SOCIAL CLASS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM: REPRESENTATION IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *NATIVE SON* AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHE'S *AMERICANAH*

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AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE, NIGERIA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE

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CERTIFICATION

This is to clarify that this study was carried out by Jane Eseosa OSARUMWENSE (Miss) in the Department of English and literature, University of Benin, under my supervision.

_____ _____

Prof. Amen Uhunwangho **Date**
Project Supervisor

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to everyone who have inspired and supported me throughout my academic journey. Your support and beliefs in my abilities have been invaluable, and this work stands as a testament to the collective efforts of everyone who has played a role in my growth. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

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In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has played a role in my academic journey. Though the journey was not easy, we scaled through, and I am truly thankful for your support and encouragement. This project is a reflection of our collective efforts, and I dedicate it to all of you

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of social class and the American Dream in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The research analyzes how both authors critique the accessibility of the American Dream for marginalized communities across different historical periods. Through comparative literary analysis, this study explores how Wright's portrayal of Bigger Thomas in Depression-era Chicago and Adichie's depiction of Ifemelu's contemporary immigrant experience reveal persistent class-based barriers to social mobility in American society.Despite being written over seventy years apart, both novels demonstrate a striking continuity in how economic inequality shapes individual destinies in America. Wright's unflinching examination of systemic racism and poverty in 1930s Chicago finds unexpected resonance in Adichie's nuanced portrayal of a Nigerian immigrant navigating contemporary American class structures. While Ifemelu's middle-class background and education afford her opportunities that remain tragically out of reach for Bigger Thomas, both characters encounter institutional barriers that challenge the fundamental promise of American meritocracy.The study reveals how each author employs different narrative strategies to expose these inequalities. Wright's naturalistic approach places Bigger within an almost deterministic cycle of poverty and violence, while Adichie's more satirical lens dissects the subtle ways class distinctions persist even within seemingly progressive spaces. Both works ultimately question whether the American Dream functions as a genuine pathway to advancement or merely as a compelling mythology that obscures deeper structural inequities.Through close textual analysis and historical contextualization, this research contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about literature's role in documenting and critiquing social stratification. The findings suggest that while the specific manifestations of class barriers have evolved significantly between the 1940s and 2010s, the fundamental tension between American ideals of equality and the reality of economic stratification remains largely unchanged. This comparative approach illuminates how literary representations of class can both reflect and shape our understanding of social mobility across different eras of American history.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This study examines how social class functions as a barrier to achieving the American Dream in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The American Dream promises that hard work and determination enable anyone to achieve upward mobility, yet this study investigates how both authors reveal this promise as largely inaccessible to marginalized communities. The research demonstrates the remarkable consistency of class-based barriers across different historical periods, providing evidence for structural rather than individual explanations of limited social mobility. These findings engage with contemporary debates about inequality while showing how literature functions as both artistic expression and social critique.

By examining how both authors translate social criticism into compelling narrative form, this study reveals literature's unique capacity to illuminate the psychological and emotional dimensions of social inequality that quantitative studies often miss.

1.2 Scope of study

This study focuses specifically on the representation of social class barriers and the American Dream within Richard Wright's *Native Son*(1940) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*(2013). The analysis is delimited to examining how these two novels critique the accessibility of American social mobility for marginalized communities across different historical periods.The study spans approximately seventy

years of American social history, comparing Wright's Depression-era context (1930s-1940s) with Adichie's contemporary setting (early 2000s-2010s). This timeframe allows examination of both continuity and change in how class barriers operate to limit access to the American Dream.

The research concentrates on three interconnected themes: social stratification and economic mobility, the intersection of race and class, and the deconstruction of American Dream mythology. The study examines how both authors reveal the gap between democratic ideals and lived realities for their protagonists.

Primary analysis focuses on the protagonists Bigger Thomas (*Native Son*) and Ifemelu (*Americanah*) as representative figures of their respective historical moments. Geographically, the study centers on urban American settings, particularly Chicago in Wright's novel and various American cities in Adichie's work, where class dynamics are most clearly manifested.

The study employs comparative literary analysis through close reading of the primary texts, supported by relevant secondary scholarship. While historical and sociological contexts are incorporated where necessary for textual understanding, the focus remains on literary representation rather than comprehensive historical or sociological analysis.

