

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Racial Oppression and Identity Crisis in Richard Wright's**

*The Man Who Lived Underground*

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**Letter of Recommendation**

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### **Abstract**

The outstanding issue in the text, *The Man Who Lived Underground* is the social and racial clash that has persistently been between the whites and blacks. The very scuffle indeed creates a sort of marginalization on the part of the black people underprivileged of the social and political rights in the nation, America ever known as the most democratic country. Social dispossession and racial abuse on the part of the blacks pushes them to the situation where they feel the sense of deprivation. Fred Daniels, the central character who stands on the behalf of the entire black race makes efforts to speak against the white hegemony and tribulations but his voice is not heard. Despite his innocence he is blamed that he has committed crime which is not significant. Rather it is just the mark of the white domination and the predisposed mentality of the white race. Since racism has a wide-ranging wing, it covers up all sorts of suppression and ill-treatments done on the blacks by the whites. Unreservedly Wright's attempt is slanted towards expressing the agonies of the marginalized and showing the current plight of the blacks through depiction of Fred Daniels who undergoes plentiful repugnant moments.

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## **I: Racial Oppression and Identity Crisis**

Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* is an inquiry into the life of the protagonist, Fred Daniels who suffers from identity crisis due to his race and lower social status. Hence, the protagonist, Fred, is forced to flee from the "aboveground" society because of the false accusation charged against him by the mainstream racist white society. Since he is a man of color and belongs to the poor economic strata of the society, he cannot resist immediately. Rather he compromises with the consequence of charge set against him. By coming to the aboveground society, though he frequently tries to assert his identity, through various mediums- i.e. by showing the beautiful cave he has made- however quite contrarily, his wish is obstructed and trampled down by the cruel white state authority and is at last even shot dead unnamed and unidentified as a 'nigger boy'.

The novella, *The Man Who Lived Underground* is set during 1940s America when the two conflicting discourses – racist and anti-racist discourse – were functioning in parallel. The novella, though, captures the spirit of anti-racist discourse advocated and promoted by Afro-Americans; however, it mainly delineates the consequent identity crisis faced by those Afro- American People in the so- called largest democracy of the world, penetrating subtly in the life of the victimized protagonist, Fred.

Fred is like a speckle in the eyes of the white people. He is falsely accused of murdering a white woman. After a long span of stay in tunnel, he comes to the normal world and tries to assert his identity relentlessly by challenging the racist white-dominated society going to the police station. He says: "I am guilty" (1443). He strives much to prove that he is innocent and has not committed any crime but nobody listens to him. To make them convinced about his innocence, he shows evidence as well. Here his efforts in convincing the authority turn futile: "He was eager to show them cave, then they would feel what he had felt and they in turn would show it to others and those others would feel as they had felt and

soon everybody would be governed by the same impulse of pity” (1449). Though he is innocent and for the time being it seems that he succeeds in asserting his identity by proving his innocence and creating psychological or mental fear and sense of guilt in the minds of three white policemen who has tortured him in the past, he is brutally killed, as a nameless and unidentified nigger by the racist white agents while trying to show them the cave, the symbol of his existence. He is unable to gain his lost identity and self-respect being turned into the epitome of failure and “was lost in the heart of the earth” (1450). In other words, the protagonist Fred suffers from crisis of identity despite his relentless endeavor to assert it. This identity crisis emerges due to the lack of existence which is being denied to the people like him by the mainstream white authority.

The state of segregation existing between the people of color and white Americans is much oppressive and unjust. Despite the fact that people of color are as equal as the whites, the former are treated as if they are not human beings. They are considered inferiors and brutes by the whites. Since the racial segregation pervades America, the people of color become prey of domination, oppression and racial and social injustice. They face identity crisis and state of guilt and humiliation. In fact they find their self overshadowed.

Denials’ courage in heading to the police station and confronting them boldly, where he is tortured and forced to sign a confession, is his new level of consciousness in the situation where racial prejudices prevail against the African-Americans. However, rejection from acknowledging his identity by the white racist mechanism, through constant humiliation, underestimation, and ostracism creates identity crisis. In fact identity is an individual’s inborn right to freedom, equality and after all, happiness. This identity crisis, of the black hero, Fred symbolizes the identity crisis of all the oppressed and segregated Afro-American individuals/race that turns ‘failure’ even after their relentless effort in asserting their being, free will, and freedom.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* carves out a picture of a Black man named Fred Daniels, a servant in the house of a white woman Mrs. Wooten, who is forced to hide in the sewers of a city as he is falsely accused of murdering a white woman Mrs. Peabody, his employer's neighbor. In fact, Mrs. Peabody has killed by an Italian citizen. One day, as Daniels is on his way home with his wages in his pocket, suddenly he is arrested, accused of the murder and brought to the police station, beaten and tortured. Eventually he manages to escape and then undergoes a long span of tunneling in the city sewers, until he comes out to prove his innocence and gain what he has lost.

Despite the fact that the police have found out the real murderer, they linger the investigation with Fred and persists accusing him of committing the crime. Hence this case of injustice on the part of a black man reflects the condition of social discrimination and racial injustice extant in the oldest democratic nation, the United States of America. The things get pretty clear when the police declare and make a commandment:

“Now go home and forget it. It was all a mistake.

We caught the guy who did the Peabody job.

He wasn't colored at all. He was an Eytalian.”

“Shut up! Lawson yelled.” Have you no sense!”

But I want to tell' im” Murphy said.

“We can't let this crazy fool go,” Lawson exploded. “He acts nuts, but this may be a stunt”. (1444)

Hence the police realize the mistake they have committed by taking Fred in custody without getting to the fact. But the way they feel they are sorry for is much subtle in the sense that they express the heart-core reality they do not usually suspect the white people as criminals. Meanwhile other fellow police do not prefer to let Fred go. Rather they use derogatory terms

to address him. On the whole it shows that they are biased too much in the case of dealing with Fred, a man of color.

The term underground has a metaphorical sense that is scarcity of identity. Fred's identity is underground in the sense that he lacks social recognition because of his color. Was he a white man he would not have identity crisis. Unfortunately he is a man of color in a country that strongly advocates liberalism and democracy and their norms and values.

Fred Daniels represents the entire black race and his depiction carries on the suppressed voices and unheard cries of those who have been tossed down in the pool of racial brutality and tribulations in America. In many cases people of color like Fred get prey at the hands of police brutality and ill-treatment in such a way that they cannot express their wants and desires to prove their virtue regarding any kind of accusations made over them by the police that prop up the position of whites and obstruct the voice of the black.

The text, *The Man Who Lived Underground* opens in an unidentified modern city sewer. The setting reflects the black settlement is much poorer in the sense that the unidentified modern city sewer is rainy, windy, becoming dark and the protagonist is crouching in a dark corner in the vestibule, metaphorically a hell/black ghetto. Spotting a manhole cover lifted off sewer water beneath, he opts for the underground bowels of the city as his haven of escape. While being into the sewer or the subterranean world, he is severely caught in the whirlwind of dilemma because neither he can stay there for a longer time- for it is too terrible, nor can he come out of it- for there is a fear of being caught by police and put to death.

The protagonist, Fred Daniels leaves the underground and confronts the policemen who earlier forced him to sign a confession of guilt. Daniels tries to lead them into the sewer so that they can understand the consequence of racism. He wants the police to know the miserable plight of the black people in the ghettos. The police know that Daniels had not committed the murder of Mrs. Peabody and they tell him assuming that Fred will go away.

Ironically, he is taken back to the manhole, and when he tries to show them the cave, he is brutally shot dead and dumped in the manhole:

“What did you shoot him for, Lawson?”

“I had to”

“Why?”

“You’ve got to shoot his kind. They’d wreck things”

Then he sighed and closed his eyes, a whirling object rushing alone in the darkness, veering, tossing lost in the heart of the earth. (1450)

Lawson very proudly and passionately asserts that he has done what has had to do. He does not feel guilty of killing Fred Daniels. Rather his assertiveness gets to the higher degree. No doubt, the man whose identity has ever been under challenge and disrespect is ultimately finished. The text *The Man Who Lived Underground* is analyzed through multiple dimensions and perspectives. Carla Cappetti takes it as a black Orpheus, which tells the story of epic journey. Regarding this interpretation he notes: “A fugitive escapes to the underground sewer of an unnamed city; in the footsteps of Orpheus and Odysseus, Virgil and Dante, Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck and Jim, he begins to explore the underworld, the world of darkness, nature and death” (41). As the fugitive does not feel safe at the timeless place, he moves away in search of shelter. Hence Cappetti vitalizes the position of Fred by comparing him with the historical and renowned figures such as Virgil and Odysseus. When Fred does not see any chance of being protected in the aboveground, he moves to live in the underworld which is gloomy and desolate. This critic seems to have mentioned the journey made by Fred to the underworld.

