

Historical Trauma, Abolitionism, and Social Reforms in Selected American Novels

الصدمة التاريخية، وحركة إلغاء العبودية، والإصلاحات الاجتماعية في روايات أمريكية مختارة

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تتناول هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي تُعيد بها روايات أمريكية مختارة تمثيل العبودية، لا بوصفها حدثًا تاريخيًا منغلًا، بل بوصفها جرحًا نفسيًا وثقافيًا واجتماعيًا ممتدًا لا يزال يؤثر في البنى المعاصرة للمساواة والإصلاح. وتركز الدراسة على ست روايات هي: *Kindred* لأوكتافيا باتلر (1979)، و *The Left Hand of Darkness* لأورسولا ك. لو غوين (1969)، و *Beloved* لتوني موريسون (1987)، و *The Known* لإدوارد ب. جونز (2003)، و *The Chaneysville Incident* لديفيد برادلي (1981)، و *Walk Through Darkness* لديفيد أنتوني دورهام (2002). وتبحث الدراسة في الكيفية التي تتجاوز بها هذه النصوص تقاليد رواية الاحتجاج التقليدية من خلال توظيف الزمن غير الخطي، والسرد التخيلي/التجريبي، والذاكرة الثقافية بوصفها أدوات للاستعادة التاريخية والنقد. وتعتمد الدراسة منهجًا بيئيًا يجمع بين الدراسات الثقافية، والنقد الاجتماعي-التاريخي المادي، ونظرية الصدمة النفسية، وذلك لتحليل تمثيلات العرق، والجسد، والنسب، والفقد الأمومي، والذاكرة الجمعية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذه الروايات لا تستعيد تاريخ العبودية فحسب، بل تكشف أيضًا عن امتداداته المستمرة في التكوينات النفسية والقانونية والاجتماعية الحديثة. كما ترى أن الأشكال السردية التجريبية ليست مجرد اختيارات جمالية، بل هي استراتيجيات ضرورية لتمثيل صدمة تتجاوز السرد التاريخي الخطي. ومن خلال الربط بين الشكل الأدبي والمناصرة الاجتماعية، تطرح الدراسة الرواية الأمريكية المعاصرة بوصفها فضاءً فاعلاً للشهادة التاريخية، والتذكّر الأخلاقي، وتخيل الإصلاح البنيوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة التاريخية؛ الذاكرة الثقافية؛ الإبطالية؛ الإصلاح الاجتماعي؛ الرواية الأمريكية المعاصرة؛ رواية العبودية الجديدة؛ نظرية الصدمة؛ العرق والجندر.

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Abstract:

This article examines how selected American novels reimagine slavery not as a closed historical episode, but as an enduring psychic, cultural, and social wound that continues to shape contemporary structures of inequality and reform. Focusing on six novels—Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Edward P. Jones’s *The Known World* (2003), David Bradley’s *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and David Anthony Durham’s *Walk Through Darkness* (2002) the study investigates how these texts move beyond the conventions of the traditional protest novel by deploying non-linear temporality, speculative narration, and cultural memory as modes of historical recovery and critique. Methodologically, the article adopts an interdisciplinary framework that brings together cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory to analyze representations of race, embodiment, genealogy, maternal loss, and collective memory. The analysis demonstrates that these novels do more than revisit the history of slavery; they reveal its ongoing afterlives in modern psychological, legal, and social formations. The study further argues that experimental literary forms are not merely aesthetic choices, but necessary strategies for representing trauma that exceeds linear historical narration. By linking literary form to social advocacy, the article positions contemporary American fiction as a vital site of historical witnessing, ethical remembrance, and imagined structural reform.

Keywords: Historical trauma; cultural memory; abolitionism; social reform; contemporary American fiction; neo-slave narrative; trauma theory; race and gender.

1. Introduction:

The history of slavery in the United States continues to occupy a central place in American literary and cultural discourse, not only as a record of past violence, but also as an enduring source of psychic, social, and ethical disturbance. While historical archives and political narratives have documented slavery in legal, economic, and institutional terms, they have often proved less capable of conveying its lived, affective, and intergenerational dimensions. Contemporary fiction, by contrast, offers a more flexible and imaginative space in which the afterlives of slavery can be revisited, reinterpreted, and connected to ongoing structures of



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inequality. In this sense, literature does not merely preserve memory; it actively reshapes the ways historical trauma is understood in relation to the present.