1.3 Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach based on comparative literary analysis to examine the representation of social class and the American Dream in *Native Son* and *Americanah*. The methodology combines close textual analysis with comparative

framework to identify patterns, contrasts, and thematic developments across the selected texts .The study incorporates relevant scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on both authors, American Dream literature, and social class analysis to provide theoretical framework and contextual support.The study concentrates on class-related themes, which may not capture all significant aspects of the novels.This study employs a qualitative research approach based on comparative literary analysis to examine the representation of social class and the American Dream in *Native Son* and *Americanah*. The methodology combines close textual analysis with comparative framework to identify patterns, contrasts, and thematic developments across the selected texts.

The study uses systematic close reading techniques to examine specific passages, character development, narrative structures, and literary devices in both novels. This involves detailed analysis of dialogue, symbolism, imagery, and authorial commentary that relates to themes of social class and the American Dream.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This study adopts Marxist literary theory as its guiding framework for analyzing the representations of social class and the American Dream in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Marxist criticism, derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, emphasizes the relationship between literature, class structures, and material conditions of society. At its core, Marxism argues that human history is driven by the struggle between social classes the ruling class that controls the means of production and the working class that sells its labor. Literature,

therefore, is never neutral; it reflects, reinforces, or challenges the ideological structures of the society in which it is produced (Eagleton 3).

One of the central tenets of Marxist theory is the idea of base and superstructure. The "base" refers to the economic system how wealth, resources, and power are distributed while the "superstructure" includes culture, ideology, and institutions such as law, education, and even literature. According to Marx, the superstructure is shaped by the base; in other words, cultural products like novels often reflect the economic realities and class struggles of their time. Wright's *Native Son* exemplifies this, as Bigger Thomas's fate is shaped by the harsh economic and racial structures of 1930s America. Similarly, Adichie's *Americanah* reveals how race, immigration, and global capitalism structure the lives of Nigerian immigrants pursuing the American Dream.

Another key concept in Marxist thought is ideology the set of ideas that makes unequal social relations appear natural or inevitable. The American Dream itself can be seen as an ideological construct. It promotes the belief that hard work and determination alone guarantee success, while masking the systemic inequalities that prevent marginalized groups from achieving upward mobility. As Marxist critic Terry Eagleton notes, ideology often works "to legitimate the power of the ruling class" by persuading individuals that the social order is just (Eagleton 5). Thus, examining the American Dream through a Marxist lens allows us to see how it functions both as a source of hope and as a mechanism that perpetuates class division.

Furthermore, Marxist criticism pays close attention to class conflict. In *Native Son,* Bigger's violent rebellion against his conditions can be read as a distorted form of class struggle, born out of desperation and systemic oppression. In *Americanah*, the struggles of Ifemelu and Obinze reflect the challenges of negotiating social mobility within a transnational context, where class, race, and immigration intersect. Both texts reveal the contradictions of a society that promises equal opportunity yet consistently restricts it along class and racial lines.

By applying Marxist theory, this project aims to uncover how Wright and Adichie critique the structures of capitalism and social hierarchy, and how their novels reveal the limitations of the American Dream for marginalized communities. In this way, Marxism provides a powerful lens for analyzing the intersection of social class and ideology in literature.

Now, the American Dream says anyone can become rich if they work hard. But Marxists say this is not fully true. Why? Because society has unfair systems that stop some people especially the poor, immigrants, and Black people from climbing up. This "dream" is an ideology a belief that looks fair, but actually hides the unfair system underneath.

In Richard Wright's *Native Son,* we see how Bigger Thomas cannot reach the American Dream because of racism and poverty. In Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu and Obinze try to live the Dream in America, but they find it is very hard because of racism, immigration struggles, and class issues.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

Scholars generally agree that both Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) expose the American Dream as unevenly accessible, filtered through race, class, and immigration status. While Wright writes from within Jim Crow–era Chicago, Adichie writes across Lagos, the United States, and the UK, placing migration and diaspora at the center. Read together, the novels show how class desire ("to move up") is tightly bound to racialized structures that shape what "moving up" even looks like.

A strong strand of scholarship reads Native Son as a direct critique of the American Dream's promise of meritocratic mobility for Black Americans. Uvares argues that the novel dismantles this Dream by tracing how institutional racism and economic segregation foreclose advancement for Bigger Thomas before he even acts, making "success" a structural impossibility rather than a matter of individual effort (Uvares 12).

