to manifest at the individual level, the media often portrays band-promoted images of African American men as criminals and rappers due to this other subculture. It is deeper than that, because it is not about unifying identity, but rather it is about asserting one. This, consequently, does not get to flourish because they are hindered by the invisible rules of society; it is a mechanism of survival. DuBois illustrates the complex ways in which African Americans navigate the dual identities of blackness and Americanness, along with the challenges they encounter, as articulated in the following lines, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness... one ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled striving; two warring ideals in one black body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." (2)

DuBois' concept of "Double Consciousness" describes the dilemma of having two separate layers inside you, each with opposing views and ideals, but nevertheless holding them all together. DuBois struggled with his list of questions: Am I American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? In his book entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*, he kept repeating the same questions until he figured out the idea that blacks have a double consciousness: one as an American person and one as a black person. Furthermore, he claimed that African

¹⁷Double Jeopardy's concept explores the intersecting challenges faced by black women. It emphasizes the unique struggles of being both black and female, highlighting the compounded discrimination and inequalities that arise from the intersection of race and gender.

Americans live behind the 'veil'. It is a metaphor that is weighed down by the invisible chain of the mind and trapped by how others see you as less than who you really are. The "veil" has two different perspectives that show how it prevents blacks from seeing themselves as they are, but at the same time prevents whites from seeing blacks as Americans and treating them as human beings. Hence, DuBois makes it the responsibility of African Americans to change the veil into "a better and true self" (38).

Nevertheless, in his renowned book *Black Skin, White Masks*, the psychiatrist Fanon Frantz provides an explanation. The gist of the book is an exploration and venture into how colonialism has affected black Africans and their descendants. Africans experienced such complete dominance that they adopted, adhered to, and favored every aspect of European culture and values over their own. They are, in essence, white Europeans who happen to have black skin. He delves into the buffoonery, the awkwardness, and the schizophrenia of the black African race. He demonstrates that colonized peoples also suffer from double consciousness. Through his concept of cultural assimilation, he illustrates how one culture attempts to supplant and erase the traditions and identity of another, forcing it to conform to the dominant culture.

On a similar note, DuBois discusses the issue of black Americans having conflict identity. This is how the concept is similar to Fanon's exploration of dissatisfaction and the struggle for recognition in a society dominated by white people. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois first described African Americans' hardships as double consciousness, the feeling of being part of two opposing cultures, also known as double vision. Equally, Fanon describes the issue, stating "It refers to the struggle faced by African Americans, who

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constantly view themselves through the perspective of others and measure their worth based on standards that often hold them in contempt or pity.” (Fanon 2).

It feels as though he is shedding light on the difficulty of constantly viewing oneself through the eyes of others; it is as if you are imprisoned in a hall of mirrors that reflect back to you the opinions of society. Measuring your worth based on norms established by a society that views you with a combination of pity and hate is extremely exhausting. It tells a lot about how internal conflict over one’s own worth in the face of other people’s opinions can influence how one views him/herself. Therefore, people who have more than one identity often have internal issues. It shows how hard it is to find a place in both American and black society, as well as how difficult it is to balance the two identities. DuBois explains this constant struggle as follows, “One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” (2) . DuBois’ claim highlights the strength needed by someone with opposed identities to balance two identities in a society that has been tearing them apart.

Conclusion

This chapter delves into the tough issues of racism that have existed for a long time, ranging from slavery and the American Revolution to the horrific events of the Slave Trade that led to the Missouri Compromise. It then goes into the Civil War, showing how slavery created big gaps in society and led to a lot of struggles for racial fairness. Even though there were the Emancipation Proclamation and Civil Rights movements, racism is still there, showing up in things like unfair treatment in the justice system and differences in housing, education, and jobs. Additionally, discovering the perspectives of scholars like DuBois and Frantz Fanon through the concept of double consciousness and how it shed light on how African Americans are struggling with two different identities with internal conflict and external perception. Furthermore, exploring critical race theory and its concepts, such as convergence and intersectionality, from the viewpoints of significant prominent figures.

Chapter II

**The Status Quo of Afro-Americans in Just
Mercy: A Step Towards Resisting Racial
Disparities**

Introduction

Destin Daniel Cretton's film *Just Mercy* (2019) draws inspiration from Bryan Stevenson's memoir, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. The protagonist Bryan Stevenson, an aspiring attorney, founded the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) to provide free legal assistance to death row inmates, who have little to no representation. He devoted his career to defending those who have been illegally convicted and abused in state jails and prisons. With the assistance of Eva Ansley, a white coworker who manages numerous financial and logistical setbacks, they manage to defend people who have been erroneously convicted and mistreated in federal prisons. It is worth pointing out that his assistant, Eva, was creative and persistent; she wants to achieve justice as much as Stevenson. The film delves into numerous death row cases; however, the case of Walter McMillian stands out, as it embodies numerous issues within the criminal justice system, including a lack of physical evidence despite the presence of a dozen alibi witnesses. However, Stevenson's efforts undoubtedly prevented McMillian's from going to death row.

Stevenson's perspective gained inspiration upon witnessing the power of lawyers to effect change. For instance, they opened a public school for black children. At first, it did not resonate with him, but it instilled in him the belief that lawyers could make a significant impact. When he finished his studies, he started law school and wanted to focus on racial issues and poverty. Subsequently, they dispatched him to the Deep South¹⁸, where he had to interact with individuals awaiting execution. He discovered that individuals in need of legal

¹⁸ Deep South, often used to refer to the southeastern part of the United States, encompasses states like Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina. This region has a complex history marked by deep-rooted racial tensions and systemic injustices, particularly concerning African Americans. It was a place where segregation and discrimination were prevalent, and where individuals like Bryan Stevenson confronted the harsh realities of the legal system, especially in relation to racial issues and poverty.

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assistance often condemned those without money or legal representation, and their cases revealed some deeply troubling truths about the American criminal justice system. Bryan Stevenson famously remarked, “a system treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent.” (2:00:22) He immediately knew that he wanted to help condemned people who were facing execution in an unjust system.

Nevertheless, the story starts with Walter McMillan, an African American man in Alabama who was accused of committing murder in the 1980s. It was a terrible crime that took place in downtown Menville when a young white woman, Ronda Morrison, was murdered at a dry-cleaning store and the police could not solve the crime. Nevertheless, after six months, they have not solved the case. After tremendous pressure, they targeted McMillan not because he had a prior criminal history. On the contrary, he had never been in trouble before, but they convicted him because he was an African American man having an affair with a young white woman. Despite the fact that at the time of the crime he was with his family, about 20 other people were raising money for his sister’s church 11 miles away, and they persisted in prosecuting him. Accordingly, the film demonstrates the struggles that Bryan and McMillan faced, endeavoring to achieve justice.