This study examines the interplay between historical trauma, cultural memory, abolitionism, and social reform in six selected American novels: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Ursula K. Le Guin's *the Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987a), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and David Anthony Durham's *Walk Through Darkness* (2002). Although differing in genre, structure, and narrative mode, these texts engage with the concerns of the neo-slave narrative through their treatment of slavery, memory, historical violence, and the enduring effects of racial oppression. Rather than assuming that all six novels belong uniformly to a single literary category, this study approaches them as a related comparative corpus whose shared concern lies in reimagining the afterlives of slavery and their implications for identity, trauma, and social reform. Through forms such as non-linear narration, memory work, and speculative or experimental representation, these novels reveal that the legacy of slavery remains embedded in cultural consciousness and in the structures through which race, gender, power, and belonging are negotiated.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach. Drawing on cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory, the article reads these novels as sites where private suffering and public history intersect. Such an approach makes it possible to examine how literary texts represent bodily scarring, disrupted genealogy, maternal loss, fractured memory, and communal remembrance while also engaging broader questions of structural inequality and ethical responsibility. By linking literary form to social meaning, the study explores how fiction participates in shaping critical understandings of race, trauma, and reform within the American context.

In this study, abolitionism is approached not only as a nineteenth-century political movement concerned with the formal end of slavery, but also as an ongoing ethical and critical framework through which contemporary fiction rethinks race, gender, memory, and structural injustice. From this perspective, abolitionism extends beyond its historical origins to signify a continuing engagement with the social, psychological, and cultural aftereffects of slavery. The selected novels therefore do not simply revisit a closed historical chapter; they reactivate the moral and intellectual urgency of abolition by tracing how past violence continues to inform present conditions of inequality and exclusion.

Although scholarship on neo-slave narratives and trauma has made important contributions to the study of slavery, memory, and representation, less attention has been given to how selected contemporary American novels bring psychic trauma, cultural memory, and social reform into one comparative analytical framework. This study addresses that gap by exploring how these texts move beyond conventional realism and traditional protest fiction in order to express forms of suffering that are fragmented, embodied, and resistant to linear narration. In doing so, the article argues that contemporary American fiction not only revisits the past, but also functions as a critical mode of historical witnessing and ethical reflection through which the continuing aftereffects of slavery can be read in relation to present social realities.

The article therefore aims to show that these novels do more than narrate historical pain. They challenge fixed assumptions about race, gender, and identity; expose the psychological



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and cultural consequences of institutional violence; and illuminate literature's capacity to participate in wider conversations about justice, remembrance, and social transformation. By placing these works in a unified critical conversation, the study highlights the continuing relevance of literary form to the understanding of historical trauma and to the ongoing call for structural reform.

2. Research Questions

1. How do the selected novels employ experimental, speculative, and non-linear narrative forms to move beyond the limits of traditional protest literature and represent slavery as an ongoing psychic, cultural, and social wound?
2. In what ways do these texts utilize psychoanalytic trauma theory and feminist criticism to deconstruct established biological notions of race and gender, exposing them instead as socially produced categories shaped by institutional violence?
3. How do these novels connect historical memory to contemporary social, legal, and cultural inequalities, and how do they position literary form as an active site for ethical witnessing and structural reform?

3. Objectives of the Study:

1. Examine how selected contemporary American novels move beyond the conventional protest novel by employing experimental, speculative, and non-linear narrative forms associated with the neo-slave narrative tradition.
2. Analyze how the selected texts interrogate established constructions of race and gender by revealing them as socially produced categories rather than fixed biological realities.
3. Investigate the psychological and cultural effects of slavery as an enduring historical trauma through the lenses of psychoanalytic trauma theory and feminist criticism.
4. Explore how institutional violence disrupts the individual, the family, and maternal bonds and how these disruptions are represented in the selected novels.
5. Demonstrate how the legacy of slavery continues to shape contemporary social, legal, and cultural structures and how literature serves as a critical space for ethical reflection and structural reform.
6. Apply an interdisciplinary framework combining cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and trauma theory to provide a comparative reading of the six novels under study.