Contemporary critics reiterate that the novel functions as a "powerful indictment of systemic racism," emphasizing the social machinery that produces the very outcomes used to blame Bigger (Ademilokun 44). At the level of literary history, Wright's long engagement with Marxist thought sharpened his interest in class antagonism and the economic roots of racial domination. Critics such as Rowley demonstrate that *Native Son* invites Marxist readings that locate Bigger's tragedy in the collision of surplus labor, racial capitalism, and commodity desire (Rowley 65).

Other scholars add rhetorical and psychological angles: how Wright frames the Black urban experience for largely white readerships, and how fear, shame, and overdetermination structure Bigger's choices. Butler, for instance, suggests that Wright's rhetorical strategies not only tell a story of oppression but also persuade readers to confront racial injustice as systemic rather than individual (Butler 5).

Several studies also foreground how the novel's realism tracks migration as labor and paperwork. Emenyonu notes that *Americanah* "depicts migration as a process structured by visa struggles, job precarities, and humiliation alongside the promises of success" (Emenyonu 59). In this reading, the Dream is outsourced to the global periphery young Nigerians chase it in the metropole, only to find that class mobility is gated by racial legibility and legal status.

Other critics examine *Americanah* through the body and space hair politics, beauty economies, and intimate geographies. For example, Mbue highlights how Ifemelu's salon experiences and blog posts double as social commentary, showing how appearance becomes a class credential and how race is "learned" in America as a daily discipline (Mbue 134).

Across this field, researchers emphasize identity "in flux": the pressure to assimilate, the pull to return, and the unevenness of belonging. Nwakanma observes that *Americanah* uses digital platforms like Ifemelu's blog to articulate how migrants negotiate class aspiration and critique U.S. racial common sense (Nwakanma 207).

Methodologically, scholars also converge in reading voice and form as part of the critique. Wright's naturalist pressure-cooker and Adichie's blog-infused realism both expose how social systems speak through characters' choices. Rhetorical studies of Wright (Butler) and feminist/digital-diaspora studies of Adichie (Nwakanma) together demonstrate that narrative technique is not decoration; it is evidence of how power works in everyday life.

Even with rich coverage, three gaps keep appearing. First, while Marxist lenses are common for *Native Son*, fewer studies explicitly put *Americanah* into conversation with Marxist or racial-capitalism frameworks. Second, comparative work that pairs 1930s Chicago with post-2000 U.S./UK policy regimes could better track how "opportunity structures" change yet continue to rank racialized subjects. Third, there is space for closer analysis of aesthetics as class work how narrative form (e.g., Ifemelu's blog or Wright's courtroom rhetoric) does the labor of demystifying the Dream. Addressing these would deepen our understanding of the Dream as an evolving but consistent system of inclusion and exclusion.

1.6 Thesis Statement

While Richard Wright's *Native Son* presents the American Dream as fundamentally incompatible with racialized poverty through Bigger Thomas's tragic entrapment within deterministic class structures, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* reveals how contemporary class mobility remains constrained by racial hierarchies despite new pathways through education, technology, and transnational identity, demonstrating that

the American Dream's promise of economic advancement continues to be mediated by race across different historical periods and immigrant experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

2.1 Historical Context and Evolution of the American Dream

The idea of the American Dream occupies a central place in the social and cultural history of the United States. Although its roots can be traced to the nation's founding ideals of liberty and equality, the phrase itself was first popularized by James Truslow Adams in his seminal text The Epic of America (1931). Adams defined the Dream as "a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement". Importantly, Adams stressed that the Dream was not primarily about wealth, but about the chance for individuals to pursue a meaningful life, free from class or social restrictions.

From its inception, however, the American Dream has been subject to shifting interpretations. In the nineteenth century, the Dream was bound up with the frontier ethos and westward expansion. Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis argued that the availability of land and the push westward fostered American ideals of independence, democracy, and individual self-reliance. For many, the Dream was embodied in the promise of land ownership and self-sufficiency. Yet this version of the Dream was also racially and socially exclusive, as Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and other marginalized groups were systematically denied access to its benefits.