Another critic, Joseph A. Young analyses the novella in relation to phenomenology and power. He notes: “Here the protagonist, having exposed the transcendental; a condition of infinite possibilities in shaping his destiny and building a new value system” (82). Young

seems much concerned to the outer factors that have surrounded Fred to reshape his destiny by dismantling the existing system and innovating a new that can ensure the fundamental rights of the marginalized like him. The world he has chosen is better than the one he has ever lived in the sense that the newer one is unbiased and unfair.

Analyzing in subtlety, the protagonist's underground stay symbolically stands for the black ghetto which is overlooked and has become the victim of cold indifference of the racist white mass. Furthermore, the protagonist Fred represents every Black man and his suffering, dilemma into the sewer (underground) and his alienation, loneliness, torture stand for the suffering faced by every black people due to the racist white-dominated society. In this connection, Susan Neal Mayberry, a critic on *The Man Who Lived Underground: Symbols in the Sewer* argues: "the sewer setting becomes Wright's metaphor for the black ghetto and the protagonist's namelessness through much of the novella represents every marginalized black man" (72). By the same token, J.F Gounard writes:

It is interesting to note that the writer never refers to the main character by name in that novella. It is only by chance, the readers learn his name when he finds a typewriter in the jewelry store and pecks out *Fred Daniels* (Wright 1969:45)... Indeed, the choice of a Blackman as the protagonist in the novella made it easier for Wright to convey his ideas since the white characters are blinded by racial prejudice that prevents them from knowing Daniels as a man. Moreover, the condition of this Blackman is not only symbol of all black Americans due to racism, but also of anyone who is oppressed: Wright underlines that when Daniels is outside his subterranean universe, he totally remains unknown to the people he meets. This entire situation is caused by the color of the skin. (383–84)

Hence, the protagonist's anonymity represents the anonymity and identity crisis of every black people in white-dominated society, especially America. Daniels' condition into the underground as well as aboveground is devoid of the most significant identifying feature of an individual man due to racism.

Ultimately, even though, he is accused of committing the murder for which he is not responsible, Daniels wants (goes) to turn himself into the police. *Why* and *what* Daniels escapes by leaving the relative safety of the underground and by returning to the mortally dangerous aboveground is more important. We know that he escapes to the sewer in order to escape death, and we know if he returns, he will be killed. Arguments and logic can be unequivocal in this regard. But only possible explanation for his return is that Daniels reaches a new level of color consciousness and sense of identity with regard to the aboveground, due to brutality of whites. He wants to show the three policemen (Lawson, Murphy and Johnson) the place where he hid and tries to create the sense of guilt in their minds to assert his and kinds' identity and existence.

I went underground ...I just went ... he paused and looked in to the street,  
then pointed to a manhole cover. I went down in there and stayed

"In the sewer?"

"Yes, sir." (1447)

By doing this, he hopes to teach the whites the mindless, irrational and inhuman outcome of racism and its evils due to which they would learn how to establish a society based on co-existence, equality, justice and humanity where humans will be treated as humans, not as animals and where everybody will live as "somebody", irrespective of one's caste, color and creed. The policemen especially Lawson, who is symbolic of his profession and is supposed to protect society by enforcing the law and order, shoots Daniels thinking him a raving maniac abandoning his dead body to the dark and dirty kingdom of the sewers.

Daniels is a Christ-like figure who leads martyrdom for the sake of emancipation and equality of all segregated and dehumanized blacks who were deprived of natural rights as human beings. Hence, the novella tries to subvert the racist discourse of Whites, which is biased subjugating, irrational, inhumane and dehumanizing.

Similarly another critic, Whitted Qiana J. has studied the novella giving Autobiographical touch. The impact of Wright's grandmother is reflected in this text. He points out: "Yet Wright's fictional account of Fred Daniels' otherworldly withdrawal in to establish a troubling kinship with his memories of Granny" (10). This critic seems to have touched the personal aspect of Wright and the expression of autobiographical tenets in the text. He further discloses the fact that his relationship with grandmother is much significant since it has left inerasable impression on him.

Hence, the novella, besides other themes, deals with the theme of identity crisis. The identity crisis is reflected through the central character Fred Daniels. The novella is an account of so called higher class white brutality over lower class blacks. The novella is about the issues that arise out of the identity crisis. The identity crisis of Fred and his all endeavors to assert it get collapsed due to higher class white's master psychology. Thus, it delineates the vulnerable existence of the "man" who is never called by his name that is "underground" forever.

In this regard, it becomes clear that though the text can be analyzed through various perspectives, the racism and existentialism has not been applied yet. There exists a strong need to carry out research on this novella from new perspective. Without proper study on this issue the meaning of this text will remain incomplete. Having taken this fact in consideration, the present research will be accomplished from the approach of racism and existentialism.

Racial confrontation is one of the burning issues in the contemporary time. Particularly, in America, the racial confrontation or racial antagonism between blacks and

white started with enforcing the Afro-American slaves to cultivate the land grabbed (confiscated) from the Native Americans, which consequently created hierarchies in color and division of land. Then, the American society is based on exploitation. The racist whites establish the social, political and economic system of privileges. In this regard, Ordone and Harris put forward their views in the following ways:

In America, the social division along the color line crossed class, nationality, language and religious barriers. The simple fact of “whiteness” meant the overall life fortune and destiny of white people ... white people enjoyed wide latitude of opportunities personal freedom and democratic rights protected by the state. Even though poor Americans born and immigration whites were viciously exploited by rich white people, they were not on the bottom. The bottom was reserved for Indians, blacks and other people of color. (26-27)

The Afro-Americans have been subjugated and exploited by the whites along with their cultural lives in America since the seventeenth century. Indeed, the history of American society is the history of racial discrimination, oppression and migration. The Afro-Americans and their African heritage and culture have been denied the space in American society, whereas the white culture has been privileged with limitless potentials since its settlement. The African heritage is repudiated by the white culture. Along with different historical events—slavery, migration and emancipation, they try to negotiate their relationship with their cultural traditions but the culture and heritage of blacks are marginalized by the white race and their racist and dominating larger culture. So, it won't be exaggeration to say that history of America is the history of class, conflict and color conflict.

The subjugated Afro-Americans get victimized to a severe extent. But when severe exploitation crosses the limit of tolerance, they retaliate and thus commence posing demands for fundamental rights. This fight for existence and identity energizes and empowers them to

feel prestigious and pave a path for them to walk along. Fred Daniels does undergo similar plight and is engaged in doing a lot for his existence and identity that has been obstructed by the racist white Americans.

The research as per plan contains the methodology as the second chapter that especially discusses racism and existentialism. Since in the American context race and identity are intertwined, issues of race and human existence need elaborating. Similarly the third chapter covers textual analysis that focuses the justification of hypothesis. In order to support the claims made in the process of justifying the hypothesis, lines from the original text will be cited. Likewise, the final chapter is the conclusion that unifies the entire thesis paper.

## II. Racial Confrontation and Identity

After the most devastating two world Wars, human mind is ruled by anxiety, absurdity and uncertainty. Modern writers start to give expression to the troubles and uncertainties of the post war period in their literary creations and they present themselves in favor of individualization against socialization, social norms and values. They write only about human situation which gives the birth to a different kind of philosophy - existentialism. It is probably the most dynamic and appropriate philosophical movement to define and interpret anxiety, uncertainties of the terrified people towards individualization. Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion defines the term existentialism as “a philosophical movement challenging essentialism and concentrating attention to the human situation. Theistic existentialism is usually regarded as beginning with Kierkegaard and atheistic existentialism with Nietzsche” (110).

Existentialism is a philosophical movement centered on individual existence which begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that denies that the universe has any in-built meaning or purpose. It requires people to take responsibility for their own actions and shape their own destinies. Existentialism is not totally a new belief of the modern philosophers of nineteenth and twentieth century. These types of feeling and thought can be found in Socrates, Plato, Rousseau and so many other classical thinkers. Twentieth century existentialist thinking is long before conceived by thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Fedor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche of the nineteenth century. But the real term “existentialism is coined by Jean-Paul Sartre in twentieth century” (Solomon 141-45).

Like “rationalism” and “empiricism,” “existentialism” is a term that belongs to intellectual history. Its definition is thus to some extent one of historical conveniences. The term is explicitly adopted as a self-description by Jean Paul Sartre, and through the wide dissemination of the post war literary and philosophical output of Sartre and his associates –

notably Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau –Ponty, and Albert Camus – existentialism becomes identified with a cultural movement that flourishes in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. Among the major philosophers identify as existentialists are Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Martin Buber in Germany, Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel in France, the Spaniards Jose Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno, and the Russians Nicholai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov. The nineteenth century philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, come to be seen as precursors of the movement. Existentialism is as much a literary phenomenon as a philosophical one.

The term existentialism is used to describe “a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world,” and his relationship or lack of it with God (Cuddon 316). It is a “very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood” (Ellmann and Fiedelson 803). Encyclopedia International states that existentialism is near to life and death of people. Instead of concentrating on logic or science “Existentialism is primarily concerned with human existence, especially with man’s most extreme experience: the confrontation with death, anguish and anxiety, despair and guilt” (“Existentialism” 589-90). Today, Existentialism is probably the most dynamic of appropriate philosophical movement to define and interpret the anxiety, absurdity and the uncertainties of the human existence. In the context, M.H. Abram’s description, of the term absurd will be helpful: “The term is applied to a number of work [. . .], which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially and ineradicably absurd and that this condition can be adequately represented in works of literature that are themselves absurd” (1).