4. Statement of the Problem:

By limiting our exposure to history to the vernacular, we can diminish its meaningful impact on our lives. The value of traditional historical archives and legal documents lies in their ability to soothsay the psychological depth of systematic oppression by reducing visceral human suffering to dry dates, economic indicators, and legally decreed laws. Traditional realism and conventional protest novels have made efforts to rectify these absences, but they often miss the authentic, unsettling impact of chattel slavery and its psychological "afterlife".

In the same vein, conventional literary analyses frequently stray far from the mark by placing too much emphasis on formal aesthetics and disregarding the emotional distress caused by generational trauma. A significant gap exists in our comprehension, which demands a more detailed understanding of how contemporary speculative and experimental fiction address the intricate and personal perspectives on structural injustice. Through the failure to integrate



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psychic trauma, cultural memory, and social reform into a single comparative framework (often overlooked in literature), contemporary novels fail to acknowledge that these living wounds are actively healing and reforming.

5. Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary examination of how selected contemporary American novels represent slavery not merely as a historical event, but as an enduring psychic, cultural, and social wound. By bringing together literary analysis, cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how fiction can illuminate the continuing afterlives of historical violence in modern social and ethical structures.

At the literary level, the study is significant because it highlights the capacity of contemporary fiction—particularly speculative, experimental, and non-linear narrative forms—to move beyond the limits of the traditional protest novel and to offer more complex representations of slavery, memory, and suffering. In doing so, it broadens critical understanding of the neo-slave narrative and demonstrates how literary form itself can function as a mode of historical recovery and ethical reflection.

Methodologically, the study is important because it shows the value of an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis. Rather than relying on a single interpretive model, it combines cultural, historical, and psychological perspectives in order to examine how issues of race, gender, trauma, and power are negotiated within the selected novels. This approach allows for a more comprehensive reading of the relationship between individual suffering and larger systems of inequality.

At the social and cultural level, the study is significant because it humanizes abstract concepts such as structural racism, intergenerational trauma, and historical memory by tracing their effects within lived experience, family relations, and collective consciousness. It further suggests that literature can serve as a critical space for ethical witnessing and for rethinking the relationship between past injustice and present demands for social reform.

6. Limitations of the Study:

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it is confined to a selected corpus of six American novels published between 1969 and 2003. Although these texts provide a meaningful cross-section of speculative, realist, and experimental fiction, they do not represent the full scope of the neo-slave narrative tradition or the broader field of protest literature.

Second, because the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory, it emphasizes a broad thematic and interpretive reading rather than a highly specialized historical or clinical psychological analysis. As a result, the study privileges comparative literary interpretation over disciplinary depth in any single field.

Finally, the study is primarily situated within the American historical and cultural context. Therefore, its conclusions regarding trauma, identity, and structural reform are intended mainly in relation to American literature and society, and they cannot be generalized uncritically to global or postcolonial contexts.

7. Review of Related Literature:



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The relationship between literature, trauma, and social justice has long occupied a central place in literary criticism. The social novel emerged historically as a form through which writers exposed suffering, class inequality, and institutional injustice. In the American context, this literary tradition became especially significant in relation to slavery, race, and reform. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) all illustrate the enduring role of fiction in confronting systems of exploitation and moral crisis (Sinclair, 1906; Steinbeck, 1939; Stowe, 1852; Wright, 1940).

At the same time, the protest tradition has been subjected to important critical scrutiny. In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin (1955) challenges the sentimental and morally reductive tendencies of protest fiction and suggests that, in Stowe's case, the "courage to be a novelist" is overshadowed by the "courage to be a reformer" (pp. 13–24). Baldwin's intervention remains significant because it raises a central question for later writers: how can literature address oppression without reducing historical suffering to moral simplification?

This question becomes particularly important in later discussions of the neo-slave narrative. Rushdy (1999) identifies this mode of writing as a contemporary return to the history of slavery through self-conscious and revisionary narrative forms. In this tradition, slavery is not treated simply as a completed historical event, but as a continuing site of memory, trauma, and reinterpretation. Such a perspective is especially relevant to works like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, both of which revisit slavery through formally complex and psychologically layered narrative strategies (Butler, 1979; Morrison, 1987a; Rushdy, 1999).