The early twentieth century brought another redefinition. The industrial boom of the 1920s tied the Dream closely to consumer prosperity and material success. Cars,

suburban homes, and a rising middle class became its visible markers. However, the economic collapse of 1929 and the Great Depression revealed the fragility of such a materialist vision. According to historian Jim Cullen, the Dream's meaning has "always reflected the nation's changing economic circumstances" and often oscillated between spiritual fulfillment and material accumulation.

During the New Deal era, the American Dream became associated with collective recovery and government intervention to ensure economic security. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's programs reframed the Dream around stability and social welfare, rather than unchecked individualism. This broader vision extended into the post-World War II years, when economic expansion, suburbanization, and the rise of the nuclear family re-centered the Dream on homeownership, steady employment, and middle-class respectability.

The civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s once again expanded the conversation. African Americans, women, and other marginalized groups highlighted the contradictions in a Dream that promised equality yet systematically excluded them. Writers such as Martin Luther King Jr. re-imagined the Dream as a call for racial justice and true democratic inclusion. As literary critic Walter R. Fisher argues, the Dream had to be understood as a contested "rhetorical vision" that was continually redefined through struggle.

By the late twentieth century, however, neoliberal policies and globalization shifted the Dream once more toward individual achievement and personal competition. Success was increasingly measured by personal wealth and status rather than collective well-being. In

the twenty-first century, the 2008 financial crisis and the widening gap between rich and poor have intensified skepticism about the Dream. Studies on social mobility indicate that the United States now lags behind many European countries in upward mobility, suggesting that the Dream of "rags to riches" is more myth than reality.

This historical evolution reveals a tension at the core of the American Dream. On one hand, it is a narrative of hope, opportunity, and self-determination. On the other, it is shadowed by exclusion, inequality, and systemic barriers. This tension is crucial for understanding its literary representations. In Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the Dream is shown as unattainable for African Americans like Bigger Thomas, whose social class and race trap him in a cycle of poverty and criminality. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, the Dream is re-imagined through the lens of Nigerian immigrants, where the promise of success in America collides with the reality of racism, economic struggle, and cultural alienation. As literary scholar Cheryl A. Harris has noted, the Dream often rests on "whiteness as property," a social structure that privileges certain groups while marginalizing others .Another important aspect of the American Dream's history is its dual nature a tension between aspiration and disillusionment. As cultural historian Lawrence Samuel notes, the Dream has always been "part promise, part myth," serving both as an inspiring national ethos and as a tool for masking structural inequality . While Adams envisioned it as an egalitarian and moral pursuit, over time it became associated with material accumulation, which critics argue reduces its moral weight.

The Dream's evolution is also inseparable from immigration. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Dream functioned as a beacon of hope for millions arriving from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. According to historian Hasia Diner, immigrant communities embraced the idea of America as "the land of opportunity," yet they often encountered labor exploitation, racial prejudice, and class stratification that limited upward mobility. Thus, the immigrant experience highlighted the gap between the Dream's ideal and the harsh realities of American society.

The American Dream has been tied to the myth of meritocracy the belief that individual effort alone guarantees success. Scholars such as Michael Kammen argue that this notion has been both empowering and misleading, since it overlooks structural inequalities that affect race, class, and gender . The persistence of this myth is significant in literature, where characters often grapple with the belief that personal determination should yield success, only to discover systemic barriers.

The Dream has also been shaped by capitalism and consumer culture. By the mid-twentieth century, owning a home, a car, and modern appliances became synonymous with achieving the Dream. Literary critic Walter Benn Michaels contends that this consumerist interpretation hollowed out the Dream, making it "less about equality of opportunity and more about the visibility of wealth" . This consumerist redefinition is crucial for understanding both Wright's and Adichie's works, where economic deprivation and material aspiration clash with racial and social realities.Another dimension of the Dream's evolution lies in its racialized history. While white Americans

were encouraged to believe in limitless opportunity, African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities were structurally excluded. Toni Morrison emphasizes this contradiction, arguing that the American Dream was constructed "on the backs of those who were denied it". For African Americans, in particular, the Dream has often symbolized an unattainable promise a theme that Wright dramatizes in *Native Son*.

In contemporary discourse, the Dream has been increasingly critiqued in relation to globalization. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild explains that for many immigrants and minorities, the Dream is no longer just about American soil but about negotiating between multiple cultural identities and transnational experiences. This broader perspective is especially relevant for Adichie's *Americanah*, where characters navigate the Dream not simply as Americans, but as immigrants trying to reconcile Nigerian values with American realities.