I. Alabama’s Troubled Past with Racial Injustice

Alabama has an extensive history of racism and segregation. The film takes place in Alabama, highlighting the perpetual racial segregation in schools and public areas. Alabama has been the setting for important movements such as the Selma-to-Montgomery March¹⁹

¹⁹ The Selma-to-Montgomery March was a series of three 1965 protest marches advocating for African American voting rights.

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and the Montgomery Bus Boycott²⁰. This story explores many themes, such as wrongful imprisonment, justice, overcoming obstacles, and hope. Stevenson has a Harvard education, but he has it in mind that what he wants to do is go and represent people to make a difference and to give voice to the prisoners, whose voice has been taken away from them since they have always been silenced. McMillian's conviction was based on a high level of racism; he has no faith in lawyers on the basis that he has been abandoned by a legal system that has led him down. Although segregation was not legal at that time, this law town still had a strong racial divide, which McMillan fell victim to. A jury of eleven white people and only one black person found McMillian guilty and recommended a life sentence. However, the judge did not take the jury's recommendation and sentenced him to death by electric chair.

The encounter between Stevenson and McMillian was a powerful and emotional scene; it sets the stage for the big battle they face when achieving justice. Stevenson is trying to convince McMillian to start the battle, but McMillan has lost faith in the judicial system. He expresses to Stevenson his frustration due to the challenges he has faced, admitting "When you're guilty from the moment you're born." (21:49:00). This concession aligns with Malcolm X idea captured in his speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" when he said:

Now in speaking like this, it doesn't mean that we're anti-white, but it does mean we're anti-exploitation, we're anti-degradation, we're anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn't want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us. (Malcolm X 4)

²⁰ The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956) was a pivotal civil rights protest against racial segregation on public buses in Montgomery, Alabama, sparked by Rosa Parks' arrest.

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Malcom's speech underscores that regardless of their efforts to overcome these barriers, black people will always be assumed to be guilty.

II. Manipulating Justice: How Interest Convergence Shapes Legal Outcomes

In his book *And We Are Not Saved*, Derrick Bell discourses interest convergence. This means that white people never take deliberate action, particularly in politics, unless they control the system and always create opportunities based on how it benefits the system that you created or work for, which does not work for black people as mentioned by Derrick who points out "It does not work for us, that is not in our favor, that is in your favor" (p23) This is known as interest convergence. For instance: With the passage of legislation like the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, America made significant progress toward civil rights in the 1960s. Important political figures such as President Lyndon B. Johnson and Martin Luther King Jr, supported these laws, showing a strong commitment to racial equality. President Lyndon B. Johnson, a white leader, backed this legislation not only out of kindness but also because it benefited him politically. Johnson understood that siding with Civil Rights would earn him votes from African Americans and make the Democratic Party look good. The partnership of interests between African American communities striving for equality and politicians seeking votes resulted in significant reforms to civil rights laws such as Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, demonstrating how interest convergence works in society and politics.

III. Behind Closed Doors: Racism and Manipulation in *Just Mercy*

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In *Just Mercy*, there is a critical scene that shows how racial biases affect the legal system. The sheriff, Tom Tate, was under tremendous pressure due to the fact that the killer of the young white woman had not yet been found. After six months, the sheriff found a way to protect himself by pinning the murder on Walter McMillian solely because he was an African American romantically involved with a white woman, causing racial tensions to escalate. This clue is clearly described in the following passage:

The sheriff: So, you ain't got no boss to check in with, huh? That must be pretty nice. Free to run up and down the road wherever you want to, whenever you want to, in this fancy truck.

Walter: Hey, well, not if my wife has something to say about it.

The sheriff: Yeah, I heard that ain't stopped you before, though. Ain't that right, Johnny D.? You want to make a break for it?

Walter: No, sir, I don't want to do nothing...

The sheriff: After what you've done, I'm looking for any excuse to get this over with, right here, right now.

Walter: Sir, I ain't did anything, and I think y'all got the wrong person here. Y'all got me confused with somebody. And I think...

The Sheriff: I ain't got you confused with nobody.

Walter: I don't have a thing to do with this. (*Just Mercy*, 00 :01 :10)

In breaking down the motives behind Walter's arrest, it is evident how the sheriff's agenda fits into the idea that racism is more than just a personal favour. The sheriff's decision to shift the blame was a calculated move. Walter not only protects him and serves his own interests, but also upholds the existing power structure. Rather than seeking justice and trying to find the killer, he took the easy road by framing Walter, despite knowing McMillan was innocent.

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Remarkably, The Central Park Five case, which involved the brutal murder and sexual assault of a white woman, bears similarities to this scene. The attack got widespread attention and became a media sensation. Investigators quickly focused on a group of black and Hispanic boys who were in the park that night. Years later, it was clear that this terrible crime was the subject of a new Netflix miniseries. The only reason these men are free and exonerated is because the killer admitted he was the real assailant. He had more compassion for them than the police, and if he had not admitted that, these boys would still be guilty.

Another significant scene in the film shows an indirect example of how white individuals in positions of power always prioritize their own needs. Due to the tremendous pressure on the sheriff for not finding the killer of the white young women, he takes a different approach by trying to pressure Ralph Myers, a convicted felon, to testify against Walter McMillian. In this scene, Myers explains to the lawyer how they manipulated him to attest against Walter by moving him from the count, confessing:

Myers: They put me in the cell closest to the kill room. In the middle of the night, everybody started screaming and banging on the bars, and then came the smell of his skin burning. I know that smell.

Stevenson: May I ask you what happened?

Myers: Seven years old, I was sleeping in my foster mom's basement when her heater blew up and caught my P'Js on fire. I was screaming for two minutes straight before they found me. Everybody knew that I had a fear of being burned; they knew what it would do to my head to be in a place like that. I couldn't stop shaking all night, curled up on the floor like a baby trying to breathe, but every breath you take, you get another taste of the man they killed. You can't go through something like that and come out the same. Stevenson: I know.

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Myers: I called that sheriff the next morning. I told him I would say whatever he wanted to get me out, and he took my statement and moved me to the county the next day. (1:25:32)

This event illustrates their main goal of securing a conviction in Walter's case, even though they are aware of his innocence. By manipulating Myers to further their own agenda, it shows how seeking personal advantage can worsen the flaws in the criminal justice system and contribute to racial bias and unfairness. This situation is in line with the idea of interest convergence, where events that perpetuate racial discrimination ultimately benefit those in power and those with privilege.

III.1. The Venture to Balance Interests and Morality in *Just Mercy*

Interest convergence has some positive aspects, despite the fact that it typically involves powerful individuals who only permit change when it serves their interests and needs. Accordingly, Bryan Stevenson is an example of those who used power to gain public attention to serve his needs. He used "60 Minutes", the most successful television program ever, to leverage public support and media attention on the way to secure justice for McMillian. Even though he lacks conventional and traditional authority, his actions support the public's desire for a just legal system to bring McMillian's case to justice. The acceptance, if not to say, the adoption of interest convergence serves as an example of how group activities can combat structural and systemic inequities.