Critical work on *Kindred* has further reinforced this line of interpretation. In his introduction to the novel, Crossley (2003) places Butler's work within the neo-slave narrative tradition and describes it as "a distinctive contribution to the genre of neo-slave narrative" (pp. ix–xxvii). This critical framing is important because it helps situate Butler's use of time travel, bodily injury, and genealogical return within a broader literary effort to reactivate the history of slavery in the present. Similarly, Morrison (1987b), in "*The Site of Memory*," emphasizes the importance of imaginative reconstruction in recovering dimensions of lived historical experience that official historical discourse often leaves unarticulated (pp. 103–124).

The present study is also informed by trauma theory, which has provided an influential framework for understanding slavery and its aftereffects. Caruth (1996) emphasizes that trauma is not fully grasped in the moment of occurrence, but often returns belatedly through repetition, fragmentation, and haunting. LaCapra (2001) likewise distinguishes between historical understanding and the unresolved psychic force of traumatic experience, while Felman and Laub (1992) stress the importance of witnessing and testimony in the articulation of catastrophic histories. Together, these approaches offer a useful framework for reading literary texts in which memory appears through temporal disruption, repetition, and spectral return.

Psychoanalytic approaches to intergenerational transmission further deepen this discussion. Abraham and Torok (1994) develop the concept of the "phantom" to explain how unspoken family trauma may continue to haunt later generations. This idea is particularly relevant to novels such as *Kindred*, *Beloved*, and *The Chaneysville Incident*, in which the past is represented not as a closed archive but as an active psychic inheritance that shapes personal and collective identity (Abraham & Torok, 1994; Bradley, 1981; Butler, 1979; Morrison, 1987a).



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Feminist psychoanalytic criticism has also contributed to literary discussions of gender, family, and subject formation under oppressive structures. Mitchell (1974) and Chodorow (1978) provide major theoretical foundations for understanding how gendered identity and maternal relations are shaped through familial and social systems. These insights are especially relevant to literary representations of enslaved motherhood, emotional vulnerability, and the destruction of kinship bonds under slavery. In this sense, trauma in these novels is not only historical and racial, but also gendered and relational (Chodorow, 1978; Mitchell, 1974).

The social novel's engagement with race has likewise continued to attract critical attention. In relation to Mark Twain, Railton (1995) argues that the antislavery force of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is complicated by the persistence of minstrel conventions in the representation of Jim (pp. 112–134). Such criticism is important because it demonstrates that literary texts often participate in reformist discourse while simultaneously reproducing elements of the ideological structures they seek to critique.

Taken together, these critical traditions demonstrate that contemporary fiction has moved beyond the conventions of the traditional protest novel toward more complex forms of historical witnessing. Existing scholarship has made substantial contributions to the study of slavery, memory, trauma, and representation; however, less attention has been given to how selected contemporary American novels bring together psychic trauma, cultural memory, and social reform within a single comparative framework. It is this critical intersection that the present study seeks to explore through an interdisciplinary reading of six selected novels.

8. Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology in order to examine how selected contemporary American novels represent slavery as an enduring psychic, cultural, and social wound rather than as a closed historical event. The analysis is based on a comparative reading of six novels: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Ursula K. Le Guin's *the Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987a), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and David Anthony Durham's *Walk Through Darkness* (2002). Although these texts differ in genre, structure, and narrative mode, they are treated as a related corpus because they engage with the continuing afterlives of slavery through memory, trauma, race, gender, and social reform.

The study is structured around three interrelated analytical frameworks. First, it draws on the critical model of the neo-slave narrative in order to situate the selected texts within a contemporary literary tradition that revisits slavery through self-conscious and often experimental forms of narration (Rushdy, 1999). This framework is especially useful for reading works such as *Kindred* and *Beloved*, which reactivate the history of slavery through strategies of temporal disruption, haunting, and retrospective reconstruction. In this regard, Crossley (2003) situates *Kindred* within this tradition and describes Butler's novel as "a distinctive contribution to the genre of neo-slave narrative" (pp. ix–xxvii).

Second, the study employs a socio-historical and materialist perspective in order to place each text within the broader structures of race, class, and institutional power that shape its representation of slavery and its aftermath. This dimension of the analysis does not treat literary texts as isolated imaginative productions; rather, it reads them in relation to the historical conditions that inform questions of domination, kinship, dispossession, and social inequality.