The decline of faith in the American Dream is a significant feature of its modern evolution. According to Pew Research Center studies, younger generations express growing skepticism about whether hard work truly leads to upward mobility in today's America. Scholars such as Robert Putnam and Thomas Piketty connect this decline to widening inequality, arguing that the Dream has become "a luxury of the privileged rather than a promise for all". This erosion of belief in the Dream provides a powerful backdrop to both *Native Son* and *Americanah*, where characters confront the harsh truth that social structures often outweigh personal ambition.The American Dream is not a fixed concept but a dynamic ideal that evolves with the nation's history and conflicts. Its

shifting meanings between moral aspiration and material desire, inclusion and exclusion form the backdrop against which Wright and Adichie interrogate its promises and failures. By tracing its historical trajectory, we can better appreciate how their works expose the Dream's contradictions and reveal its implications for issues of race, class, and identity.

2.2 Representations of the American dreams in both novels

The American Dream has long stood as one of the most influential myths in the American consciousness, promising equality of opportunity, material prosperity, and upward mobility to anyone willing to work hard. James Truslow Adams, who first popularized the term in The Epic of America (1931), describes it as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement".This notion, while inspiring, has been consistently contested by writers who reveal the inequalities and exclusions masked by the ideal. Scholars argue that the dream is not neutral but historically shaped by race, class, and power structures. Both Richard Wright's Native Son and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* engage with this concept critically, exposing its contradictions and showing how marginalized groups, particularly African Americans and African immigrants, often find the dream elusive or conditional.

In Wright's *Native Son*, the American Dream emerges less as an attainable goal and more as a haunting illusion. Bigger Thomas, a young African American man in 1930s Chicago, dreams of escaping poverty and achieving success. Yet systemic racism and entrenched class hierarchies thwart his ambitions. He fantasizes about becoming a pilot,

but recognizes that such a career is impossible because of the color bar in aviation. As Abdul R. JanMohamed notes, Bigger is trapped in a "death-bound subjectivity" where every aspiration is suffocated by the structures of oppression that define his existence. The irony of Bigger's life is that he exists in a nation that celebrates abundance and opportunity, yet for him, opportunity translates only into exclusion and frustration.

The representation of Bigger's struggles demonstrates Wright's critique of American society, which professes equality but practices segregation and dispossession. Irving Howe observes that *Native Son* was groundbreaking because it dramatized "the dispossessed and disinherited man who exists in the shadow of American abundance". The infamous opening scene of the rat in the cramped apartment captures this contradiction vividly: Bigger, like the rat, is confined, hunted, and desperate. His violence later in the novel culminating in the accidental killing of Mary Dalton can be read not merely as individual pathology but as the tragic outcome of structural oppression. As James Baldwin argued in "Everybody's Protest Novel," Wright sometimes risked reducing Bigger into a symbol of black rage; yet Baldwin nonetheless conceded that the novel exposed how the so-called American Dream was structurally denied to African Americans. Thus, Wright's representation of the dream highlights its exclusivity, showing how the promise of prosperity collapses in the face of racialized poverty and systemic discrimination.

Adichie's *Americanah*, though written in a different historical moment, extends the interrogation of the American Dream from an immigrant perspective. Ifemelu and Obinze,

two young Nigerians, initially perceive America as the land of endless opportunity. Their migration narratives echo the long history of those who travel to the United States seeking education, jobs, and a chance at a better life. However, Adichie destabilizes this optimism by illustrating the realities of cultural alienation, racial prejudice, and economic precariousness. For Ifemelu, assimilation becomes a form of survival: she straightens her hair, alters her accent, and adopts American mannerisms to fit into the social fabric. Scholars such as Ogaga Okuyade argue that this negotiation of identity illustrates how immigrants "must pay the price of assimilation in order to be granted partial access to the dream".

The politics of hair in *Americanah* exemplifies Adichie's symbolic critique of assimilation. Stephanie Li points out that Ifemelu's decision to stop chemically straightening her hair and return to her natural curls is a moment of resistance, signifying a rejection of the pressure to erase her cultural identity for American acceptance. The rejection of Eurocentric beauty norms becomes an assertion of autonomy and an alternative measure of success one not grounded in material prosperity but in authenticity and self-determination. Ifemelu's blog, The Non-American Black's Guide to the American Black Experience, functions as both a counter-discourse and a survival strategy, giving her a platform to articulate the racialized exclusions she experiences. Through satire and sharp critique, she exposes the subtle ways racism undermines the immigrant's pursuit of the dream.