Existentialism is near to life and death of people. Instead of concentrating on logic or science, one of the leading philosophers Sartre states, " Existentialism is primarily concerned with human existence, especially with man most extreme experience; the confrontation with death, anguish and anxiety, despair and guilt" (589-90).

Existential philosophy itself represents a concept of strongest denial of any metaphysical ideas. The only task of philosophy, according to existential philosophers, is the description of things as they appear in front of us. Existential philosophy, term signifying a philosophy describing these as they appear, is a trend in philosophy based on ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and the German philosophers, Heidegger, Jaspers and others, which first gains importance after First World War and which take different shapes in different countries in different times. Existential philosophy experiences a revival after Second World War especially in France where almost all the younger philosophers have participated in the resistance movement subscribed to it.

As existentialism has its diverse and contrasting ideas regarding its diverse bases, In terms of its function and nature, Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as:

It can insist on the transcendence of Being with respect of existence, and by holding this transcendence to be the origin of foundation of existence, It can thus be assumed a theistic term. On the other hand, it can hold that human existence, posing itself as a problem, projects itself with absolute freedom creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of God. As such Existentialism presents itself a radical atheism. (621)

Existentialism is a primary philosophy of twentieth century which is concerned with the analysis of the way man finds himself existing in the world. Although the existentialists themselves differ in the doctrine and attitude, most agree that man is totally free and responsible to himself alone and that reality is grounded in existence or the experience of existence. Individual is the most important in this philosophy. So the focus of existentialism is on “being” and “subjectivity” as opposed to “logical reasoning” and “objectivity”. Individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge is foreground in this philosophy. This is not totally a new phenomenon but it is a rethinking and purification of

philosophical thinking. Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition, experience, and existence of man.

To find its root the study of Socrates, St. Augustine, Pascal, Pythagoras, and Rousseau who have contributed to build its foundation is crucial. In the same way the study of Martin Heidegger, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus is also of a great importance. By collecting various thoughts and feelings from the beginning of its development, Jean Paul Sartre, the French Philosopher have given the final shape after 1940s then only it spreads rapidly all over the world and becomes popular as existential philosophy.

Existentialism has been a reaction in favor of individual subjectivity, introspection and feeling. It is a philosophy not of things but of the human situation. It has much in common with romanticism, pragmatism and individualism but it is far from idealism, mechanism and determinism. There are many different views about existentialism born but all of them are wandering around to search the answer for the following common questions. Perry and his co-writers remark:

What route should people take in a world where old values and certainties had dissolved, where universal truth was rejected and God's existence was denied? How could people cope in society where they were menaced by technology, manipulated by impersonal bureaucracies, and overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety? If the universe is devoid of any overarching meaning, what meaning could one give to one's own life? (755)

These are the relevant questions for all existentialists. They are always searching meaning of their lives by remaining inside these questions. Though the existentialists have different views about the philosophy, their major common thesis is "existence precedes essence" or

“existence is prior to the essence”, while in the established tradition “essence is prior to existence”. What this means for the existentialists is that human nature is determined by the course of life rather than life by human nature. Most of existentialist thinkers believe in the following basic principles: Human nature is problematic, paradoxical and each person is like no other. Self realization comes when one finds out one’s own uniqueness by himself. All the men of this universe are alone, and free and the universe is indifferent to our expectations and needs. But they have been given various chances from among different possibilities and they themselves are responsible to their life. “Abstract thinking does not work it must be transformed in to deeds. Every individual has the potentiality to become more than s/he is” (755).

Existentialism just is this bygone cultural movement rather than an identifiable philosophical position; or, alternatively, that the term should be restricted to Sartre’s philosophy alone. But while a philosophical definition of existentialism may not entirely ignore the cultural fate of the term, and while Sartre’s thought must loom large in any account of existentialism, the concept does pick up a distinctive cluster of philosophical problems and helpfully identifies a relatively distinct current of twentieth- and now twenty-first century philosophical inquiry , one that has had significant impact on fields such as theology (through Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and others) and psychology (from Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss to Otto Rank, R.D. Laing, and Viktor Frankly). What makes this current of inquiry distinct is not its concern with “existence” in general, but rather its claim that thinking about human existence requires new categories not found in the conceptual repertoire of ancient or modern thought; human beings can be understood neither as substances with fixed properties, nor as atomic subjects primarily interacting with a world of objects.

Individuals are willing to do what is harmful to them to prove they have the complete freedom to do so. Later existentialist writers in the twentieth century take up Dostoyevsky literary technique of exposing negative, embarrassing, and even criminal thought of individuals. Most of us try to repress such thoughts but Dostoyevsky and later existentialists describe them with lucidity for the purpose of revealing the fullness of human consciousness.

Major existential philosophers write with a passion and urgency rather uncommon in our own time, and while the idea that philosophy cannot be practiced in the disinterested manner of an objective science is indeed central to existentialism, it is equally true that all the themes popularly associated with existentialism – dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment, nothingness, and so on – find their philosophical significance in the context of the search for a new categorical framework, together with its governing norm.

Existentialists object to philosophical theories, organized religions, and political movements that treat human beings solely in terms of what is common to them. What makes each individual unique is important to existentialism. Because each individual regards her own life as central and valuable, who she is cannot be captured by theories (such as Hegelianism and Marxism) that treat individuals as just so many members of a larger group of economic class. Such theories reduce the individual to a replaceable part of a larger whole and ignore the subjective, self-conscious self an individual has of herself. In contrast, existentialism treats individuals as valuable in their own right.

Fred Daniels in Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* has certain qualities of extreme experiences of existentialism. It is because the text explores the theme of racism and color persecution, human suffering and solitude, dread and despair, anguish and alienation. Fred, a black protagonist of the novel seems to have gone through the extreme experiences of life in the racist society, which is strict, unjust and inhuman for blacks. Fred,

from the initial phase of his life, is in a state of messy disorder and despair. When he is accused of the murder he has not committed, he begins to be frightened from the concern of jail and penalty and goes to live in the underground sewer.

The dread of penalty leads him to reside in the underground cave. There he denies/ violates all the systems, rules and regulations of the aboveground white society and steals things from others' shops, and houses. There he feels alienated from the community. He realizes his self. So he doesn't have the least remorse of his deeds and chooses his own way of life through his "free will" at least when in underground cave. He even comes to the aboveground and decides to meet the police and cleanse himself out of the false accusation of the murder. This means not only in the underground, but also in the outside unfavorable society/system he uses his free will and sense of being an individual. There is the antagonistic relationship between an individual and the society where the society is overwhelmed by racism tries to trample the existence of a black individual and symbolically the whole black race. Likewise, Fred, by every possible means, tries to assert his identity and existence until his tragic death. These are all the common features to all existentialists.

### **Afro-American History of Racial Discrimination**

The history of Afro-American is the history of racial discrimination, oppression, apartheid, exploitation, brutality and dehumanization. Indeed, the history of racial discrimination begins in 1619 (or the Afro-Americans were first introduced as slaves since 17<sup>th</sup> century) after a Dutch frigate sells twenty black captives to the Jamestown settlers. The Jamestown colonists are in need of workers or laborers for planting crops, constructing roads and clearing fields. So, those twenty blacks are used as a good source of labor by those colonists. However, the native settlers in America do not have the practice of slavery. Rather, they have the practice of indentured service before the arrival of those twenty blacks from Africa to Jamestown. The poor whites are used or treated as indentured servants by the rich

whites. But due to the arrival of these twenty blacks, the demand of poor whites decreases dramatically, and those blacks brought by the Dutch ship are instead used as indentured servants. Along with the passage of time, the poor whites are replaced by those indentured blacks. Moreover, the white servants are given certain freedom after the end of certain time and condition as the contracts are written for them for certain time and period. But the black servants are not nor given freedom and contracts as a result of which are they exploited too much and indentured throughout their lives. Even the children of those indentured blacks were indentured from birth to death. Consequently, the practice of indentured servants resulted in the slavery system in America.

During 1640 to 1680, the slavery system is established with the ill-treatment of those indentured blacks. There is high demand of blacks in the plantations. The demand of blacks is in places like Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and other places. On the other hand, people start raising voice against slavery system or slave trade in 18<sup>th</sup> century, but those slaveholders and slave owners suppressed the voice as the economic foundation depend upon the production of cash crops such as cotton and tobacco produced by those slaves. The white owners of plantation do not want to change the practice of slavery as the large scale of production could be produced on cheap labor by exploiting those black slaves. They are solely concerned with economic growth and profit in the plantations. Though the Americans revolt against the British colony under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Patrick Henry during 1770s and 80's for the sake of equality, freedom, life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, the whites indeed do nothing so as to abolish racial discrimination or slavery system because the whites accept the blacks as economic necessity. Against slavery system, some prominent black leaders such as Frederic Douglas, Paul Coffee and Benjamin Banker revolt for the dignity and emancipation of all black slaves. Then, the confrontation between

blacks and whites is intense as some educated blacks become aware of the slavery system and its evil outcome in America.