As well, Ansley works with Bryan Stevenson. Ansley's presence and support, as a white lady assisting Stevenson in achieving justice, emphasizes how crucial it is for allies from many backgrounds to band together in order to confront structural injustices.

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Unquestionably, at first, Bryan Stevenson encountered challenges and objections from those who did not believe or think he should represent people like McMillian. Threats to his life and property were made, along with other attempts to thwart and spoil his efforts to have Walter's conviction overturned. This idea is projected through the following scene that demonstrates the bomb threat he was exposed to:

The speaker: working for that nigger lawyer?

Ansley: Who is this?

The speaker: The guy who put the bomb under your house is going to blow all your family to hell if you don't stop working for that nigger Johnny D.(47:42:00)

This intense scene illustrates Stevenson's determination and that of his coworker to push forward despite these threats, which is truly admirable and speaks to the importance of standing up against injustice. Plus, her whole family was threatened but that did not stop her no matter what the obstacles are, despite the fact that they were only trying to do the right thing.

What is more, Darnell, who expose the manipulation of the evidence against McMillian in his conversation with Bryan Stevenson, is another instance that exemplifies the misuse of power, as indicated in the following passage:

Darnel: I think I can prove he's innocent. You heard of Bill Hooks, right!?

Stevenson: He testified that he saw Johnny D's truck at the cleaners that morning.

Darnell: Bill didn't see anything; he made the whole thing up.

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Stevenson: How do you know that?

Darnell: Because I was with him, we were working at the shop together.

Stevenson: the morning of the murder?

Darnell: Yes, sir, we were fixing the head gasket on the Camaro from 8:00 in the morning until right after we closed for lunch. He was right next to me when the sirens were going off.

Stevenson: Why would he lie? (35:45:00)

In this scene, McMillian's son states to Bill that "he cut a deal with the cops because he was locked up for burglary, the day he gives a statement, he walks out free "(39:23:00). It was a win for both; he got free and the police got a witness against McMillan. Thus, they both served their own interests, even if it meant convicting an innocent man. Days later, Darnell, who signed a statement in favor of McMillan, was arrested for perjury without evidence that a false statement had been made. He was afraid to testify because he knew that he would get in trouble, but still, he challenged his fears and could not keep silent since an innocent man was convicted. But his fears came true, and he was arrested to drop his testimony and it worked. This form of manipulation not only harms the legal system's reputation, but rather creates moral issues for those involved. Difficult decisions confront the sheriff and prosecutors, highlighting the conflict between selfish motivations and doing what is right.

Just Mercy encourages individuals to contemplate the ethical challenges that arise from the convergence of interests. It questions the usual rules of society and shows how important it is to have good morals when seeking justice. To truly understand the difficulties that people face when trying to balance their own interests with what is right, we must explore

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the complex issues that challenge their conscience. People face moral dilemmas when trying to balance their interests with justice. In this regard, decision-makers face a complex situation where personal gain may clash with moral obligations. This dilemma becomes more profound when societal norms or institutional pressures align with self-interest. However, Sheriff Tate is a character that exemplifies the interplay between personal interests and moral obligations. He manipulates evidence to arrest the only witness who could prove Walter's innocence, refuses to cooperate with Stevenson's investigation, and attempts to question the new evidence. Stevenson is furious because they arrested Bell Hooks despite promising him that he'd keep him safe. He confronted both Sheriff Tate and Chapman, the district attorney, as shown in the discussion below:

Stevenson: Who ordered the arrest of my witness?

Sheriff Tom: When people make false statements concerning this case, they're going to be held accountable.

Stevenson: You can't arrest someone for perjury without evidence that a false statement has been made.

Sheriff Tom: You know, I went down to see Ronda Morrison's momma yesterday, and she's in tears. She kept asking me why some lawyer from up north would come down here and make them relive all this hell again.

Stevenson: Well, tell her that because Johnny D didn't kill her daughter, and whoever did is still out there somewhere.

Sheriff Tom: I know how desperate you must be to fulfill your fantasy of who we are down here just a bunch of corrupt Southern racists framing niggers for murder and you

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here to save the day well, hell you can believe that if you want to. But I know that Johnny D killed that girl, and he's going to answer for it. (54:22:00)

In this scene, the sheriff's reaction is only because he does not want to acknowledge the fact that Walter is innocent despite knowing he is, but his main concern is not seeking justice but maintaining his reputation and the reputation of the office. He is serving his own interests by denying the fact that he is doing illegal things, for example, arresting Bell Hooks for perjury without any evidence. His main goal is the prioritization of personal and institutional gain over moral integrity.

Moreover, In *Just Mercy*, the police officer who was the first to arrive at the incident stated in court, "the prosecutor asked me to testify that she had been drugged from the front to the back, and I told him, ain't going to lie in court, and then, well, a few weeks later, I got fired from the department."(01:37:05)

Another illustration and proof that if something is not in their interest, they discard it. Leaders who prioritize their own self-interest in attaining progress must also ensure that their decisions benefit all individuals, not only themselves. Progress driven by self-interest can help marginalized communities, but leaders must consider the effects of their decisions on everyone and weigh the potential benefits against the potential problems. In essence, people face moral dilemmas in interest convergence, balancing their desires with what is right for the end.

III.2. Against All Odds: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Justice

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African Americans endured various forms of segregation. Stevenson, having grown up in a different environment, experienced the discrimination he sought to overcome when trying to achieve justice and change society for the better. There are multiple scenes that show how Stevenson faced discrimination. In one scene, when he wanted to visit his clients, a police officer questioned him, asking, “Are you really a lawyer? (15:51). In this scene, the officer’s interrogation of Stevenson’s aptitudes to be a lawyer illustrates how white individuals often perceive blacks as lacking education or not having the potential to achieve success. In the same scene, the police officer further diminishes Stevenson’s value by requesting him to remove all his clothes for a search, as demonstrated in the conversation below:

The police officer: Well, I’m gonna have to search you. Just go on in that room there and take everything off.

Stevenson: Attorneys aren’t strip searched for legal visits.

Police officer: well, you wait gonna visit ... unless you get in that room and strip, let’s go! (15:58:00)

The scene reflects society’s perception that it is somehow acceptable for them to apply illegal actions to black individuals. This normalization of injustice based on race underscores the deeply ingrained biases and systemic discrimination that continue to plague our society.

IV.3 Revealing Hidden Burdens of Racial Injustices in *Just Mercy*

McMillian’s conviction did not only affect him, but it affected his whole family. That is what people of convergence neglect to see: the consequences of the actions of what they did. In the film, there are two scenes that show the unfairness and the impact that it has on his family. The first scene is where Stevenson meets McMillan’s family after almost losing faith;

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he gives them new hope to hold on to knowing that their father is innocent. In the first-time meeting Stevenson, McMillan's wife Minnie McMillian makes a statement that catches the attention, saying: "And really don't know what I'm supposed to tell them about staying out of trouble when you can be in your own house, minding your own business, surrounded by your entire family and they still going to put some murder on you" (36:58:00). The statement of McMillan's wife, Minnie, is truly incredibly powerful, highlighting the reality of unjust accusations and their impact on innocent individuals. The film's portrayal of this scene effectively captures the despair experienced by those treated unfairly, trying their best to stay out of trouble knowing that the slightest mistake will be imprisoned for it.

Moreover, his children also suffer from this whole cycle of discrimination, they are only collateral damage. His daughter's statement reverberates the idea, as revealed in the following words: "We feel like they put us all on death row, too." (37:15:00) The daughter's revelation shows the emotional rollercoaster that his whole family went through, as well as the burden they shared. Hence, the interconnectedness of their struggle is depicted in a vivid manner in the above passage.

After Stevenson's effort to reopen the case of McMillan to make the charges drop and reveal the truth that he is innocent and false accusations have been made, but the judge's ruling made the family of the prisoner relive the courtroom all over again. The following passage describes the judge, after stating his final ruling:

The judge: After careful review, it is this court's opinion that conclusive evidence has not been provided and that Ralph Myers perjured himself at the original trial [...] Walter McMillian shall be returned to the Holman Correctional Facility, where he is to face death by electrocution. (1:39:34)

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This is a scene where the judge announces the death row again on McMillan. McMillan's son, however, has a breakdown in court, knowing that his father is innocent and he cannot do anything about it. The heartbreaking plea from McMillan's son is revealed in the following words: "You can't do this to us again, judge. This is my dad, sir; he ain't do anything wrong"(1:40:27). The son kept repeating over and over again, despite the fact that he was only talking, not taking action, they pinned him down on the floor, repeating the same words: "Not if you're going to kill my dad for no reason; "He ain't do anything wrong, you' killing my family, sir..." (1:40:50) His repeated cries for his father's innocence and the devastating impact of the judge's decision reflect the suffering caused by individuals in power prioritizing their own interests over justice and truth.

The characters' struggles expose deep-seated issues and the corrupt nature of the system, as evidenced by Stevenson's relentless pursuit of justice and the collateral damage Walter McMillan's family endured. The film portrays a number of harsh realities that society often refuses to acknowledge, as well as the devastating effects they leave behind. It also highlights the importance of working together to bring about change and eradicate corruption.

V. Prioritizing Fairness and Equality in Criminal Justice

Fairness and equality within the criminal justice system are crucial in today's society. Crenshaw's reason for developing the concept of intersectionality is that it is not meant to judge or exclude people who are privileged. It is meant to shed light on people who are effectively victimized because of their racial categorization. It is, somewhat, meant to identify them and their vulnerability. This does not mean excluding others, and it is not about finding how many different identities there are, nor about classifying or categorizing people according to that. As an example, in Just Mercy, the lawyer Stevenson spotted many black people with a

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tight income struggling to have legal representation. Intersectionality uncovers these hidden layers that come together to have an impact on their experiences. By working from this point of view, we can establish the complicated connections between different parts of the way people sense themselves, which can affect how people engage with and experience the law.

VI. Unveiling the Intersection of Manifold Layers: Herbert Richardson's Struggles for Equality

The story of Herbert Richardson in *Just Mercy* exemplifies the intersection of the struggles of mental health and race in the legal system. Herbert, a young African American, has fought in Vietnam since he was 18 years old. He faced a traumatic experience when he witnessed his entire army die in front of him because of an ambush, and he was the only survivor. This traumatic incident changed his whole world and led to a breakdown and many suicide attempts that affected his well-being. However, the effects of the war haunted him and he relived the same incident through terrifying nightmares. These nightmares and breakdowns resulted in Herbert planting a bomb that killed a young girl, resulting in his death. Later on, they uncovered that Herbert had PTSD, leading him to commit such a crime, not on purpose. However, he ends up facing death row instead of getting the help he needed to a hospital.

Analyzing Herbert's narrative can help us understand the way different types of difficulties can come together to potentially lead us to an unfair result. It is important to comprehend intersectionality and avoid such cases and results by promoting necessary improvements in the legal system and emphasizing enough attention to the issues of mental health. Unfortunately, Herbert's journey ended tragically because the system failed him due to

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his race. Thus, being an African American, immediately considered and confirmed his wrongdoing, neglecting the fact that he was a hero fighting for his country.

VII. Walter's Struggle Against Racial Injustice

One of the many issues that black people fear and face is getting pulled over without a proper reason. In *Just Mercy*, there is a scene where Walter is returning home after he finishing his job until the officers' start asking questions about his fancy vehicle, referring to the idea that black people cannot own or purchase such things. The conversation is illustrated below:

Officer: That's a sharp-looking truck you got.

Walter: Yes, sir, thank you.

Officer: Those rims look like they cost you a pretty penny. Who've been working for?"

Walter: "Oh, no, sir. I don't work for anyone. I got my own pulping business."

Officer: "So, you ain't got no boss to check in with, huh? That must be pretty nice.

Free to run up and down the road, wherever you want to, whenever you want to, in this fancy truck" (02:19:00)

This situation reflects racial stereotypes and assumptions about economic status. Moreover, when the officer accuses Walter of being wanted for a murder without any evidence, it emphasizes how easily black individuals can be falsely accused or targeted by law enforcement. The officer's suspicion of Walter's ability to have money because of his skin

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color emphasizes the injustices that black individuals often face within their society, as it illustrates the prejudices established vis-à-vis this group.

Another scene that personifies the idea discussed earlier is when Eva Ansley receives racist bomb threats to stop working on the case of Walter (47:41). Eva's exposure to threats echoes the challenges of fighting for justice in a society filled with discrimination. This scene highlights the struggles faced by individuals like Stevenson and Ansley as they work towards equality and systemic change. Despite the risks involved, they continue to advocate for marginalized communities, demonstrating the importance of addressing intersecting forms of oppression. The threats they face also showcase the concept of intersectionality, where different aspects of their identities, such as ethnicity and roles as activists, come together to shape their experiences and the obstacles they encounter

VIII. Stevenson's Pursuit of Truth and Justice

Stevenson's watchful and in-depth approach to gathering evidence and addressing biases is obviously exposed. He collects data by meeting Walter and his family with the intention of gathering all the needed evidence to assure that all elements are uncovered. Further, he takes the time to survey case records, reports, and other records, looking for any disparities and gaps that might distort the trial's progression. A clear testament to his dedication and devotion to saving Walter is finding a witness, who can give a plausible excuse for Walter to demonstrate his guiltlessness, and uncovering the imperfections within trial. This finding plays a significant role in revealing the wrongful conviction against Walter. Despite his dedication, Stevenson faces challenges in his quest for justice. For instance, a witness willing to testify on Walter's behalf is arrested, indicating the threats and burden aimed at quieting the truth and manipulating a tricky scenario that accuses Walter, whose

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main guilt is living in a society that judges people by their skin color. This event highlights the obstacles and risks involved in challenging biases within America's legal system.