Obinze's failed migration narrative further complicates the American Dream's universality. Unlike Ifemelu, he never makes it to America, and his attempt to build a future in Britain ends with deportation. His narrative underscores the exclusivity of Western opportunity structures, which privilege certain bodies and passports over others. Scholars such as Ato Quayson have noted that Obinze's failure highlights the geopolitics of mobility, where the global South is systematically disadvantaged in its quest for the opportunities promised by the West. For Obinze, the dream is not simply deferred but actively denied, exposing how borders and immigration policies are tools of exclusion.

When Wright and Adichie are placed in dialogue, both works expose the contradictions of the American Dream from different vantage points. Wright illustrates how African Americans, despite being citizens, are systematically excluded from the dream because of racial capitalism and segregation. Adichie, by contrast, portrays how immigrants, though initially hopeful, often find that access to the dream is conditional, requiring compromises that erode cultural authenticity and dignity. Toni Morrison has argued that American narratives often fail to recognize "the humanity of the Other", and both Wright and Adichie dramatize this failure by placing their protagonists at the margins of opportunity.

Moreover, these novels remind readers that the American Dream is not only about material success but also about the desire for recognition and belonging. Bigger seeks dignity in a world that denies his humanity, while Ifemelu and Obinze yearn for a life where their identities are acknowledged without erasure. Their struggles reveal that the

dream, far from being universal, is shaped by exclusionary structures of race, class, and nationality. As Walter Benn Michaels asserts in The Trouble with Diversity, the rhetoric of equality often obscures deeper economic and racial inequalities, making the dream available only to a privileged few. Wright and Adichie expose this contradiction, showing that for marginalized groups, the dream is not a promise but a site of disillusionment.

Ultimately, the representations of the American Dream in *Native Son* and *Americanah* converge in their critique of its limitations. Wright portrays the dream as a dangerous illusion for African Americans trapped in cycles of poverty and racism, while Adichie illustrates its allure and subsequent disappointment for African immigrants who find that opportunity requires assimilation and compromise. Together, the two novels dismantle the myth of the American Dream as a universal reality, revealing instead its fragility, exclusivity, and dependence on systems of inequality.

2.2.1 Richard Wright's *Native Son*

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas lives in constant awareness of the limits placed upon him by race and class. Early in the novel, Bigger's family occupies a cramped apartment in Chicago's segregated Black Belt. Wright describes it as "a single room for four people, the kitchen doubling as bedroom". This physical confinement is symbolic of the broader social confinement Bigger experiences: he is trapped within poverty and denied opportunities to pursue a better life.

Scholars such as Fabre (1993) observe that Wright deliberately portrays Bigger as a product of systemic oppression rather than individual failure. Bigger himself recognizes

this when he reflects: “They don’t let us do nothing… They don’t want us to live decent. They don’t want us to have a chance”. Here, the American Dream is revealed as unattainable for African Americans, who are excluded from educational, economic, and social opportunities.

Wright also critiques the illusion of meritocracy. When Bigger takes a job as a chauffeur for the wealthy Dalton family, it appears at first to be a step toward stability. Yet, this “opportunity” quickly turns tragic, as systemic racism and fear lead him into conflict. Sundquist (1996) argues that Wright uses Bigger’s downfall to expose the contradiction between the promise of opportunity and the social reality of exclusion. Bigger’s final fate execution by the state underscores Wright’s view that the American Dream for Black men in the 1930s was not a pathway to success, but a trap that ends in violence and death..In *Native Son*, Richard Wright interrogates the notion of the American Dream by revealing how systemic racism, poverty, and psychological oppression render that dream inaccessible to Black Americans. His novel does not simply depict a failed individual; it indicts the social structures that promise equality while perpetuating exclusion. As one scholar argues, the history of racial oppression has “produced psychologically disordered AfricanAmericans who are chained by the labyrinth of neurotic anxiety, fear, and castration complex” (Albarrak, A Psycho-Social Analysis of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*) . In other words, the so-called promise of upward mobility and self-fulfillment is overshadowed by a psychic terrain of fear and restriction.