As a result, the prominent black leaders organize the campaign for the abolition of inhuman slavery system. Then, in 1780, it is abolished in Pennsylvania. Many states then in North America are forced to abolish slavery and free slaves. Also runaway slaves start going to the freed states which creates problems for whites. So, in order to stop the flow of the black slaves to the freed states, the Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Law. Also the slave owners announce reward for the return of runaway slaves by forming a group of professional bounty hunters so as to capture those runaway slaves. In 1850, the Congress issues and imposes another tougher and severe Fugitive Slave Law (punishment) to anyone those helping the black slaves to run away from the indenture.

In 1861, an initiative to end the slavery system or racial discrimination starts with the beginning of American Civil War which takes place between the slave states of the South America and free Northern states. Another bold and historic process of freedom and emancipation for blacks takes place in 1863. The then President Abraham Lincoln declares and frees the slaves through the Emancipation Proclamation. But the emancipation and freedom is confined only to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Again in 1865, the Congress amends the constitution and passes the 13th and 14<sup>th</sup> amendment so as to abolish slavery or racial discrimination. To the large extent, these amendments are beneficial but the blacks are not allowed their voting rights. The root of racial discrimination is not uprooted in the local laws, tradition and customs. The blacks are compelled to go to separate churches, schools, hospitals, swimming pool, theatre, bus, hotels etc in practice. They are equally deprived of white color jobs, housing, opportunities etc.

Even the period of great Economic Depression is more difficult for the blacks as only the whites are given the welfare support and job opportunities during the economic crisis of

1930's in America. Later, American industries start producing weapons along with the end of the economic crisis and outbreak of world war. This time, the blacks also are benefited to some extent for job opportunities. In 1940, when then president F.D. Roosevelt manages job facilities and training for the youths, again the black youth are deprived of the job opportunities, who are disappointed and fed up to that kind of discrimination. Also many whites such as President Roosevelt, his wife Eleanor Roosevelt and other prominent whites launches the campaign, for the black soldiers who join the Army before 1940 are treated as servants rather than soldiers. Ultimately in 1941, Army Air Force is open to all qualified blacks too which is the outcome of the success of the campaign of youth blacks and many whites including Eleanor Roosevelt.

In 1963, the momentous and historic Civil Rights Movement takes place under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. He has led a huge procession of Civil Rights supporters on August 28<sup>th</sup> from Washington Monument to Lincoln Memorial where, he in front of 200,000 people including blacks and whites, recalls the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, and delivers the following historic and heart-touching speech:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out of the true meaning of its creed ... I have a dream that one day, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaves owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood ... my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their characters ... the womb of inter-position and nullification will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. (76)

The primary objective of the speech delivered by King and Civil Rights Movement is on the urge and need for restoring civil rights for the Afro-Americans. Slavery is abolished a century ago, but even after one hundred years, the blacks are denied equality, dignity and freedom in the country (America) which is against the spirit of the constitution of America—the land of Lincolnian democracy and Jeffersonian liberty. It is against the principle of morality and natural law. Subsequently, the Civil Right Acts 1964, 1965, and 1968 prove to be landmarks (milestones) for abolishing racial discrimination against blacks.

Now, the blacks also start involving in mental or academic works rather than physical works. About 40% employed blacks get white collar job by 1983. The number increases in 1989 by 40%. The percentage of college admitted black students aged between 18 and 24 reach 15.5% in 1983. To the large extent, the objective of the Civil Rights Movement transforms from the abolishing racial discrimination to Affirmative Action. The prime objective of Affirmative Action is to overcome the present outcome and efforts of past (racial) discrimination. Different programs at private and public sectors have been initiated in America so as to avoid the efforts of past racial discrimination. In order to uplift the status of those marginalized groups including blacks in America, such programs such as quotas, recruitment, employment, job training, professional education etc. have been initiated and continued for the blacks, women, minorities and the disabled. Nevertheless, the American blacks have not progressed yet and their social status has not been promoted as it has to be as compared to the whites even at the turning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now, the American history has changed and the Afro-Americans have made the history for the first time as Barrack Obama is elected by a huge margin to the post of American president as the first and foremost Afro-American president overcoming their nation's torturous racial history. President Obama now is the dawn of hope, progress, prosperity, justice and equality to all since racism has been a blight on American politics, and minority communities have

always felt discriminated against by white America for generations. Obama's victory as the first Afro-American president of the United States proves that the US has come along way since the negroes were designated as slaves. Till little over a century and a half ago, Afro-American citizens in some of the Southern states can be lynched and killed with impunity. However, America demonstrates to the world the true meaning of justice and equality since the American voters' overwhelming support for Obama heralds the end of the country's torturous racial history. Along with the historic presidential victory of Obama, the Afro-American and other marginalized communities are likely to get justices in America.

Along with the presidential victory of Obama, the entire Afro-Americans are elated forgetting their bitter, pathetic and torturous history of slavery and racism. A ray of hope arises in the dawn with his victory. Progress, prosperity, opportunity, freedom, justice, democracy and protection of fundamental rights of all Americans belonging to all races treating them equally on the basis of their merits and characters, not race and color of the skin are counted.

### **Racial Confrontation between Blacks and Whites**

Racial confrontation is one of the burning issues of the contemporary world. Particularly, in America, the racial confrontation between blacks and whites starts with enforcing the African-American slaves to cultivate the land confiscated from the Native Americans, which consequently creates hierarchies in terms of color and land. Then, the American society is based on exploitation. The racist whites establish the social, political and economic system of privileges. In this regard, Ordone and Harris put forward their views in the following ways:

In America, the social division along the color line crossed class, nationality, language and religious barriers. The simple fact of "whiteness" meant the

overall life fortune and destiny of white people ... white people enjoyed wide latitude of opportunities personal freedom and democratic rights protected by the state. Even though poor Americans born and immigration whites were viciously exploited by rich white people, they were not on the bottom. The bottom was reserved for Indians, blacks and other people of color. (26-27)

The Afro-Americans are subjugated and exploited by the whites along with their cultural lives in America since the seventeenth century. Indeed, the history of American society is the history of racial discrimination, oppression and migration. The Afro-Americans and their African heritage and culture deny the space in American society, whereas the white culture has been privileged with limitless potentials since its settlement. The African heritage is repudiated by the white culture. Along with different historical events—slavery, migration and emancipation, they try to negotiate their relationship with their cultural traditions but the culture and heritage of blacks are marginalized by the white race and their racist and dominating larger culture. So, it won't be exaggeration to say that history of America is the history of class, conflict and color conflict.

Before the abolition of slavery, the racist white American society generates all sorts of discourse of racism and prejudices against the African-Americans and other marginalized groups. American injustice to her colored citizens deprives the American people of their just influence in the world movement of freedom and democracy. The American government fails to do political justice to the African-Americans. One white man in the South has always greater power than two or three white men in the North and the blacks are entirely excluded from their representation and participation in the government. In this regard, George W. Ellis in his essay asserts:

United States represented at its birth the political dream of countries. By its constitution, it substituted for the capacious of man, the movement of people

regulated by law. Founded upon the freedom, it invited to its shores the oppressed of every land. Its founders laid the foundation of democracy that was supposed to be political light to the nation ... but before government was established, the institutions of slavery had manufactured so much class, prejudice in industry, education and relation at the adaptation of the constitutions, the race was unable to make this government in fact what (in they) it was announced to the world as a democratic country. (15-16)

No matter how much America claims to be a democratic country, in American politics, there is self-contradiction, for there is, on the one hand, commitment for equality, justice, life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for all races of people, and on the other hand, there is racial discrimination especially against the Afro-Americans. The African-Americans are prohibited in the political affairs. Even this situation seems to remain the same in practice after the Civil War.

In fact, the attitude of whites towards the Afro-Americans is dehumanizing right from they are first brought to America as slaves since seventeenth century. They have to live in a state of constant humiliations whose dignity as an individual is not admitted in white-dominated American society. They are segregated from schools, deprived of public facilities, and they have to go through excessive police brutality due to their color of skin. The identity of a black is only that of a wage earner in American society. They are never given any chance for skilled jobs as a result of which they have to live with depressed status, both socially and economically. There are discriminations against them in employment opportunities, trainings (vocational and academic). Even the racial discrimination reached to the extent that a black student is not given equal treatment at school that is required to live separate from the children of whites even if he is given a chance of admission at school.

In order to subjugate the Afro-Americans, the racist whites fabricated a biased discourse that the blacks like to be separated that they are happy in their humble status. Also it is believed that the blacks are uneducated, poor and deficient in health, morals and manners that are not fit for the social companions. It is supposed that the separation for the blacks from the whites was necessary to prevent friction between two groups. All these aforementioned assumptions regarding black are fake discourse created or circulated by racist whites. The politics behind it is to discriminate, subjugate and segregate them. When it is too much for the blacks, the antagonism between blacks and whites is already germinated since the slavery system. Then, the blacks start raising voice against all kinds of discourses of racial discriminations to uplift their conditions. The blacks glorify the attainments of their literature, painting, music, games, business or the professions. The Afro-Americans fraternal orders, civic association, commercial establishment, churches and other groups or institutions are glorified by them. An explosion of resentment is inevitable. In 1955, a Negro woman refuses to a bus driver's order to let her sit to a white man. This bold step indeed sows the seed of black revolt. Along with the germinations of revolt, some black organizations like the Committee on Racial Equality (CORE), National Associations for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) are formed which accelerates the movement for the rights and equality of Afro-Americans.

Though the blacks are emancipated along with the break out of Civil War and abolition of slavery, they are partially emancipated. Again in practice, the Negroes are discriminated and exploited. The blacks in academic professional and intellectual classes go through the same fate of discrimination. In this regard, Harold Cruse in essay says:

The Negro functioned in sub cultural world made up, usually of necessity, of own race only. The only factor, which differentiates the Negro's status from that of pure colonial state, is that his position is maintained in the "home

country” in close proximity to the dominated racial group ... that the semi colonial status of the Negro gave rise to the nationalist movement. (30)

Against all sorts of injustice, exploitation, racial discrimination and dehumanization, they start revolt across the nation (USA). The black communities in 1964, in Watts, in 1965, in New York and Detroit in 1967 and nearly in every city in the nation in 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., all realize and respond to the need of end of all prevailing discriminations and racial antagonism between black and whites. Some of the groups of blacks promote the campaign of an indigenous African based cultural value system. Some of the black organizations such as League of Revolutionary Black Workers, The Revolutionary Action Movement and Black Panther Party adopt the idea and strategy by means of armed struggle so as to achieve the dignity, equality, justice and self-determination of Afro-Americans. The American history itself is the history of racism and racial confrontation.

As a matter of fact Donald B. Gibson, a critic states in the concern of racial discrimination extant in the United States:

The idea Fred Daniels represents is of the individual who becomes dissociated from community and identity. The question is the nature of identity and the extent to which communal involvement is integral to identity. While he is underground, Fred Daniels’ experience is marked by its fluidity.

Undifferentiated by night and day, by time, his existence is dreamlike.

Unrecognized, mistaken for whatever figure is projected upon him by the few who observe him, he is finally immersed in a sense of his oneness with all others, and his strange actions as the story concludes reflect his feeling that he can achieve a psychic merger with all others. His sense of relatedness is dependent upon his having lost the need for the particularity of self, and his

vision of communal relation to all others projects his willingness to diminish his claims to individual identity. Such a vision, antithetical as it is to the values of a competitive society, is indeed a threat. (126-127).

Hence the critic focuses on the alienated position of the protagonist and further reveals the fact the condition of Fred is pathetic and his dependency is the serious subject which is connected to his individual identity. There is no respect to his life along with the people of color whoever they are do face the situation alike in the country dominated by racism.

Similarly another critic, Thea Anderson says:

Daniels points out a similar absurdity in the aboveground world concerning innocence and guilt. Aboveground, Daniels is an innocent man beaten into confessing to a crime he did not commit. Later he witness a boy wrongly punished for stealing a radio, and sees a thief slip through the cracks while another man pays for his crime. A society that allows guilt to go free while presuming guilt in the innocent subverts the meaning of both concepts. When guilt is found in innocence and innocence in guilt ... the prevalent forces maintain that there is a great divide between such opposites as innocence and guilt, and irrationality and reason.

America is a materialistic country where there is no equal distribution of resources to the citizens. Consequently people who are deprived of resources happen to involve in evil deeds for survival. When someone's property is looted, the most likely suspects are the people of color since they are poor and are cut off from the national resources. Fred Daniels does represent the people of the lower class and of color. *The Man Who Lived Underground* tells the story of a Black man is forced to hide in the sewers of a city because he is accused of a murder he has not committed. The underground world in which he lives for a while makes him discover that man is guilty by nature. The discovery by nature, the discovery of human

guilt gives him the strength to leave his subterranean refuge turn himself in to the police. But he is told that the murderer has been apprehended and that he is free. Convinced of his guilt as a man, he insists that police detectives follow him into the sewers to visit his underground world. Thinking he is a raving maniac one of the detectives shoots him in cold blood when he is half way body is down into a manhole. His body is abandoned to the dark and dirty kingdom of the sewers.

Most critics of Richard Wright's novella *The Man Who Lived Underground* focus on its existential content. These critics generally ground their usually brief analysis on the story's plot rather than close textual analysis, their comments about man's essence and existence. Along with this few critics mention the story's naturalistic content. When they do mention it, these critics assure their audiences that Wright surpassed and moved beyond the naturalistic perspective to the more universal sophisticated and philosophical existential perspective. Despite its current low repute, naturalism makes a statement about man's essence and existence. Thus to focus on the story's existential content while ignoring or minimizing its naturalistic content is necessarily to risk distorting what Wright says in it about man and man's life. More importantly, such a focus disregards a major basis of the story's paradoxical structure-paradoxical because at every level, from the diction to the philosophical, Wright pairs contradictory and seemingly irreconcilable parts.

At the heart of the paradox is the story's simultaneous existence as a naturalistic fable and an existential fable. The result of this yoking of fables is a protagonist who is simultaneously portrayed as an animal, whose fate is controlled by forces independent of his will, and a god, whose will becomes, in effect, the First Cause of his fate. The paradoxical structure of the story demands first that the protagonist be considered in terms of his role in both the naturalistic and the existential fables, and finally that the apparent contradictions related to the fables and the protagonist's role in them is reconciled. This structural approach

discloses a more accurate picture of the protagonist's essence and existence than has been developed by evaluating the protagonist in terms of one fable alone.

### III. Fred's Existential Dilemma

Identity and existence are much crucial and are embedded with the individual. When a person remains detached from the society that creates her/his identity s/he feels deprived of her/his fundamental rights. Indeed the conflict between blacks and whites is much dominant in any every sector of the society. No doubt, how long the people of color have been under domination of the white people in the United States is the concern of intellectuals. Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* reveals the miserable and desperate situation of Afro-Americans in America. The writer carves out the picture of a character, Fred Daniels who represents the people of color in America who undergo many complications and difficulties due to the racial discrimination extant over the centuries. Hence, the writer through this character tells us trials and tribulations of the people of color in America. Identity crisis on the part of Afro-Americans motivates them to protest against the white hegemony.

Whatever the position the people of color in America have today is the outcome of long-time struggle and movement. It is pretty clear when oppression and suppression on the part of any minority group crosses the limit, revolution is born. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America commenced and brought about a drastic change in the political scenario as well. Richard Wright in his text, *The Man Who Lived Underground* does stress on the revolutionary spirit of the people of color represented by Fred Daniels.

To save life and to lead a respectful life for the people of color in America has ever been a great challenge due to the white hegemony in segment of the society. Hence the protagonist, Fred Daniels does undergo much severe situation. Due to the very reason, the Afro-Americans seem to be hiding for safety as well. Being a black and feeling that "hiding" is his only the way to save his life, Fred Daniels escapes from the police station and lowers

him into the dark sewer in an unknown American city to save his life from the white policemen who were chasing him:

“I’ve got to hide, he told himself. His chest heaved as he waited, crouching in the dark corner of the vestibule. He was tired of running and dodging. Either he had to find a place to hide, or he had to surrender. A police car swished by through the rain, its siren rising sharply. They are looking for me all over...

Yes, he had to hide, but where? (1414)

The condition of the people of color is much vulnerable and serious in the sense that they are unnecessarily suspected to be thieves and therefore they get compelled to seek for a place to hide from the security forces. As a matter of fact, Fred Daniels has not committed any crimes. However, he is a suspect and the police are keenly monitoring him. It is because of racism Daniels has to hide into the sewer which is terrible and dark. Even into the sewer, he is in the whirlwind of dilemma because neither he can stay there any longer, for it is terrible, nor can he come out of it because there is the fear of being caught by white police. Thus Fred through the ambivalent situation is heading towards nowhere in the text. His existence is on the verge of decline and he is much worried in the sense that he is a pendulum and he is not being respected as a citizen of a country. He is not an identified person who could lead a prestigious life of a good citizen.

Wright in *The Man Who Lived Underground* shows the tormenting and fragile plight of Fred how he is behaved and treated is the matter of serious concern: “He dropped and was washed violently into an ocean of warm, leaping water. His head was battered against a wall and he wondered if this were death” (1415). The inhuman treatment and dealing with Fred Daniels by the white police guided by racial principles that motivate the people of different races to discriminate against each other and create the situation of anarchy wherein the people of minority get exploited and oppressed which is reflected by beating Fred. Though the police

are not sure who the real criminal is, they inhumanly punish him. He is forced to live each moment of his life in the pool of blood and agony. The police batter his head against the wall in such a way that he is likely to pass away. This frightening scene of the inhuman act and treatment is the evidence that the whites are cool-blooded and they do not feel whether the blacks are also human beings like them.

The text, *The Man Who Lived Underground* displays the similar situation when the white people who have the responsibility of administration and protection of the nation, treat with the people of color discriminately and prioritize their race by insulting the black: “The white men crouched out of sight, behind their cars. Make up yo mind, nigger! C mon out er burn, yuh black bastard! Yuh think yuhre white now, nigger?” (1416). The word nigger is a derogatory term used to address the people of color provided that the white people feel that they are superior to them and they want to detach the black people from them. Addressing someone in an inhuman manner is a severe insult to human race.

When Fred is taken under custody, he strives to tell them something but he is not permitted to. Though he is aware of his existence and he is sure enough that he is guiltless, he is allowed to explain to them about the fact. His plight worsens in such a way that he remains unheard. The text, *The Man Who Lived Underground* makes it clear:

After a long time he grew numb and dropped to the dirt. Pain throbbbed in his legs and a deeper pain, induced by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him. A vague conviction made him feel that those people should stand unrepentant and yield no quarter in singing and praying, yet he had run away from the police, had pleaded with them to believe in his innocence. He shook his head, bewildered.  
(1417)

He is beaten so severely that consequently he loses his mental control. In the sense he becomes unconscious and later on restores energy to get to normalcy and then he thinks that he has been severely tortured and punished in much inhuman way.

The white police officers think that their brutal treatment with Daniels Fred will anger Fred and in return he is likely to harm. This is why they kill him because Lawson, the police officer tells Murphy “You’ve got to shoot his kind. They’d wreck things” (1450). They kill him because they want to wipe out all possibilities of retaliation from Daniels. Due to the color of Fred Daniels’ skin, wherever he goes, even if he goes to the sewer, his fear does not vanish because the sewer also is terrible and bleak:

He did not know how much fear he felt, for fear claimed him completely. Yet it was not a fear of the police or the people, but a cold dread at the thought of the actions. He knew he would perform; he went out into that cruel sunshine (above world). His mind said ‘no’ his body said ‘yes’ and his mind couldn’t understand his feelings. (1439)

Likewise wherever Daniels goes, he is in the frightening situation. Despite the fact that he gets rid of those cruel policemen for the time being and plunges into the sewer, where even animals do not live, his life is painful. It is because of extant racism, and he is in such a state due to the racist white society. In both underground and above-world, his life is torturous. When he comes out of it, there is a fear of being caught by those policemen who are likely to punish torturing him again and even he could be killed, and if he stays into the sewer, it is terribly cold and dark where he could die just like a wet mouse. The state of intense alienation, suffering, invisibility, discrimination and suppression from the world aboveground and underground makes Daniels different. The above ground, which is a beautiful place only for the racist whites is an absurd place for the blacks, teaches him a serious lesson which gradually brings alteration in Fred Daniels’ mind.

Fred Daniels, once diligent servant, husband, citizen and Christian transforms into a skeptic and sadistically a radical black hero. He turns heroic in the sense that his activities and thoughts are different from the rest of the ordinary blacks in America. When he is aware of the prevailing injustice, segregation and racial discrimination against him and his entire black community, he is extremely enraged against whites. Only the way of exposing his anti racist rage against the whites is in a peaceful manner outwardly because he knows he is alone and helpless before the God-like white supremacists, but in the core of his heart he has burning resentment against the white race which seems to thwart his ambition at every turn and keep himself and his family in abject misery. Deprived of the right and opportunity to live free and full life because he is poor and black, Fred Daniels with vigorous determinations decides to come into the above world after the stay and tunneling of underground so as to deny and resist the power of whites which shows his protests and resistance as an act of self-affirmation and self-identity. He decides to go to the police station where he has been tortured, beaten and forced to sign up a confession though he is innocent:

He (Daniels) turned and walked northward, his mind filled with the image of police station. Yes, that was where they had beaten him, accused him, and had made him sign a confession of his guilt. He would go there and clear up everything, make a statement [...] He was the statement, and since it was all so clear to him, surely he would be able to make it clear to others. (1441)

Since, wherever he goes and stays, the fear and alienation worsen his condition in the aboveground or underground. Though he is innocent, his voice is ignored and he is arrested, beaten severely and forced to sign a confession by those three policemen especially under the leadership of the police officer Lawson. As a black hero, he knows all it was due to his color of the skin that is black. And he is no more afraid of them and wants to clear his accusation so that he can be a free man, can work as a free man since he has family at home. With his

full determination, he goes to the police station and looks for those three white policemen Lawson, Murphy and Johnson who has tortured him. The courage to go to the police station boldly and looking for the policemen is due to his racial consciousness that he is punished because he is a Negro. That's why, he doesn't want to die like an animal by hiding into the underground who decides it is mandatory to go to the police station and confront with them. And after a few days of tunneling into the sewer and secretly observing the people who live aboveground, especially the brutality of racist whites upon poor and helpless people and other minorities, he leaves the underground and gets ready mentally to confront the policemen who earlier forced him to sign a confession of guilt. All this is for the assertion of his identity, racial equality and justice. So, he boldly turns to the police station and looks for those white policemen who make him sign the confession despite his innocence:

“I'm looking for the men” he said

“What men?”

...At the moment, he could not remember the names of those policemen; he recalled their beating, the confession he had signed, and how he had run away from them.

“They brought me here” he began.

“When?... “It was a long time ago.” He repeated following the promptings of his emotion.

“They beat me... I was scared ... I ran away.”

“Nuts,” the policemen said.

“Do you know what place this is, boy?”

“Yes, Sir. The police station” he answered sturdily, almost proudly. (1442)

Fred Daniels is much concerned with the people of color since he understands they do face the similar problems in the racist society. He has manifold sufferings and trials and

tribulations. His agonies and difficulties do not touch the cool-blooded white police. They damn care and even do not show sympathy towards his plight. There is both pride and agony in the voice and response of Fred Daniels. Even in the desperate condition he restores energy and boldness to fight against the currents of sadness at every moment and step of his life.

Fred Daniels, the protagonist knows very well that going to the police station in that way could be risky and dangerous, but how long he has to be afraid of them and hide from them. despite the fact that he is frightened from the forthcoming consequence, he manages to go there. No doubt he looks for alternatives and builds up ladder to lessen the degree of complication. In the same way he even sees his other fellow people being tormented by the police when he was hiding in the sewer:

“Look where you’re going, nigger!”

“That’s right! Stay there and get killed!”

“You blind, you bastard!”

“Go home and sleep your drunk off”

... Or get away from this door. (1440-41)

The extract mentioned above reveals the fact that the black people are addressed in much insulting manner by the whites in the past. They are not treated as fellow human beings. The white people do not use any respectful language while calling them. All this is, Daniels learns, because of racist attitudes of whites against the blacks who have branded the stereotypes of an Afro-American as robbers, murderers, uncivilized and uncultured race of people for the blacks. The way they are treated and addressed in America is the serious issue.

The police who are trained and cultured in the racist society do not have any idea how much Fred Daniels is furious with them and their entire mechanism of racism institutionalized by them against the Afro-Americans:

“Did you run off from an institution?”

“No, Sir he said, blinking and shaking his head

“I came from the underground.”

“I got to find those men (white policemen)” he protested mildly...

“What do you know about Mrs. Peabody’s death, boy?”

“Nothing, Sir. But they said I killed her. But it doesn’t make any difference.

I’m guilty”. (1442– 43)

Due to the racial discrimination extant in the United States, Fred Daniels is frustrated and neurotic in the underground and there is no consistency in his speech when he is asked many questions. When Fred Daniels realizes that his identity is in critical condition, he confesses the crime which he has not committed. For the prestigious existence he becomes bold and responds the condition so brilliantly. There is not even a single situation where he compromises with the injustice. No doubt how severely he is treated there is the matter of courage and relentless zeal.

The other two policemen Murphy and Johnson have a little bit consideration and pity for Daniels but they are helpless in front of Lawson though they are white as well. They are soft-hearted and liberal in the sense that they are not much strict and harsh in dealing with Fred Daniels. Hence Murphy says:

“Listen,” said Murphy. “Let me tell you something for your own good. We don’t want you, see. We caught the guy who did the Peabody’s job. He was not colored at all. He was an Eytalian.” “Shut up!” Lawson yelled “Have you no sense!” “But I want to tell’m,” Murphy said.” “We can’t let this crazy fool go,” Lawson exploded. “He acts nuts, but this may be a stunt. (1444)

There are both soft-hearted and cruel people in the white community as well. This is a common phenomenon of the existing society. We cannot put all people in the same box.

Rather we have to be aware of the fact that these two types of people constitute society. Nevertheless, the people of color are much more dominated and marginalized in every sector of the society. Due to being people of color, they are neglected everywhere. The discourse of racism is overwhelmingly dominant in America which Richard Wright stresses on.

Fred Daniels wants to prove that he is a strong and bold man and has not committed any crime. In order to protect his existence he hides him in the sewer where he feels safe and protected. Furthermore, he wants to show the underground sewer to the police which symbolically refers to the miserable plight of the people of color. The brutality and severe punishment exposed on the people of color is revealed hereby:

He was eager to show them the cave now. If he could show them what he had seen, then they would feel what he had felt and in turn would show it to others and those others would feel as they had felt and soon everybody would be governed by the same impulse of pity... Yes, sir. Just a minute. I'll show you.

(1449)

Hence, Fred Daniels very eagerly shows the place of his hiding to the concerned parties so that these people could come to know the genuine plight of people of color. He wants to win sympathy of white people. He does make his efforts in order to create milieu for prestigious existence. He is seeking for identity and meaning of his life. He is in very critical situation and where he feels much complicated to come out. This is a kind of challenge to the white hegemony as well.

The moment Lawson shoots Fred Daniels brutally is very crucial as they are afraid of him. They get to know the rebellious spirit in Daniels, who, Lawson could, thinks wreck things:

Lawson still held the gun...he saw Lawson raise the gun and point it directly at him. Then there was a thunderous report and a streak of fire

ripped the chest ...

“What did you shoot him for Lawson?”

I had to.

“Why?”

“You’ve got to shoot his kind. They’d wreck things.”

... Then his mouth was full of thick, bitter water. He sighed and closed his eyes, a whirling object rushing alone in the darkness, veering, tossing, lost in the heart of the earth.” (1450)

Though Daniels is mercilessly killed, it is not their victory, rather it is their defeat. It is the victory of Daniels—victory of blacks. He lays the stone of revolution by sacrificing his life. He has indeed done this in order to emancipate the people of color. He is killed in the process of digging the grave for racial discrimination and injustice. Of course Fred wants to change the racist temperament of white people.

He wants them to “change” their racist attitudes by showing them the underground where he hid him. His objective is to show others “What he had seen, then they would feel what he had felt and in turn would show it to others [...] and soon everybody would be governed by the same impulse of pity”( 89). Pity is indeed required to those who are oppressed in some way either in terms of race or class. To draw attention of people who are supposed to be superior to the people of color. Once Lawson acknowledges the protagonist’s revolt against them, he immediately recognizes the threat to himself and to “the white man’s world” (89). Daniels proves to be innocent since the white woman, Mrs. Peabody was murdered by an Italian, but the white policemen don’t accept that he is innocent because they are guided with the sense of superiority to Daniels.

The People of color in America whose social status is weak and voice is unheard is the main in *The Man Who Lived Underground*. The most miserable destiny the black people

bears in America is because of being black and they are unidentified in their own nation. Since there is domination of white people in every sector of the country, the Afro-Americans get dominated and discriminated against. Hence Fred Daniels is compelled to seek a place where he could hide him and defend him from the hazards likely to be created by the white people. He undergoes injustice and faces brutal treatment imposed by the police.

Fred Daniels jumps to the door and looks sideways through the fogged plate glass. The very action reveals the fact that he is captivated and surrounded by the forces and at any moment he may become prey of their injustice and brutality. It is questionable why he seeks an opportunity to get free from the society in which ordinary people reside and lead their mundane life. But he is different from the rest. This is why he is committed not to compromising with injustice. Fred Daniels is convinced that the police are going to put him in the prison house without any trial from his side. On the whole this is the reason why he has made efforts to keep him away from them.

Fred Daniels is so much troubled that he feels unsafe everywhere. He keeps moving here and there in search of a safer place. Consequently he gets exhausted and feels upset and disappointed. Somewhat he is made a submissive person who neither can revolt explicitly nor can accept the accusation. This ambivalent position reveals the fact that he is hooked to the chain of negative discriminations and injustice imposed by the white people in America. His puzzling situation can be perceived in the extract below: "Water blossomed about the tiny legs, the tiny arms, the tiny head, and rushed onward. The eyes were closed, as though in sleep; the fists were clenched, as though in protest; and the mouth gaped black in a soundless cry" (1418). Despite the fact that he is a human being like others regardless to their skin color, he treated as if he is an animal which does not feel and react. As he is powerless and helpless, he cannot express his agony and feelings.

Moreover, Richard Wright craves a picture of Fred Daniels' desperate condition in the cave in much crystal way:

Back in the cave, he sat and leaned his back against a dirt wall. His body was trembling slightly. Finally his senses quieted and he slept. When he awakened he felt stiff and cold. He had to leave this foul place, but leaving meant facing those policemen who had wrongly accused him. No, he could not go back aboveground. He remembered the beating they had given him and how he had signed his name to a confession, a confession which had not even read. He had been too tired when they had shouted at him, demanding that he sign his name; he had signed it to end his pain. (1418)

Fred Daniels' voices are neglected and there is no one to take notice of him and on the whole his life is full of miseries and difficulties. He undergoes many complications and recalls the bitter memories of the time when he was battered and tortured the police. He is undergoing a very difficult situation. He is vulnerable and his days are unfavorable. He is the victim of the time which is much cruel and inauspicious to him. He regrets why he has signed the paper of confession despite his innocence. The racial conflict remains between the white and the black uncovers the social and political fissure as well.

When people are in difficult situation, nobody seems to help them. Rather they are boycotted everywhere. Hence Fred Daniels faces similar situation. As a matter of fact in the painful days the suffered do not get helped in any ways. The similar predicament is of Fred when he is tortured and made alienated from the world of morals and laws. He suffers much and with some sort of hope he looks out so that his sadness could be shared and his painful condition could be appeased. Richard Wright says in this context:

He turned away, parted the black curtain, and looked out. He saw no one. He started down the white stone steps and when he reached the bottom he saw a

man in trim blue uniform coming toward him. So used had he become to being underground that he thought that he could walk past the man, as though he were a ghost. But the man stopped. And he stopped. (1420)

There is a dramatic irony in the sense that Fred's expectation is shattered and he eventually faces a situation of alienation. There is no one to cooperate with him. He is left alone to tackle the situation. How the old man feels and what he does inside the dark world is noteworthy here to reflect on his condition since he represents the people of color as well: "Oh, yes [...] He understood. The old man had worked here for so long that he had no need for light; he had learned a way of seeing in his dark world, like those sightless worms that inch along underground by a sense of touch" (1421). He is compared here with sightless worms in the sense that he is capable enough of envisioning things even in darkness.

The racial identity does not directly make sure what might happen to Fred Daniels. Rather, environment-especially, economic and social forces seem to be a more important determinant of Daniels's fortunes. In fact, he has to go ahead in accordance with the social and economic forces. He cannot do anything against the social condition that affects him too. On the whole he is facing the identity crisis. In this regard, few lines which are pertinent could be drawn from the text: "The watchman was guilty; although he was not guilty of the crime of which he had been accused, he was guilty, had always been guilty. The only thing that worried him was that the man who had been really stealing was not being accused" (1437).

While Fred Daniels is in the underground, his situation and mood of posture and stay is not clear. There is vagueness and confusion in his life and relationship that he has with other the reason why Fred is there in underground is crystal clear in the sense people of color face identity crisis in the above world, therefore they get bound to seek a place which could help them to have a respectful existence. In fact it is an irony on the part of humanity whose

settlement is in the society. Wright throws a glimpse on this: “Now he had a reason for staying here in the underground. He waited for a long time, but the white hand did not return. Godamm! Had he been more alert, he could have counted the twirls and he would have had the combination” (1423). The relationship between the white and the black is antagonistic and people of both races do not stay in harmony and peace. Rather some sort of conflict arises and eventually the people of color get to retaliate for their existence. Fred Daniels as a typical character stays in the underground simply because this world is free from exploitation and domination of whites.

Richard Wright further reveals the fact about Fred and his activities: “The door slammed and the light went off; once more he stood in shadow. His tension ebbed. From behind the frosted glass he heard the man’s voice. Forty-eight cents a pound, ma’am. He shuddered, feeling that there was something he had to do” (1424). Fred Daniels’ situation inside the underground is like that of a fish in the drying river. The fish cannot stay much comfortably in the river gradually drying. Similarly Fred is exhausted and fed with the long stay in the cave as well. He thinks of doing something. When the door is slammed, he feels that someone is coming to him. And for the time being he feels tension-free and suddenly becomes alert as well so that he can have any outlet from the ever-lasting problem. After all, Fred is a human being who thinks and feels. Despite the fact that he is away from his relatives and other concerned people, he keeps on considering about all: “Sprawling before him in his mind was his wife, Mrs., Wooten for whom he worked, the three policemen who had picked him up [...] He possessed them now more completely than he had ever possessed them when he had lived underground” (1425). The most significant people in his life are his wife, Mrs. Wooten and the policemen.