Stevenson's unwavering commitment to uncovering the truth and his resilience in the face of adversity demonstrate the complexities and injustices present in the criminal justice system. This underscores the importance of continuous reform and advocacy for marginalized communities. On the day of Walter McMillan's trial, and though McMillan's trial was open to the public, Stevenson saw that the McMillan family was not permitted to enter. Instead, they made everyone wait outside. The sheriff's orders prevented them from entering once all the seats were occupied, leaving the others to stand throughout the entire trial; they only let them in when they saw Stevenson came (01:57:46). This scene illustrates how white individuals have the power to prevent blacks from exercising their basic rights, abusing their privilege to discriminate. Anthony Ray Hinton's story is a prime example of racism, where individuals use color-based prejudices to discriminate against impoverished individuals who have no ability to protect themselves. Hinton's interaction with his fellow prisoners during his arrest exemplifies the idea, "When I informed the police officers who stopped me that I was innocent, do you know what their response was?" "One of you niggers did it, and if it wasn't you, then you're taking one for your homie" (46:03:00).

It is necessary to note that, in 1986, Anthony Ray was convicted of a double homicide based almost entirely on faulty reports. The prosecutor said he could tell Ray was guilty by looking at him. Following the path of Bryan Stevenson's making the effort to take Ray's case to the U.S. Supreme Court and securing justice in 2015, after 30 years on a death row for a crime he did not commit, they should award him for spending nearly 30 years in prison. What makes it stronger for the prisoner is that he knows deep down that he is innocent, but since everyone points at you that you are guilty, even yourself, you start to believe it.

Conclusion

Just Mercy shows us how the legal system can be unfair to certain people. Bryan Stevenson works really hard to show that the system is not always right, especially when it comes to race and money, and people abuse their positions to serve their own interests despite the consequences. The film discourses us about standing up for what is right, even when it is hard, like when Stevenson fights for Walter McMillian and Herbert Richardson. We see how unfairness affects not just the people involved, but also their families. Through *Just Mercy's* analysis, we recognize the complex interactions of social identities in the legal system. By embracing intersectionality, we can work towards a fairer society that treats everyone equally in court, irrespective of their background. We must persist in advocating for reforms, prioritizing mental health, eliminating racial biases in law enforcement, and uniting in the fight for equality. Only then can we attain a future that truly balances justice.

Chapter III

The Strain of Attaining Justice in *Just Mercy* and its

Ramification on Self-perception

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Introduction

Strongly based on historical reality, *Just Mercy* goes beyond a typical legal story. It tackles many cases, each with its own struggle with the harsh reality of racial prejudice that forces the characters to overcome numerous obstacles. Stevenson's goal was to protect the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned (*Just Mercy*, 2:06:54). This powerful story urges us to confront important issues surrounding fairness, equal treatment, and the basic freedoms that everyone deserves.

This chapter scrutinizes self-perception through Du Bois's double consciousness and how their characters progress through the concept of intersectionality. It discusses how the characters deal with their internal conflict and external pressure, balancing their own identity with how society sees them, which encourages them to stay strong and consistent when seeking justice. Furthermore, it shows characters' progress when delving into the paths of justice and morality.

I. Identity Conflict: Embracing the Dual Identity

For African Americans, double consciousness is like having two completely different identities, like a mirror reflection: one is your true identity, which you already know about, and the other is how others see you. (Du Bois 3) They often find themselves under the burden of conforming to societal norms that contradict their true selves. As a result, this can manifest in various forms of struggle, as beings may strive to integrate and harmonize different facets of their identities in order to gain understanding from diverse groups. This conflict leads to an ongoing battle to find harmony between how one sees himself or herself and the biased

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opinions of society. The Du Boisean conception demonstrates the impact of discrimination on blacks' life experiences. As he states:

It is a peculiar sensation—this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2)

He states that black people always judge themselves based on how the world sees them; he describes the feeling of having two people in one body, an American one and a Negro one, despite their innocence, society and the legal system frequently treat many African American characters like criminals. Walter McMillan and Anthony Ray Hinton exemplify Du Bois's idea of twoness.

II. Walter McMillian's Internal Quest for Identity and Justice

In the film *Just Mercy*, McMillan and Stevenson in their first prison visit, after McMillan losing faith in the judicial system, Stevenson tried to convince him to file for a retrial and then proceeded to tell him, "Mr. McMillian, I can see how that could be hard" (21:33:00). Before he finishes, McMillan snaps at him, repeating the same words: "No, you don't, no, you don't, you rich boy from Harvard, you don't know how it is in Alabama" (21:44:00). McMillan states that no one can feel what he endures, especially after ruining his image despite being innocent. To a greater extent, he has to struggle internally due to his

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incapacity to do anything to prove his guiltlessness. As he explains to Stevenson, people already perceive him as a criminal, regardless of his efforts. He points out:

They ain't got to have no fingerprints, no evidence, and the only witness they got made the whole thing up. Ain't none of that matter, when all y'all think is I look like a man who could kill somebody (22:01:00)

His statement further proves how society depicts black people only by their look or race. A scene that truly demonstrates the inner struggles and the contrast between how people perceive someone on the outside and their true nature on the inside. Walter talks about the internal struggle he faces with his identity. The following passage debriefs the idea:

Walter: The day I got arrested, I thought I was going to be okay because I got the truth. As soon as they talk to everybody that was with me, they're going to have to let me go. Then the police keep calling you a killer, and some white dude says he saw you do it. News people saying you did it. The judge and jury are saying you did it. Now you on the row... After a while, you start wondering what they think about you. You start wondering what you think about you; the truth ain't clear no more. (1:47:48)

Walter McMillian's character highlights the challenges he went through because of his double consciousness, revealing that his true self is not what society assumes. Despite facing racism and false accusations, Walter tries his best to stay true to his true identity by handling anything that comes his way and not letting society's negative opinions affect him. Stereotypes and biased judgments influence Walter's image in society on the external front. Overall, the scene demonstrates how hard it is to stay true to your own identity despite society's efforts to bring you down. The importance of self-belief is emphasized in

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this scene, as it showcases Walter's determination to uphold his self-worth and identity in the face of societal pressures that aim to diminish his true essence.

After giving his trial a chance and Ralph Myers changing his testimony to clear him, Walter McMillan regained hope and believed in his eventual freedom and release. Nevertheless, the judge had other plans and decided to set a date for his execution. He felt despair when he thought of gaining confidence and then continuing to live the same life. For McMillan, returning back to prison after six years of incarceration was an internal struggle due to his inability to control his emotions. Despite being told to stop and calm down by the police officers, he continued to fight back and refused to return to his room as indicated, "Come on, no, don't do this, McMillan. Come on. Go in" (01:42:11). McMillan was defeated, but he persevered because he couldn't hold back his struggle. It became too much for him until he was placed in a solo prison.