Bigger Thomas embodies the tension between aspiration and denial. He dreams that "I could fly a plane if I had a chance" yet knows that his racial identity and socioeconomic status eliminate that chance altogether. Wright's work suggests that for Black characters like Bigger, the American Dream is less a possibility than a tormenting illusion. They internalize the dream's rhetoric but are denied its material basis. Wright situates this denial not in individual fault but in a social order. As Albarrak notes, Wright emphasizes the "aspects of racial oppression that crippled AfricanAmericans in the 1930's" to explain the psychological fractures his characters endure .

Thus the novel reframes the American Dream as a site of conflict rather than hope. On one hand, Black Americans are taught to believe in the ideal of limitless opportunity; on the other, they encounter structural barriers at every turn. The gap between discourse and reality produces internal tension, frustration, and ultimately rebellion. In *Native Son*, Wright forces us to see that striving toward the American Dream can itself become a kind of violence violence of disillusion, of crushed dignity, of thwarted agency.

Wright does not merely show a character defeated by circumstance. He argues that the American Dream, as commonly imagined, is fundamentally exclusionary. It promises greatness to the ideal citizen but disavows those whom it already has marginalized. The novel exposes that the dream, for many Black Americans, is not an open road but a mirage built into it are the walls of racism, poverty, and psychological constraint.

2.2.2 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

While Wright writes from the perspective of an African American in mid-20th century Chicago, Adichie provides a transnational view of the Dream through the eyes of Nigerian immigrants. Ifemelu's move to the United States is driven by the expectation of better opportunities, education, and independence. Yet, she soon discovers that social class in America is deeply intertwined with race and cultural belonging.

In one striking moment, Ifemelu reflects: "You are not black until you come to America". This statement reveals how race, though less defining in Nigeria, becomes central in America, shaping how others perceive her and how she must navigate the world. Scholars argue that Adichie uses this realization to show that immigrants often find the Dream filtered through racial hierarchies that they were previously unaccustomed to.

Adichie also critiques the cultural costs of pursuing the American Dream. Ifemelu's struggles with "hair politics" her decision to stop relaxing her hair and wear it naturally become symbolic of her resistance to assimilation. As Nwakanma (2016) observes, Adichie uses this motif to critique how conformity to Euro-American standards of beauty and behavior becomes a hidden requirement for success in America. In other words, achieving the American Dream often demands cultural compromise.

Obinze's storyline offers another critique. Unable to secure a U.S. visa after 9/11, he travels to the U.K., where he overstays his visa and takes menial jobs. His humiliation is evident when he is forced to clean toilets and use false documents. Later, he reflects bitterly: "In London, he was invisible". This invisibility highlights how systemic barriers prevent immigrants from fully accessing the Dream. Scholars like Okuyade (2013) point

out that Obinze's experience reflects a broader immigrant disillusionment: the West is not always a land of opportunity, but often a site of exploitation.

By the end of *Americanah*, both Ifemelu and Obinze redefine success by returning to Nigeria. Their decision suggests that the American Dream, while tempting, is not the only path to fulfillment. Adichie therefore re-imagines the Dream: Instead of material prosperity abroad, true success may lie in authenticity, self-acceptance, and re-rooting oneself in one's homeland.

2.3 Comparative Perspective

The American Dream, with its promise of social mobility through individual effort, serves as both aspiration and illusion in Richard Wright's *Native Son*(1940) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). Though separated by seven decades, both novels interrogate how social class intersects with America's foundational narrative of opportunity, yet they arrive at markedly different conclusions about the accessibility and desirability of American social advancement.

Wright's naturalistic approach presents the American Dream as a cruel delusion that masks systemic oppression. Bigger Thomas, confined to Chicago's South Side during the 1930s, exists entirely outside the narrative of American opportunity. His social class position urban Black proletariat determines not only his material circumstances but his very consciousness and possibilities for action. Wright's Chicago operates as a system of rigid boundaries where segregated housing, limited employment, and constant surveillance by white authority create an inescapable trap. Bigger's violent trajectory

stems inevitably from these conditions, making him simultaneously perpetrator and victim of a class system that offers no legitimate pathways to advancement. The Dalton family's liberal philanthropy, with Mr. