

**الحرية في السياسة الأمريكية: مفهوم ما بين بلاغة التضمين وحقيقة
الإقصاء تجاه الأمريكيين أصحاب البشرة السوداء (الزنوج) ذوي الأصول
الأفريقية (دراسة ذات علاقة بالفكرة الرئيسية للرواية (الممرات السرية)
للروائي كولسن وايتهد)**

***The Freedom in American Policy: A concept Between the
Rhetoric of Inclusion and The Reality of Exclusion Towards Afro-
American Blacks (A Thematic Study in The Underground
Railroads by Colson Whitehead)***

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الملخص:

تتبع الدراسة، ومن خلال الرواية (الممرات السرية) للكاتب الأمريكي (وايتهيد)، مامدى تتطابق الشعار مع التطبيق تجاه مفهوم الحرية الذي يدور ضمن فلك السياسة الأمريكية. تكشف الدراسة الى ان هذه الرواية تعد بمثابة مشروع تحرري لانااس لطالما عانوا من قيود فرضتها السياسة الأمريكية المضللة على مستوى الممارسة والشعار. انه شعار يمنح الزوج الحرية من ازمة مزمنة تدعى عقدة العبودية والتي لازمت ذاكرة اللاوعي. فاصبحت بطله الرواية (كورا) هي التي تحمل شعلة الحرية بدلا من نصب الحرية الشهير في امريكا. (كورا) صوت الحرية المدوي الذي يدعوا مجتمع الزوج الى التحرر من عقدهم أولاً، ثم التحرر من الثقافة العنصرية الأمريكية في بلد يرفع شعار الحرية جزافا. تستنتج الدراسة الى ان الحرية ليست هبة وانماهي حق مسلوب يسترجع بالقوة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حرية، عبودية، رأسمالية، سياسة، شعار

Abstract

Throughout Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, the study traces how far is the slogan can match the implementation towards the concept of freedom in American policy. It explores that Whitehead's work can be considered as a project of liberation for such people who are suffering a lot from constraints of mis-leadable policy in terms of practice and slogan as well. This project grants the blacks the freedom from chronic crisis called slavery-complex which has been living in their unconsciousness. Cora, the heroine, replaces the Freedom Status of Bartholdi, to hold the torch instead. She is the black's voice, who is calling her own people first to liberate themselves, from their unconsciousness, then from the racist culture in American geography. The study concludes that the freedom is never granted freely, it is achieved forcefully.

Keywords: Freedom, slavery, capitalism, policy, slogan

Methodological introduction

The *Underground Railroads* is a thunderous voice of those who are anxious to get the true freedom. It is the voice that represents not only Cora's generation, but it is also for successive generations. Its narratives begin with the tale of Cora's grandmother Ajarry who had suffered a lot. Ajarry was abducted in Africa, sold more than one time, then she found herself a slave in America. She left the world, like her generation, with no sense of being a human who has already acquired freedom. Whitehead's Cora is the living voice which may achieve what the ancestors have failed to do. Whitehead's novel is Cora's adventures that illuminate the path of real freedom for coming generations. It is for the freedom that inspires American blacks in search for human rights: freedom, justice, equality, and identity. Cora's journey actually enables the readers to get better understanding of the American past of supposedly greater freedom. In fact it conveys the humiliation, fear, daily brutality, shocking power, and white's control. Since

The American Revolution (1715–1783), the slogan of freedom has been raising to declare that all American citizens, with no exception, are free. Yet, The *Underground Railroads* tells us the opposite. However the study tries to examine how credible is the American policy towards the concept of freedom. It tries to prove that there is a gap between the slogan and its implementation towards the freedom. The study is in attempt to answer the hypothetical question *how far is the slogan of freedom is credible in American policy?* It targets Whitehead's work as the suitable area where the accurate and equivalent answer can be found, then is to be the aim of the study. Since the study tries to discuss the text from political view, It adopts the Marxist approach to have deep analysis. Marxism, as a literary method, has a central idea about each text to be analyzed. It deals with so called *sub-text*.

While discussing the freedom, the paper adopts two important concepts to be attached with: slavery and capitalism. It has been viewed that freedom can not be discussed as separate from these two concepts. Slavery has been remaining a key issue in the mind of American intellectuals, particularly American blacks. It always stirs their imagination as well as their memory to write about. Whitehead is one of the among writers who links this issue with American slaves. His *The Underground Railroads* is an enslaved people's dream of getting freedom. If their dream can not be achieved consciously, it can be within those people's unconsciousness.

Whitehead assumes that capitalism and slavery has been met by one goal—the lack of freedom. American capitalists use enslaved (people deprived of freedom) to perpetuate capitalism as a very fruitful system. The people of *The Underground Railroads* are mostly paid slaves who working hard for a very low-wages. He tries to send readers a message that capitalism and anti-freedom are two sides for one coin. His work depicts how American blacks have been exploited. Freedom is the first thing that has been stolen from them. They have actually been the commodity sold wherever and whenever the capitalists need.

Finally, the paper concludes that the contradictory is a syndromic approach in the American policy where freedom has been used to hide the brutal reality of America. Whitehead refutes the idea of freedom in American states. He claims that the freedom is the right that should be practiced by American blacks, yet it can not be got unless they fight.

The roadmap of freedom

Freedom has been a fundamental value of human being as it is closely linked to the self and existence. Freedom, according to Webster dictionary, is opposite to tyranny and hegemony. So American blacks, in particular, have found that the human being without freedom means death because

freedom and life have being synonymous since birth, to be more precisely it is a divine gift granted to every man without any discrimination based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. The *Underground Railroads* is a thunderous voice of those who are anxious to get the true freedom. It is the voice that represents not only Cora's generation, but it is also for successive generations. Its narratives begin with the tale of Cora's grandmother Ajarry who had suffered a lot. Ajarry was abducted in Africa, sold more than one time, then she found herself a slave in America. She left the world, like her generation, with no sense of being a human who has already acquired freedom. Whitehead's Cora is the living voice which may achieve what the ancestors have failed to do. Whitehead's novel is Cora's adventures that illuminate the path of real freedom for coming generations. It is for the freedom that inspires American blacks in search for human rights: freedom, justice, equality, and identity. Cora's journey actually enables the readers to get better understanding of the American past of supposedly greater freedom. In fact it conveys the humiliation, fear, daily brutality, shocking power, and white's control.

The *Underground Railroads* is considered as a roadmap to free blacks from their masters—the whites. Cora and her friend Caesar, who told her about the Underground Railroads, decide to start a risky journey to escape towards the north. Their journey starts from Georgia where Cora is working on a cotton plantation. With no choice given, Cora is forced to murder a white who wants to capture her. Their first stop is in South Carolina where everybody wrongly believe that it is as heaven as whole America. Soon they discover the real truth of this city. It is actually worse than they think. Ridgeway, the slave catcher is haunting them. Their determination makes them succeed to flee again, passing state by state to get the true freedom. Whitehead in *The Underground of Railroads* assumes that his own people don't live as free as the whites. Only "In death the negro became a human being. Only then was he the white man's equal" (p.116). It makes no sense

to deprive anyone of this gift (freedom) under any pretext or justification. Therefore, this leads him to have doubts about how reliable is American banner of freedom.

Since the inception of what is known as the United States of America, politicians had raised a bright slogan of freedom to the extent that the Statue of Liberty has become one of America's most prominent titles for freedom. Unfortunately, the Negroes have found the slogan of freedom nothing but political propaganda to promote and polish the American face. Yet in order to recognize " what this nation [USA] is, you have to look at it from the outside, " and you'll find the true face of America. It was a joke " (Whitehead: 215). To the Negroes, freedom, like the Statue of Liberty, is always used as a trap to lure immigrants through baseless allegations to get what is so called American dream—the best life in the United States. Commonly, the Status, to David Glassberg, (2003) for example " stirs the desire for freedom in people all over the world." However, so many scholars, particularly in art like Albert Boime (1998) and Maurice Agulhon (1981) for instance, reveal the contradiction between the substance and shape of the Statue. They assume that " the staid visage of the Statue of Liberty " has no relation with the image of freedom even in French revolutionary history (Agulhon, 1981). Similarly, Whitehead depicts this facade with a very adorable image. Freedom to him is a " shifted" scene that depends on the position of the viewer. The freedom is like " a forest [which] is dense with trees up close but from outside". Yet it is an " empty meadow", then you can discover the " true limits" of the freedom when you are inside it (p.149). It seems that Whitehead's bad view towards American freedom is not a slander. African-American journalism had supported his claim. Harry Clay Smith (1886), who owned and edited a weekly newspaper, wrote an editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette*, showing a harsh critique towards the torch of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi (the sculpture of the Statue of Liberty). He suggests that:

" the torch of the Bartholdi statue should not be lighted until this country becomes a free one in reality. 'Liberty enlightening the world,' indeed! The expression makes us sick. This government is a howling farce. It cannot or rather does not protect its citizens within its own borders. Shove the Bartholdi statue, torch and all, into the ocean until the 'liberty' of this country is such as to make it possible for an industrious and inoffensive colored man in the South to earn a respectable living for himself and family." (*Cleveland Gazette*, 1886)

Slavery: The stolen freedom

Freedom, according to Merriam Webster dictionary, is the state of "[liberation](#) from slavery or restraint or from the power of another : [independence](#)". (Webster, 2022). However, Whitehead in his *The Underground Railroads* addresses the freedom within a political framework. His work in fact examines the reliability of American political discourse towards a thorny issue like freedom. He questions American regime that how freedom can be achieved in such a country where slavery, capitalism, and racism are dominated. The slogan of freedom has been raised everywhere in the United States, yet American Politicians have been caught in contradiction, then lost their credibility towards this slogan. However, freedom is politically discussed with relation to liberty and autonomy. Though the freedom and liberty are usually used interchangeably, Whitehead, who may follow Wendy H. K. Chun, distinguishes between these two concepts. Freedom, Whitehead assumes, means having the self-ability to achieve what you desire to do. Liberty is to be free from (repressive) constraints to do whatever you want. Therefore, Chun institutionalizes the liberty while making the freedom is a private action. In

other words he links the liberty to party institutes or state organizations. Furthermore, Cbun claims that these two concepts can not sometimes be obtained together. He says:

" To have liberty is to be liberated from something; to be free is to be self-determining, autonomous. Freedom can or cannot exist within a state of liberty: one can be liberated yet “unfree,” or “free” yet enslaved." (Cbun, 2016, p. 12)

Within the American sensibility, it is hard to ignore slavery while talking about freedom. So we can find the slavery has always been present in mind of thinkers and all stakeholder as well, especially in terms of policy, sociology, economy, and literature. Whitehead claims that Freedom is inextricably linked to the slavery, since the later mirrors a magnificent image of a free person. As a result the slavery, to him, has been occupying the centrality in the theory of freedom. Within this context, David J. Watkins (2016), in his *Slavery and Freedom in Theory and Practice* demonstrates the striking fact of the stark contrast between theory and practice particularly with regard to the concept of freedom in American policy. So Whitehead points out the paradox in American policy concerning the true meaning of freedom. since eighteen century, the birth of independence. United states has been placing freedom among human rights, yet it has kept silent about the practice of enslavement. So the most people of Whitehead's novel find no way to achieve their freedom except getting the railroad. Cora and Caesar represent thousands of blacks who are enslaved to work in such a plantation. However, they decide to use the railroad to find freedom. It is not a direct journey, Whitehead lets his people stop in some states to tell his readers that racism and maltreatment can not be confined to a particular place. Cora's journey begins from Georgia to the Carolinas, Tennessee and

Indiana. In each state, Cora and her people have been up against difficulties and risks to gain freedom.

Not surprisingly to find Whitehead's setting of his novel in 1850. It is the year of [Fugitive Slave Act](#) by which the Southern could achieve a new federal law to apprehend fugitive slaves who escaped to the North. Though The U.S. government enforcement, The Northern resisted this law by showing their sympathy and keeping rescuing the captured fugitive slaves (David C.W.A, 1924). The North, to a certain context, experienced a gradual process of emancipation that, some 20 years after the revolution, had already led to the demise of slavery. So North Carolina, to Whitehead, is like a castle where the slavery is banned, then it is possible for the blacks to get protection. So we can find the U,S,A is divided into halves the South and North. While the South supports the Fugitive Slave Act, the North demonstrates disapproval. This means the contrast towards the freedom is not only on the level of policy but it also appears geographically. Though the majority of American people believe in enslavement, few whites are still in the view that the blacks deserve freedom.

The Underground Railroad guides us to the real source of freedom which lies with the enslavers. They actually have got such a power hold over blacks, especially black woman. Cora, the protagonist, is portrayed as an enslaved woman who tries to free herself from pain and rape. Furthermore she attempts even to free her illegitimate child (if being raped) from being sold into enslavement. Whitehead, from a feminist view, is probably one of the most active writer who discusses the issue of American black woman who often suffers from abuse, harassment, and rape. She, as black man, is looking forward freedom. She always lives in horror and under threat even though she succeeds to keep herself in safe from enslavers.

Whitehead, in fact, addresses the American policy to say that the freedom is only a counterfeit in American discourse. The people of his novel

finds nothing related to what is so called freedom in their country. He addresses probably the founder of "created equal". Thomas Jefferson, the third president, who coined this statement in his declaration of American independence. He is the politician who often had a rhetoric of liberty for American citizens, particularly for blacks. The Declaration of Independence, to Whitehead, "is like a map. You trust that it's right but you only know by going out and testing it yourself." The map that should safely guide any American citizen to the right way, yet the blacks are lost wherever they go. Cora, the protagonist, has a long and hard journey towards emancipation. However, "She was a stray after all. A stray not only in its plantation meaning— orphaned, with no one to look after her—but in every other sphere as well. (Whitehead, 2016, pp. 121–197) He may refers to the iconic statement of freedom, equality, and happiness which is indicated in the Declaration:

" We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."
(The Declaration of Independence, 1776)

It can not be thought from an aristocratic person to spread concept of quality in such a society he lives in. Hence, the freedom should be given to whom it concerns. Merriam (2022) claims that Jefferson doesn't believe in "absolute quality". He was in the view that the society must be structured in different classes, "gentlemen" and "simplemen", in other words there should be a master and a slave. (Merriam.C.E, 2022, pp. 30–31). However, Jefferson, by no means, represents the deceptive facade of American policy which seeks to promote hypocritically the concept of freedom and spread an anti-slavery culture in the second half of the

eighteen century. Yet, throughout his letters, Jefferson shows his great interest in enslavement. To John Lynch in 1811, he wrote to tell him that the United States could "undertake to make an establishment on the coast of Africa." Moreover he derogates the African blacks (slaves) by assuming that they can not be considered as an autonomous citizen as free as the whites. Jefferson advises Edward Coles not sell his slaves because if they are free, they will be like "pests in society". Slaves, to Jefferson, are "incapable as children of taking care of themselves". Writing notes to Virginia in 1782, Jefferson adds that the blacks were often feeling inferior to the whites "since the former were ignorant lacked the literary ability." (Jefferson, 1918, pp. 57-64). Finkelman (2012) actually reveals the ugly face of Jefferson. In his article *The Monster of Monticello*, he disapproves what both the journalist Jon Meacham and the independent scholar [Henry Wiencek](#) assume about Jefferson's bright reality. Those writers try to portrait Jefferson as "a fallen angel" who is sent to lift the slaves by gifting them the freedom. However, Finkelman describes Jefferson as "creepy, brutal hypocrite." In fact the paradox of American policy towards blacks can be vividly demonstrated by the Jefferson's paradox. Finkelman argues that many scholars often use Jefferson's statement that all American citizens, blacks as well as whites, acquire freedom since they have been "created equal" as a crutch to write off Jefferson's bad views about the blacks. Jefferson, writes Finkelman, owned "some 175 slaves" while writing the Declaration of Independence. The true business of Jefferson is slave trader. Within only ten years, he sold 85 slaves to be in a life of luxury. (Finkelman, 2012).

Throughout *Cora*, Whitehead provides us with very vivid testimonies that refute the legend of freedom in American sensibility. Whitehead captures the vigorously contrast between slavery and what so called freedom. Simply, Whitehead's novel is a journey of freedom. It is about a slave, named Cora, who leaves the slave south to reach the free north.

While moving, Cora finds that the slavery is the same, yet with different shapes. Therefore, she has no choice except running forward. Her journey has a silent history and unspeakable tails of racial tyranny in the United States. The novelist lets the reader to find that Cora's dream of liberty is not personal. So many Blacks, men and women, share their dreams with Cora. They are all waiting at the station to achieve their freedom. They, of course, have so much to tell the next generation about how much they have been suffering to get the true freedom.

Though general ideological principles of U.S. policy seek to promote the concept of freedom and spread an anti-slavery culture which was found in the second half of the eighth century, there is no doubt that the battle for official emancipation was a long and difficult battle, especially in some areas. *The Underground Railroads* brings us back to the time of The American Revolution (1715–1783). The novel demonstrates how difficult it was to remove a practice legislated by states and churches for centuries that ended with the British recognition to declare the independence of the United States of America. The Whitehead's discourse is similar to what had been used by the populations of The Thirteen Colonies. They were British colonies found in the North of America to fight the American Revolutionary War. Actually they were Whitehead's ancestors who were subject to a very oppressive system of slavery. It was an unequal freedom characterized by different forms of distinction (former slaves were deprived of civil rights, and therefore they were doing hard work for a small wage). The situation was very different in the Hanubi states where old and modern legislation on slavery followed. Under the same system of government there are two opposing judicial worlds: one is legally legalized, and the other is slavery in which is already prohibited or is on the way to prohibition. By stopping the movement of heroes of slavery in the name of federal unity, the revolution pushed the northern states toward emancipation, and in this way ended up increasing the prestige between the two sides of the state: the

independence movement was accompanied by the emancipation of slaves only in the north (as would happen in the nineteenth century in Latin America), while in the south the two processes remained separate. (Rodriquez, 2007)

Capitalism: Anti-freedom system

Since " more slaves led to more cotton, which led to more money to buy more land to farm more cotton."(U.R: P- 135), Whitehead touches on a very critical issue, it is the oppositional relationship between the freedom and capitalism. Whitehead argues that since its emergence, capitalism has been relying on the exploitation of the weaker links of any society. Therefore, it has been closely linked to slavery, racism and discrimination. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the slaves were subjected to the most heinous exploitation by the bourgeoisie that owned the means of production. The aim was to keep the cost of production low, thus ensuring a greater profit margin. Whitehead may refute Milton Friedman's philosophy about capitalism. Friedman often links the capitalism with freedom. He assumes that the capitalism is based on the individual's freedom (Fiedman, 2002). Within this context, the Italian –American writer and professor [Silvia Federici](#) in (2004) touches on the history of the subjugation of women, the exploitation of colonies and the enslavement of blacks and indigenous peoples as means of consolidating and strengthening the capitalist system. "With the Industrial Revolution, the capitalist system became in need of more workers, so it started employing women and children as well, because they are cheaper than men, and if the worker previously sold his time and his own workforce, he was selling his wife and children as well. The capitalist system has had brutal and degrading effects on women. The feminist Silvia, who uncovers the true face of capitalism, supports Whitehead's Cora who "knew people being sold as property"(U.R: P. 81). So Cora, her mother, and all black women exist in the capital system. To assert this view, Silvia Federici (2004) claims that the freedom (of slaves

) never meets the capital system. To her the slaves are definitely used as and prolific services and cheap paid employment that makes a productive force sustainable in capitalism. she says :

For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations—the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury—by denigrating the “nature” of those exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization.” (Federici: 2004, p.17)

Cora's people find nothing related to the " equal, liberty, and happiness" in her life. Being American citizens, they must be equal with the whites, yet they are treated like a commodity sold whenever and wherever is possible. They lack the real sense of being human since they find that " In America the quirk was that people were things.... If you were a thing—a cart or a horse or a slave—your value determined your possibilities”(U.R. P:10). To live in such a capitalist society or even a state, definitely the freedom never be granted. Though the American constitution, or even Declaration of independence has legalized that all American citizens acquire the freedom equally with no discrimination, American blacks feel that all these principles have been remaining a dead letter and not been followed up.

It can be found a great convergence between what Whitehead's view and some historians' towards the relationship between people deprived their freedom (slaves) and capitalism. Whitehead says " When black blood was money, the savvy businessman knew to open the vein." (U.R: p.25). So to the capitalists, the slave is just a tool to be exploited. some historians, like Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, often explain metaphorically the biological relationship between slavery and capitalism. They are actually in the view that “American slavery is necessarily imprinted on the DNA of American

capitalism,”. Therefore, the slavery is the real source of American wealth. Cotton and other products were grown in American land, then picked by people who were enslaved; those people were able, by no means, to boost the U.S.A. economy. However, American paradox is derived from these oppositional binaries: (barbarism/modernity), (cruelty/ lawfulness), (poverty/prosperity), and (totalitarianism/democracy) (Desmond.2019).

Conclusion:

Whitehead's *Underground Railroads* puts the American Policy towards freedom to the test. It shows undoubtedly that there is an American paradox, or the birth of a republic that places freedom and equality among human rights, but remains silent about the presence of slaves within its borders: this was a problem that emancipatory history removed for so long that it resorted to the fragility of the state to justify the choices of its founders. It shows how difficult to remove a practice legislated by states, politicians, for centuries that may still exist today in such parts of America. It actually agitates the American blacks to discard this faked slogan and then obtain the freedom even by force. Whitehead is as if to call his people to follow what Martin Luther King says ***"Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed"***

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