However, Fanon Frantz, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, provides an overview of how colonialism has affected black Africans and their descendants. Fanon stated in his book:

When we revolt it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe (p118)

He explains how their fear of demonstrating their identity can damage their true identity and stop them from developing their own self-perception. Sooner or later, they'll realize that they'll have no viable identity.

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III. Bryan Stevenson' Troubled Identity

In examining Bryan Stevenson's identity as a Black African American through the concept of double consciousness, we can observe the complex struggles he encounters in making a balance between social experiences and his own self-perception. Du Bois talked about how black men strive to become better versions of themselves. He stated:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better self. (09)

By combining their dual identities into a stronger self. The shared experiences and struggles within the black community create a sense of unity and solidarity, which not only fosters a strong bond among black individuals but also serves as a source of resilience. Stevenson is surprised during his first visit to death row when he unexpectedly encounters someone his age who comes from a similar background and shares similar cultural experiences, as illustrated in the scene:

The prisoner: My mom made me join our church choir when I was about four; I sang lead baritone all through high school.

Stevenson: I played piano at my church growing up... (05:30:00)

This scene completes the previous one in which Stevenson is attempting to persuade his mother of the reasons behind his job choice:

The first time I visited death row, I wasn't expecting to meet somebody the same age as me who grew up listening to the same music from a neighborhood just like ours; it could've been me, Mama. (10:0:00)

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In this scene, we see Stevenson having a moment where he learns more about himself and gains insight that he could have easily ended up in the same situation. It demonstrates his realization of the bond he has with the prisoners he meets. It illustrates how Stevenson's self-perception shifts when he recognizes similarities between himself and the individual on death row, prompting him to reflect on his own advantages, background, and identity. When Stevenson realizes that he has things in common with the prisoner, he starts seeing the unfairness and differences in the criminal justice system in a new light. He starts to understand and feel for the prisoner on a personal level. The sense of oneness he felt is crucial to constructing what we call social identity that is defined as "The way that people classify or associate themselves with others in the formation of social groups and collectivities. Identity, in this sense, is a primarily discursive or cultural construct, to be counter-posed to social class as an objective patterning of social inequalities and life chances." (Jun He, p35) This makes him even more determined to fight for justice and change the unfair systems that keep inequality and discrimination going. This scene shows how our own experiences can influence the way we see ourselves and how we view the world, making us more aware of social problems and more compassionate towards others.

Unjustified stops based on race are a constant issue that blacks encounter. George Floyd's death exemplifies the consequences of racial bias, his constant cry for help "I can't breathe" for eleven times caught on video, sparking nationwide protests. A scene that illustrates the many problems and issues that black people face every single day, which is a police officer stopping a person for no reason, happened with Stevenson. He was driving back to rest after a tiring day of seeing many cases of people's false convictions. A police officer

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stopped him and directly asked him to step out of the vehicle. The situation is explained below:

Stevenson: Something wrong, officer?

Officer: Step out of the vehicle.

Stevenson: I don't understand; I wasn't speeding.

Officer: I said to step out of the vehicle!

Stevenson: I'll get out of the car, but first, can you tell me why you stopped me?

Officer: Get out of the goddamn car! (Pointing his gun at him.)

Stevenson: Whooh, okay, okay, hold on.

Officer: Come on!

Stevenson: Okay! I'm taking off my seat belt... (57:23:00)

This scene shows the internal struggle of Stevenson despite being a person of law and knowing that stepping out of the vehicle without a proper reason is illegal, but also since he knows that this kind of issue happens to people of color like him. As soon as the police officer points out his gun, Stevenson panics and steps out of the vehicle to avoid any issues since knowing that he did nothing, but still he stepped out of the vehicle willingly. Therefore, the scene exemplifies how racial profiling operates, wherein individuals are treated with suspicion due to their skin color and always labeled as dangerous. This inner conflict perfectly represents the idea of double consciousness on the basis that Stevenson is fully aware of his identity as an American, yet an American who is somehow different due to his skin color, as explained by W.E.B. In this esteem, Du Bois clarifies in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* :

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I sit with Shakespeare, and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the veil. (101-103)

Du Bois emphasizes the importance of accepting one's identity while trying to understand and make connections with diverse perspectives.

In conclusion, despite overcoming these challenges, they continue to shape their self-perception and question their worth. They have to live in constant fear because they are always held guilty for the slightest mistake and immediately assumed guilty at the end of time. This feeling comes from a long history of unfair treatment and discrimination. Their constant struggle with two different identities can create a cycle that is difficult to get out of. Addressing and recognizing these feelings is crucial because it can help heal and build a stronger sense of support.

IV. Intersectionality: Understanding Power Dynamics and Systemic Inequalities

Intersectionality focuses on how the perceptions and issues like gender, ethnicity, economic status, citizenship, sexual orientation and physical ability come together to form our social identity and potentially form intersecting axes of oppression. The publication *Reach Everyone on the Planet* by Kimberlé Crenshaw edited by the Gunda

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Werner Institute and the Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ), consists of Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as:

A lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ²¹ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (p16).

This theory is depicted through characters whose identities shape their struggles and progress despite the challenges confronted. By analyzing progress through intersectionality, one can see how different social identities interact to address systemic inequalities. Through the characters' actions, stories, and key themes, the film shows us the significance of intersectionality in the fight for fairness and equal rights, exploring some examples from the film that show this growth by looking at different aspects.

V. Empowering Change: Eva Ansley's Brave Stand

Eva Ansley's journey towards justice demonstrates the progression of her character each time she encounters racism or any other form of discrimination. She recognizes her privilege as a white person and goes beyond mere assistance, showcasing a profound understanding of how race and financial status intersect to create unique challenges within the legal system. Despite Stevenson's disapproval, she delivered a stirring speech after their threat, remarking: "I don't want my son to grow up knowing that his mom stopped doing what was right, just because she was scared of some crazy bigot" (49:26:00). Her statement

²¹ LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning. It is an inclusive acronym used to refer to individuals and communities with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

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can be considered an inspiration since she wants to provide justice for the wrongful conviction despite the threats and bombs. She has the potential to be an inspiration to others, particularly young people, by demonstrating that fighting for what is right and moral is more significant than other things.