Fred Daniels is much obsessed with the sight of the white people. He does not feel excellent any more when he sees the white people. The reason for this may be a preoccupied concept that he lingers with. On this ground he is also a racist:

Emotionally he hovered between the world aboveground and the world underground. He longed to go out, but sober judgment urged him to remain here. Then impulsively he pried the lock loose with one swift twist of the crowbar; the door swung outward. Through the twilight he saw a white man and a white woman coming toward him. He held himself tense, waiting for them to pass; but they came directly to the door and confronted him. (1425)

There is a rift and difference between the world underground and the world aboveground. As a matter of fact people hardly choose the underground world since life is much troublesome there. But Fred Daniels chooses this life as he is convinced that he could have prestigious life there. Though that is the world of gloom and bleakness, he loves being there.

Despite the fact that America has ever been considered as the most democratic country, there are racial predicaments and discriminations deep-rooted in that country. The political and bureaucratic system is too rotten that it cannot protect the unalienable rights of human beings at the equal rate. In the regard Wright mentions: a headline: "HUNT NEGRO FOR MURDER" (1426). The commandment looks very meaningful and does reflect the critical existence of the people of color in America. There is a hasty generalization in the sense that all Negroes are generalized to be guilty and are subject to being punished.

The reason why most blacks in the United States of America turn thieves is the economic and political deprivation. They are not considered nationals of the country. They are socially and politically marginalized. Due to the very deprivation and marginalization they face identity crisis. They do not have access to resources available in the country.

Rather they die due to not having required products and amenities to live prestigious life.

The extract given below can make it crystal clear:

The hands trembled; again the right hand slipped a packet of bills up the left sleeve. He's stealing, he said to himself. He grew indignant, as if the money belonged to him. Though he had planned to steal the money, he despised and pitied the man. He felt that his stealing the money and the man's stealing were two entirely different things. He wanted to steal the money merely for the sensation involved in getting it, and he had no intention whatever of spending a penny of it; but he knew that the man who was now stealing it was going to spend it, perhaps for pleasure. The huge steel door closed with a soft click.

(1428)

Fred Daniels is not intentionally bad. Rather he is a commendable man but social forces and materialistic world tempt him and implicitly force him to think of committing the crime which is beyond his moral grounds. He is not convinced that he will steal things like money. He is not interested in stealing money since he does not prefer to make expenditure of that money. After all, he is guiltless and morally strong. In this regard Wright in *The Man Who Underground Lived* reveals:

There was in him no sense of possessiveness; he was intrigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men aboveground held toward it. The sack was one-third full when it occurred to him to examine the denominations of the bills into the sack. (1429)

Fred is much critical to the entire American system that has been constituted with the hierarchal notion wherein the whites are superior and the rest are inferior. He says: "Maybe anything's right, he numbed. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture" (1434).

Fred Daniels' race is an outcaste in America and people of his color are deprived of their fundamental rights and these people are helpless and cannot go explicitly against the white people's oppression and exploitation. His miserable condition is not perceived positively in the following lines:

He knew now that he could not stay here and he could not go out. He lit a cigarette with shaking fingers; the match flame revealed the green-papered walls with militant distinctness; the purple on the gun barrel glinted like a threat; the meat cleaver brooded with its eloquent splotches of blood; the mound of silver and copper smoldered angrily; the diamonds winked at him from the floor; and the gold watches ticked and trembled, crowning time the king of consciousness, defining the limits of living. (1435)

Fred Daniels' dealing and handling with money is not so much commendable. He breaks into a musing laugh, feeling that he is reading of the doings of people who live on some far off-planet. He turns the bill over and sees on the other side of it a delicately beautiful building gleaming with paint and sets amidst green grass. He has no desire whatever to count the money; it is what it stands for the various currents of life swirling aboveground that captivates him. Next he opens the rolls of coins and lest them slide from their paper wrappings to the ground. Fred is living the captive life in the underground world. He perceives the people in the aboveground with keen eyes. How Fred takes the world aboveground and the world he is hiding him is crucial to bring into light:

He slapped his thighs and guffawed. He had triumphed over the world aboveground! He was free! If only people could see this! He wanted to run from this cave and yell his discovery to the world. [...] Yes, this room would be his hide-out; between him and the world that had branded him gully would stand this mocking symbol. He had not stolen the money; he had simply

picked it up, just as a man would pick up fire-wood in a forest. And that was how the world aboveground now seemed to him, a wild forest filled with death. (1434)

Though there are many drawbacks on the part of the world underground, he prefers this to the world aboveground. Fred imagines that he is a rich man who lives aboveground in the obscene sunshine and he is wandering through a park of a summer morning, smiling, nodding to his neighbors, sticking an after-breakfast cigar. He feels he has a glorious victory locked in his heart. He is not secure and needs some sort of safety from the climate as well as from the white race that has ever thrown his life into the well of troubles from the world aboveground. Thus he is in identity crisis and has got many problems connected to his existence.

#### IV. Protest against Racial Discrimination

Richard Wright never refers to the main character by name in *The Man Who Lived Underground*. It is only by chance that the readers learn his name when Fred Daniels finds a type-writer in the jewelry store and pecks out Fred Daniels. As the story progresses, we again find Daniels seated before a typewriter, this time in the cave where he has made his underground home. Now, however, he tries in vain to recall his own name. Wright shows that the character's identity from his former existence has lost its meaning in his new life. His present condition represents that which is human and universal, and thus devoid of the most significant identifying feature of an individual man.

The choice of man of color as the protagonist in this story makes it easier for Wright to convey his idea's since the white characters are blinded by racial prejudice that prevents them from knowing Daniels as a man. The condition of Fred Daniels is not only symbolic of all Afro-Americans, but also of anyone who is oppressed. His life underground allows him to freely express the feelings of the human race that he represents.

Richard Wright underlines that even when Daniels is outside his profound universe, he remains totally unknown to the people he meets. If this situation is caused by the color of his skin, it is also a result of human apathy. When he wanders in the halls of movie-theater, he is surprised to be told where the men's room is by an usher used to a tedious job. When he steps out of the grocery store to get some fresh air, a white couple mistakes him for a clerk and buys a pound of grapes from him. Neither the usher nor the white couple can imagine for a second that Daniels has created a fantastic world for himself underground. To them, he is only a person permitted to play certain given roles by society. Daniels subterranean world is very different from the one above him. Everything is new, including the notion of time that is unimportant. He winds up stolen watches without worrying about what time of the day or night it is.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* is existentialist parable since the protagonist develops his identity through his relationships with other people. Before Sartre or Camus has entered the literary scene, Wright has already grappled with the philosophy they later expressed. The author tries to define the position of the individual in relation to modern society Daniels is the symbol of the loneliness and anonymity surrounding man in a materialistic and unfeeling society.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* has all of the features of the classic naturalistic fable. The text's working-class protagonist Fred Daniels has been falsely accused of murder. He escapes from the police and takes refuge underground in the sewers. After a few days of tunneling through the sewers and secretly observing the people who live above ground, he leaves the underground and confronts the policemen who earlier forced him to sign a confession of guilt. When Daniels tries to lead them into the sewers so that they can see people as he has seen them, one of the officers shoots and kills him.

Daniels' struggle begins when he is forced to flee from the police for a crime which he has not committed. He takes refuge by escaping through a manhole into the city sewer. It is here, beneath the superficial elements of the outer world, that he begins to discover the true nature of reality and of human nature. In the depths of the sewer Daniels gropes through the darkness until he finds that he has entrance to the basements of buildings adjacent to the sewer tunnels. In these buildings and in the sewer he sees people in grotesque and different roles, symbolic of the base human nature that underlay outer respectability. He first observes a Negro church service, next discovers a naked, dead baby caught in some debris in the sewer slime, and then goes on to view the people in a mortuary, a movie theatre, a jewelry firm, a radio repair shop, and a meat market. These incidents are significant because the people do not realize they are being observed, and Daniels is seeing them from a unique vantage point, from the level of the unconscious evil and despair which motivate man.

When Daniels first approaches the Negro church service and hears the people imploringly singing, his impulse is to laugh at their blindness. The protagonist escapes from society's stereotype of an African American male by hiding underground. After the protagonist returns to the world, he experiences the ultimate punishment. He is tormented by the night watchman's suicide and the claustrophobic feeling he receives while in his hideout. Although the plot moves slowly, it captures the attention of the reader by making the person wonder what will happen next. This short story is recommended for people who like to see man struggle within him as well as with society.

Paradoxically, as Wright compares Daniels to animals, he similarly compares him to Christ. Daniels stays underground for three days, reveals his story to be virtually the mirror image of Christ's. Christ was executed, lay dead in a cave for three days and then rose on the third day; Daniels lives in a cave for three days, rises on the third day, and then is executed.

Daniels' identification with Christ is further suggested in the confrontation of Daniels with the Black worshippers in a church when Daniels returns above ground on the third day. Their paradoxical encounter, during which the worshippers reject the savior that they pray for, is a sustained example of dramatic irony, based on the reader's awareness and the worshippers' lack of awareness that Daniels is a Christ.

Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* besides other themes deals with existential consciousness. The black identity is reflected through the character Fred Daniels. The text is an account of white brutality over blacks. The novel is about the issues that arise out of marginal experience. The identity crisis of Fred and his endeavor to assert it get collapsed due to White's Master psychology. Thus, instead of articulation of existential voices, it represses.

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