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Third, the study draws on psychoanalytic trauma theory to examine the enduring psychological effects of historical violence. Following trauma theory, the analysis approaches slavery as an experience that resists closure and returns through fragmentation, haunting, repetition, and belated memory (Caruth, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992; LaCapra, 2001). This framework is particularly relevant to novels in which the past re-emerges through non-linear narrative structures, spectral presences, bodily injury, or compulsive acts of remembering.

The study also incorporates insights from feminist psychoanalysis in order to examine the gendered dimensions of trauma, especially in relation to motherhood, family rupture, and emotional vulnerability under oppressive systems. In this respect, the work of Mitchell (1974) and Chodorow (1978) provides a useful theoretical basis for understanding how gendered subjectivity and maternal relations are shaped by social and familial structures. These insights are especially important in the analysis of texts such as *Beloved* and *Kindred*, where maternal grief, reproductive vulnerability, and the destruction of kinship ties form central aspects of the narrative representation of slavery.

Methodologically, the analysis relies on close textual reading and comparative interpretation. It focuses on recurrent thematic and symbolic patterns across the selected novels, including bodily scarring, genealogy, historical haunting, disrupted family structures, maternal loss, and collective memory. These motifs are examined not only as narrative devices, but also as interpretive sites through which the relationship between personal suffering and structural injustice becomes legible.

Finally, the study remains limited to a selected corpus of six novels and to an interpretive approach grounded primarily in literary criticism, trauma theory, and cultural analysis. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive historical or clinical account of slavery's aftereffects; rather, it seeks to show how contemporary fiction participates in the work of historical witnessing, ethical remembrance, and reflection on social reform.

1.8. Data Collection:

The "data" for this qualitative, comparative study consists of a primary literary corpus and a secondary theoretical archive:

1. **Primary Literary Corpus:** The primary data comprises six selected American novels published between 1969 and 2003: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and David Anthony Durham's *Walk Through Darkness* (2002).
2. **Secondary Theoretical Sources:** To analyze these primary texts, data was collected from key works in psychoanalytic trauma theory (such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Felman & Laub), feminist psychoanalysis (Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Chodorow), and critical literature on the neo-slave narrative tradition (specifically Ashraf Rushdy and Robert Crossley).

2.8. Data Analysis:

Through three interdisciplinary interpretive lenses, the qualitative comparative method is utilized to analyze the collected theoretical and literary data.

1. **Analysis of Neo-Slave Narrative and Cultural Studies:** The study examines primary texts, which subvert traditional realism through their use of speculative elements like time travel and



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haunting. The framework traces how the novels challenge established cultural assumptions regarding racial purity and social hierarchies.

2. **Socio-historical Materialism:** The novels are analyzed in terms of the material history associated with class, labor, and institutional power. The lens aims to comprehend how domination systems affected family structures and their impact on modern legal and social
3. **Psychoanalytic and Feminist Trauma Analysis:** The study employs close textual analysis to uncover common symbolic themes of physical scarring, genealogy disruption, maternal loss, and collective memory. Against the backdrop of clinical trauma patterns such as flashbacks, belatedness, and "phantom" intergenerational haunting, these motifs are mapped against feminist critiqued maternal relations in relation to oppressive systems.

9. Theoretical Framework:

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings into dialogue cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory in order to examine how selected American novels represent the legacy of slavery as an enduring historical, psychic, and social condition. Rather than approaching the selected texts through a single interpretive lens, the study adopts a cross-fertilized framework in which literary form, historical context, and psychological experience are read as mutually reinforcing dimensions of meaning.

The first component of this framework is the neo-slave narrative and cultural studies perspective. This perspective provides the study with a literary and cultural basis for analyzing how contemporary fiction revisits slavery through modern narrative forms. It allows the selected novels to be read not simply as reconstructions of the past, but as texts that interrogate how race, identity, and power are socially produced and historically sustained. Through this lens, the study examines the ways in which the novels challenge fixed assumptions about racial purity, social hierarchy, and inherited structures of domination (Rushdy, 1999).

The second component is socio-historical materialist criticism, which situates the selected texts within broader structures of history, class, and institutional power. This framework is important for understanding slavery not only as a moral or psychological tragedy, but also as a material system that shaped social relations, family structures, and cultural hierarchies. By linking literary representation to the historical conditions out of which racial inequality emerged, this perspective helps explain how the aftereffects of slavery continue to resonate within modern legal, social, and cultural formations.