VI. Resilience and Redemption: Walter's Path

We observe the development of Walter's character in *Just Mercy*. He starts off feeling hopeless, angry, and lacking faith in the justice system and Bryan Stevenson. But as the story unfolds, we see him evolve and find hope in even the smallest things, like when they lost the trial. He tells Stevenson: "But if they take to that chair tonight ... I'm going out smiling, cause I got my truth back, you gave that to me; to me and my family and ain't nobody gonna take that from us. (01:49:46). His development and transformation throughout the journey were truly motivating, as he accepted the fact that he lives in an unfair society. However, what matters to him is that he has regained strength and dignity, clearing his name in front of the world and his family regardless of the final outcome. After Walter finally became free after the Supreme Court trial, using his experience to speak out side by side with Stevenson to advocate for change in the criminal justice system, giving voice and raising awareness to the subject of the death penalty in the U.S. Senate hearing on the death penalty²², he did not want others to live what he lived. (02:06:36). In The United States Senate Hearing on the Death Penalty, Stevenson expresses his gratitude and inspiration to Walter, as illustrated in the following words: "Through this work, I've learned that each of us is more than the worst thing that we've ever done, that the opposite of poverty isn't wealth, and that the opposite of

²² The U.S. Senate hearing on the death penalty is a formal session where Senate members discuss issues related to capital punishment in the United States. Experts, advocates, and affected individuals share their perspectives to inform policymakers and the public about the implications of the death penalty.

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poverty is justice.” (2:06:33) Accordingly, Walter served as Stevenson’s source of motivation and the reason he kept going, emphasizing in his statement that our actions do not define our entire being and that true poverty stems from the absence of justice and fairness in society.

VII. Voicing the Silenced in *Just Mercy*

Stevenson tries his best to keep his promise by promoting justice to the condemned that deserve an opportunity to a fair trial but it seems that the effects of history is still prevalent, after losing the trial due to the judge decision, Stevenson illustrate his frustration to his coworker Ansley:

Nobody wants to remember that this is where thousands of enslaved people were shipped in and paraded up the street to be sold. Just ten miles from here, black people were pulled from their homes and lynched. Nobody talks about it, but now this black boy from Delaware walks into their courtrooms and expects them to admit they convicted an innocent black man. I made a promise to the entire community that I would bring him home, but instead, I made matters worse.

(1:44:54)

Stevenson started to lose hope in the justice system and the way he handled things to make it better, but it only got worse. He began to question the morality of his actions throughout this entire situation. However, as the story unfolds, one can see that he is unstoppable and it was a moment of weakness only. Considerably, Herbert's execution deeply affected Stevenson, breaking him emotionally. Despite the obstacles he encountered, Stevenson’

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persistent determination to expose the flaws in the justice system and the lies concerning Walter's conviction was a quiet journey, but that is what motivated him to step forward.

Among the challenges he faced were being arrested illegally while visiting his clients for the first time; having his vehicle stopped and a gun pointed at him despite not doing anything suspicious; receiving bomb threats to stop defending Walter McMillan; losing two trials; and facing obstacles from people in positions of power. His development throughout this journey is outstanding; he persistently fought and searched for the truth, used the media when participating in the 60-minute show to win the voice of the people, and took the trial to the Supreme Court, and emerged victorious while advocating for other cases. Stevenson filed a motion to dismiss all charges against Mr. McMillian in the Supreme Court. The judge gave him the stage to speak because it was his motion, and he delivered a powerful speech, as shown below:

It's easy to see this case as one man trying to prove his innocence, but when you take a black man and put him on death row a year before his trial... and exclude black people from serving on his jury. When you base your conviction on the coerced testimony of a white felon and ignore the testimony of two dozen law-abiding black witnesses, when any evidence proving his innocence is suppressed and anyone who tries to tell the truth is threatened, this case becomes more than the trial of just a single defendant; it becomes a test of whether we're going to be governed by fear, anger, or the rule of law. (01:59:16)

In his speech, he summarized the discrimination that black people encounter when pursuing justice or advocating for their basic rights. He emphasized how this discrimination persists despite the presence of two dozen alibis, the absence of evidence, and the conviction of an

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innocent man; thereby, highlighting the unfairness of the justice system. Besides, Stevenson points out how people are always presumed guilty based on their race or background, having to live in constant fear of getting a false conviction by watching their every move waiting for the slightest mistake, Stevenson demonstrated in statement:

If the people standing at the back of this courtroom are all presumed guilty when accused, if they have to leave here and live-in fear of when this very thing will happen to them, if we're just going to accept the system that treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent, then we can't claim to be just. (2:00:06)

His statement illustrates how intersectionality plays a big role; people always judge based on race, gender, or financial status. According to him, if you are rich, you are free no matter what you do; on the contrary, being poor means being guilty. Stevenson's development and the challenges he faced as a black man defending black people are noteworthy. As well, having close connections with his clients is what made him a qualified lawyer, making him feel as if his own life is at risk or needs justice. He delivered a powerful speech at the United States Senate hearing:

Our system has taken more away from this innocent man than it has the power to give back, but I believe if each of us can follow his lead, we can change this world for the better. If we can look at ourselves closely and honestly, I believe we will see that we all need justice, we all need mercy, and perhaps we all need some measure of unmerited grace. (2:07:03)

Following Stevenson's lead, we can make the world a better place by encouraging people and holding the unfair system accountable for equal opportunities in life. Stevenson's message

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was that we all take a positive look at ourselves, that everyone deserves fairness, mercy, and maybe some unexpected kindness too. When we think about this and work together, we can make society fairer and more caring.

VIII. The Transformative Power of Truth: Ralph Myers' Journey

Ralph Myers' character development was unexpected when he finally admitted in court that his testimony was a lie because of pressure. Ralph's perspective alters when he comes across Walter McMillan's story through Stevenson, particularly since Stevenson has a close connection with Walter. He went back to Myers' prison cell to convince him to reveal the truth. This shows the importance of allowing emotions and personal feelings to influence decisions. When Ralph is face-to-face with Walter McMillan in court, he realizes that he is a normal person, just like him, with a family that relies on him for responsibilities and has people to care about, especially his role as a father. His testimony is shown below:

Stevenson: Was the testimony that you gave at Walter McMillian's trial true?

Ralph: No, sir. Not at all.

Stevenson: Did you see Mr. McMillian on the day Ronda Morrison was murdered?

Ralph: No, sir.

Stevenson: Did you drive his truck to Monroeville that day?

Ralph: No. Never did.

Stevenson: Did you go into Jackson Cleaners and see Mr. McMillian standing over the body of Ronda Morrison?

Ralph: Absolutely not. (1:34:24)

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His confession, which reveals that he was under pressure to provide false testimony, represents significant progress. In addition, he further confesses in a national television 60-minute show to clearing McMillan's name in front of the whole world and challenging the authorities, as shown in the interview below:

Ralph: I told them I had seen a young girl lying on the floor with her mouth open and Johnny D. standing over her.

The interviewer: Was it true?

Ralph: No, sir. Not at all. Nowhere near true. (1:52:27)

His journey demonstrates the power of truth, the significant influence of personal feelings on decisions, and the role of unions in standing up against injustice.

IX. Tommy Chapman's Moral Evolution

Tommy Chapman's character, a white district attorney, at first strongly supports the state's choice to condemn Walter McMillian, but as the story progresses, we see him as someone who blindly follows the legal system's norms without questioning the evidence Bryan Stevenson presents. His position indicates that he is reluctant to question established beliefs and confront the biases that are deeply rooted in the system. When interviewed on national television, he expressed his opinion on the case.

The interviewer: If an execution date is set for McMillian and that day comes and it's time for him to go to the electric chair, will you be comfortable?

Chapman: Yes, I'd be comfortable with it.

The interviewer: Do you think it's fair? He had his...

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Chapman: He had his day in court. He was tried by a jury. They heard his testimony, and they believed it. (1:52:39)

But as the story progresses, mainly after the interview, Chapman was under pressure from the government, the victim's family, and others, calling him a racist. Bryan confronted Chapman, telling him how he could build a new case, knowing that Walter was innocent, just to salvage his reputation. The heated conversation is shown below:

Chapman: You have any idea the... that I've had to put up with since your 60-minute story aired? I got the governor on me; I got the NAACP calling me a racist...

Stevenson: You can't keep an innocent man in prison while you try to salvage your reputation. And what about people are you talking about right now.....Your job isn't to defend a conviction, Tommy; it's to achieve justice, and as long as you keep fighting this, someone from your county has literally gotten away with murder. (1:55:55)

And I believe that confrontation and that pressure affected him. As we see later on in court, He finally admitted that Walter is innocent for not objecting to Stevenson's motion to drop all charges.(2 :01 :56)

Chapman's character takes a major turn when he decides to drop all charges against Walter, which shows how external pressure, ethical dilemmas, and personal confrontations can bring about a transformation. This moment highlights the complexity of decision-making within institutional systems and emphasizes the potential for individuals to grow and make choices that align with justice and integrity. By dismissing the charges against Walter,

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Chapman is taking a significant step towards recognizing and correcting past injustices. This action is a sign of progress in the story because it illustrates a move towards accountability, fairness, and a better understanding of the responsibilities that come with legal positions.

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Conclusion

This chapter delves into how racial prejudice and discrimination affect the characters' identities, as seen through Du Bois's double consciousness and intersectionality. Walter McMillian and Bryan Stevenson's experiences show the struggles African Americans face in a biased legal system. McMillian's journey toward embracing oneself and dignity, along with Stevenson's dedication to justice despite challenges, highlights the strength needed to tackle societal discrimination. The character's transformations of Eva Ansley, Ralph Myers, and Tommy Chapman also show how truth, support, and moral courage can challenge and transform unjust systems. This chapter stresses the importance of addressing unfairness and how justice, empathy, and honesty can result in personal and societal change.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The film *Just Mercy* aimed to depict the reality of segregation in Alabama, drawing attention to the experiences and struggles of African Americans, especially wrongful convictions. The journey starts off with Bryan Stevenson and Walter McMillian, who went through a lot to achieve justice in a discriminatory society, they shaped not only their relationship but also each other's identities.

The present study analyzed the scenes from several key aspects. First, it portrayed how racial discrimination is depicted in the criminal justice system, focusing on how African Americans faced false convictions and unfair treatment because of their race. Secondly, the actions of the white privileged by abusing and violating their position to serve their own interests affect the verdicts of trials or convictions of African Americans. Thirdly, the struggle of African Americans with conflicting identities, having to live between two worlds as a black person and as an American and yet not enjoying the full right of being American troubled these characters. The strain of maintaining a balance between the two identities that are mostly contrasted is agonizing for the characters in the selected work. Additionally, the intersectionality of different factors like race, ethnicity, and gender contributed enormously to characters' psychological development and identity shaping.

In the first chapter, the research offers an overview of the historical background of the struggle and mistreatment faced by African Americans since the early colonization period to the mid-nineteenth century. African Americans endured slavery, faced separations from their homeland, and were denied their fundamental rights. It went from the evolution of the arrival of the first African slaves to the role of the American Revolution in fighting for freedom. Besides, the Transatlantic Slave Trade marked a significant event in the history of slavery and blacks' victimization as they went through discrimination and racial bias. The

General Conclusion

chapter covers blacks' endeavor to fight back racism to create an egalitarian and just society, through two essential movements: the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter. Though these movements fought against racism, challenging the ideas that put different races against each other, readers may notice that blacks' struggle against racial inequalities is still present. Through the use of Critical Race Theory, which primarily tends to examine the intersection of race in the molding nation's legal system. By applying these frameworks, one can grasp the characters' internal struggles and difficulties faced to form their identities, such as Bryan Stevenson and Walter McMillan, and how they dealt with discrimination within the legal system.

In the second chapter, through the analysis of the characters and scenes, *Just Mercy* portrays the hardships against racial injustice in Alabama, exposing the failure of the legal system. However, Bryan Stevenson's consistent battle to assist McMillan get a fair trial and the opportunity he wants clarifies that Stevenson is aware that the court is administered by white privileged beings such as Sheriff Tom and the area lawyer Chapman in legitimate procedures. The analysis focuses on exposing how white authority takes advantage of their position to serve their own interests and effect the final ruling for African Americans. Further, the final part of the chapter focuses on the analysis of how many African Americans were subjected to arrest simply because of their race, financial status, or mental health, as uncovered by Richard Henderson, Anthony Ray Hinton, and the one and only Walter McMillian. Despite facing threats and bombs, Stevenson continued to fight for what he believed.

The final chapter provides a detailed analysis of the film, employing the theoretical framework introduced in the earlier chapter. *Just Mercy* is about the exportation of the way

General Conclusion

African Americans tend to perceive themselves through the lens of W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness that they are American and yet citizens that are less favored. This chapter covers how characters had a hard time dealing with two identities: American and African at the same time. Through the analysis, we see the challenges they faced in trying to establish a meaning to their identity without being affected by racial partitions and prejudices, and most importantly, creating a balance between the two. The chapter concludes that certain dynamics, including race, ethnicity, gender, and power, significantly shape their experiences and underscore the necessity of recognizing and addressing systemic inequalities to achieve true justice and identity reconciliation.

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Appendices

Biography of Bryan Stevenson



Bryan Stevenson, the writer of the acclaimed memoir "*Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*," has had his book acknowledged as one of Time Magazine's top 100 nonfiction books ever and it was on the New York Times Best Sellers list for 52 weeks.

Stevenson established and currently holds the position of Executive Director at the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a human rights organization located in Montgomery, Alabama. Under his guidance, EJI has achieved important legal wins, such as eliminating unfair punishments, proving the innocence of death row inmates, advocating for better treatment of incarcerated individuals with mental illness, and supporting minors facing adult charges.

Stevenson grew up in a society that was segregated and experienced discrimination from a young age. He was born in Milton, Delaware on November 14, 1959, and was raised in a deprived rural village. Stevenson completed his studies at Harvard Law School in 1985,

Bibliography

earning a JD and also obtaining a master's degree in public policy from the Kennedy School of Government. Harvard Law School was perceived as intimidating and disconnected from the racial and economic issues that motivated him to pursue a legal education.

Stevenson currently holds a position as a law professor at New York University School of Law. He has achieved outstanding outcomes by aiding the underprivileged and imprisoned in steering clear of unjust judgments.