The third component is psychoanalytic trauma theory, particularly as informed by Caruth (1996), LaCapra (2001), and Felman and Laub (1992). This framework enables the study to read literary texts as forms of witnessing through which trauma is expressed in fragmentation, haunting, repetition, silence, and belated memory. Within this perspective, slavery is understood not as a completed historical event, but as a psychic wound whose effects persist across generations. In addition, feminist psychoanalytic insights associated with Mitchell (1974) and Chodorow (1978) help illuminate the distinct violence inflicted upon women, motherhood, and family bonds under oppressive structures.

Taken together, these three theoretical strands provide the study with a coherent analytical basis for examining the relationship between historical violence, narrative form, cultural memory, and social reform. The neo-slave narrative framework clarifies the literary and cultural



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dimensions of representation; socio-historical materialist criticism supplies the structural and historical context; and psychoanalytic trauma theory offers the psychological depth necessary to understand the persistence of suffering in individual and collective consciousness.

10. Opening of the Discussion Section:

The discussion that follows moves from the study's interdisciplinary theoretical framework to a close examination of how the selected novels represent slavery as an enduring psychic, cultural, and social wound rather than a completed historical episode. Through the combined lenses of cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory, the analysis explores recurrent thematic patterns such as bodily scarring, disrupted genealogy, maternal grief, fractured memory, and the persistence of structural inequality. In different yet related ways, the six novels reveal that the legacy of slavery continues to shape both individual consciousness and collective social life. By employing speculative, experimental, and non-linear narrative strategies, these texts do more than reconstruct the past; they expose the continuing aftereffects of historical violence in the present and demonstrate how literature can function as a site of ethical witnessing, cultural remembrance, and reflection on social reform.

11. Cultural Aspects:

1. Defining Culture in the African American Context:

Because enslaved Africans had their languages, religions and kinship structure systematically erased, the reconstruction of African American culture was always an act of creative resistance. Enslaved people created new cultural forms from what they had—spirituals, the ring shout, encoded folktales.

In this study, the novels interact with African American culture at different levels: “*Kindred*” dramatizes the passage of cultural memory between generations. Dana bears within her body the literal scars of slavery — not least the loss of her arm, which lingers in the past while she returns to the present. This amputation highlights the never-ending injury slavery has caused Black bodies and minds; that the mark of slavery “is carried not only in the minds but also on the bodies of all African Americans, especially women”. “*Beloved*” literalizes cultural memory with the ghost haunting 124 Bluestone Road. Sethe’s act of infanticide — slicing her baby’s throat to keep her from being returned to slavery — is the unbearable inheritance she comes to carry. Morrison’s novel seems to indicate that cultural memory is a permanent, irreducible presence in the present presence that the characters are living in today.

2. Race as a Social Construction:

One central insight of recent cultural studies is the belief that race is not biological but a social construction. Dana's interracial kinship with Rufus in “*Kindred*” — she is his descendant, but he is unaware of it — undermines “America’s erroneous conceptions of racial purity.” Edward P. Jones’s “*The Known World*” takes this deconstruction at least to another level, in which it turns to Henry Townsend, a Black slaveholder living in antebellum Virginia. Townsend, a slave who bought his own freedom, and then found slaves of his own, lives in a moral universe that resists easy classification. Jones finds that slavery corrupted everyone it held — Black and white, free and enslaved.

3. Cultural Studies and Popular Culture:



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In addition to the common discussions of mass-produced consumer goods to which American cultural studies is often wedded, Ursula K. Le Guin's "*The Left Hand of Darkness*" pursues these discussions through a thought experiment in cultural difference. Humanoid beings on the planet Gethen are called ambisexual and have no gender. This biological disparity results in a gender-less society and reads more like an abolitionist textbook as a whole: abolitionist literature seeks to eliminate the mental bondage behind gender essentialism.

12. Social Aspect:

1. Class, Status, Internal Discrimination:

The social dimension of abolitionism encompasses much more than slave and free, and also points to a system of hierarchy within the racial relations of African American communities. In the analysis of Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*," African American identities have historically been shaped by—and broken down—internal factors such as wealth, education, lineage, and dark skin. Pecola Breedlove's descent into madness accentuates the inner violence of white beauty. David Bradley's "*The Chaneyville Incident*" also deals with this sort of internal division. The main character's account discovers: the story of thirteen escaped slaves who took their own lives rather than be captured. It is against these tragic background that Bradley's work deals with the division between those black Americans who have made it as middle class people and those who remain behind, how historical memory holds between those with good formal training, for whom things like books and textbooks are not only a fact of life, but also divide the educated elite from the population.

2. The social construction of maternity:

perhaps the most brutal aspect of slavery was how it systematically destroyed family bonds. Because enslaved women had no legal right to children, motherhood was a never-ending act of vulnerability and anticipating grief.

3. Perspective on Enslaved Motherhood:

"*Beloved*" takes the hard way at the logical end of its argument; Sethe's sin of infanticide underscores how slavery could have denied the possibility of maternal love. The ghost-daughter returns to consume Sethe's energy, showing that the trauma of enslaved motherhood is never healed; only witnessed. "*Kindred*" sets Dana in a kind of impossible moral paradox: Dana must revisit time to ensure her ancestor Alice lives long enough through her own white master, Rufus. And so, she begins to see that many African Americans are descended from slaves and enslavers both.

4. Social Justice and Community:

Community is conceptualized as a site for resistance and healing in the primary texts. In "*The Known World*," the free Black community of Manchester County tries to find a defining identity for itself when faced with slavery and refuses the easy heroes that get lost in it. David Anthony Durham's "*Walk Through Darkness*" centers on an escaped slave, William, and a Scottish immigrant, Morrison — an exercise in solidarity across racial and ethnic differences. Morrison's increasing consciousness of his own complicity suggests that social change is just as much an emancipation of the oppressed and moral conversion of the oppressor.

13. Psychological Aspects:

1. Trauma and the African American Psyche:



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The basis of trauma studies through the lenses of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra is that traumatic events are not an experienced event; they return belatedly in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, and compulsive repetition. *'Beloved'* shares this structure with its non-linear narrative, where traumatic events re-emerge in a new world, often without warning. Sethe's fixation on justifying her actions, Baby Suggs' self-imposed withdrawal and Paul D's defensive defense all bear out clinical post-traumatic patterns. The critical part, Morrison says, is that the community, not individual therapy, is the ultimate site for partial healing. Traumatic Historical Event —> Psychic Fracture & Repression —> Belated Repetition/Haunting —> Collective/Community Witnessing & Exorcism.

2. Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma:

Psychoanalytic theorists Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok considered the idea of the "phantom", an undiscovered family secret that haunts the next generation. *"Kindred"* literalizes this transmission via time travel, in which Dana's irrevocable amputation of her arm becomes the material object of a historical wound constantly just "going to stay the same." *"The Chaneyville Incident"* John Washington's academic investigation of his father's suicide turns into an anguish-struck obsession, a sign that while the weight of historical memory weighs heavily on his shoulders, it's the essential base for being who we are.

3. Feminist Psychoanalysis and the state of women:

Feminist psychologists (e.g., Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 1974) like Nancy Chodorow, and Jessica Benjamin, have also looked at how one's gender identity form through the early relationship experiences of their families. Such theories reveal the vulnerabilities of women at various intersections under oppressive systems. Dana's fraught relationship with Rufus in *"Kindred"* is complicated by the role she plays as a modern educational feminist forced to negotiate antebellum patriarchal violence. And in *"Beloved,"* we see that the mother-daughter bond under slavery is necessarily pathological because the system rendered the possibility of maternal protection legally and physically impossible.

14. Study Results:

The study's comparative analysis of the six novels yielded several significant findings on how contemporary literature handles historical trauma and promotes social change:

1. Narrative experimentation as a Critical Approach to Witnessing Evidence:
 - a) The study revealed that the use of non-linear timelines, speculative structures, and magical realism are not just aesthetic but also necessary cognitive strategies to represent psychological trauma that surpasses linear historical narrative.
 - b) The novels, using techniques like time travel (*Kindred*) and haunting (*Beloved*), reintroduced the history of slavery as a living, psychic inheritance in the present day, rather than preserving it as an isolated chapter. This works wonderfully.
2. Deconstruction of Race and Gender as social constructs:
 - a) The novels effectively reveal race and gender as dynamic, socially constructed categories rather than fixed biological elements.
 - b) In *The Known World*, the story's protagonist (Henry Townsend) shows that slavery was a corrupting socioeconomic system that perverted human ethics regardless of race.



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- c) An abolitionist text like *The Left Hand of Darkness* uses the thought experiment of ambisexual, genderless society to attempt to break the mental attachment of gender essentialism. This book is an example of this approach in action.
3. Pathogenesis of Enslaved Motherhood and Kinship:
 - a) This analysis shows that "the most destructive aspect" of slavery was the systematic, legal eradication of family bonds and relationships.
 - b) Enslaved women's inability to have children legally prevented them from becoming mothers, making it a desperate situation and hopelessness.
 - c) Sethe's occurrence of infanticide in *Beloved* illustrates how systematic oppression rendered normal maternal protection physically and legally unattainable, leading to significant and haunting trauma in the mother-daughter relationship.
4. Trauma and intergenerational transmission:
 - a) The findings demonstrate that historical trauma is transmitted through physical and psychic influences throughout history.
 - b) Dana's physical loss of her arm in *Kindred* is a testament to the lasting effects of slavery on the Black body and mind. This scar is permanent.
 - c) *The Chaneyville Incident*, written by John Washington, a scholar who investigated his father's suicide, exposes how unresolved psychic "phantom" of history is passed down through generations.
5. An Up-To-date Reform Project, with a New Vision for Abolitionism:
 - a) The research indicates that these novels effectively reformed "abolitionism" from an influential political movement in the 19th century and transformed it into active morality.
 - b) In these texts, the emphasis on contemporary fiction as a place of active ethical observation and an ongoing moral necessity for progressive social change is placed on linking historical violence to modern structural, legal and social inequalities.

15. Academic Gains:

Taking matters out from within and beyond the academic box, this article contributes to the broad intellectual conversation in multiple important ways:

1. A New Toolkit for Fiction:

It deepens the knowledge of literary style—showing that non-linear plots, magical realism, and speculative worlds don't detract from political history but they also powerfully transmit social commentary.

2. Nuance Over Monoliths:

It deconstructs flat historical narratives. By examining richly human characters such as Edward P. Jones's Black slaveholder Henry Townsend, this study reveals how oppressive structures pervert human ethics and, indeed, our humanity.

3. Interdisciplinary Validation:

It offers a blueprint for how that literary analysis functions alongside psychoanalysis and materialist social criticism to demonstrate that all the emotional truths in art are just as valid as the empirical facts in sociology.

16. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study has shown that slavery in selected contemporary American fiction is represented not as a completed historical episode, but as an enduring psychic, cultural, and



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social wound whose aftereffects continue to shape modern structures of identity, inequality, and ethical consciousness. Through a comparative reading of six novels, the study has demonstrated that the legacy of slavery persists in the body, in memory, in kinship relations, and in the wider social imagination. These texts reveal that historical violence does not remain confined to the past; rather, it survives through fragmented memory, intergenerational trauma, disrupted maternal bonds, and the continuing presence of structural injustice.

By drawing on cultural studies, socio-historical materialist criticism, and psychoanalytic trauma theory, the study has further argued that contemporary fiction provides a particularly effective medium for representing experiences that exceed the limits of conventional historical narration. The formal complexity of the selected novels—including non-linear temporality, speculative narration, and symbolic reconstruction—emerges not as a merely aesthetic feature, but as an essential mode of witnessing historical suffering and rethinking its implications in the present. In this respect, the study suggests that literary form itself participates in the work of remembrance, ethical reflection, and critical engagement with inherited systems of power.

The study also concludes that abolitionism may be read, in these novels, as a continuing project rather than a closed political achievement. The selected texts expand the meaning of reform by connecting the historical experience of slavery to broader concerns such as racialized inequality, gendered vulnerability, oppressive kinship structures, and the silencing of trauma. In doing so, they position literature as a space in which the past is neither simply recalled nor symbolically resolved, but critically re-examined in relation to ongoing social and moral questions.

Ultimately, the contribution of this study lies in bringing these texts into a unified interdisciplinary conversation that clarifies the relationship between historical memory, psychic injury, and social reform. Without claiming to offer a total account of the neo-slave narrative tradition, the study affirms the continuing value of literary analysis in understanding how cultural narratives preserve trauma, challenge inherited myths, and imagine possibilities of structural transformation. In this way, the article argues for the importance of contemporary American fiction not only as a record of suffering, but also as an active site of ethical witnessing and critical thought.

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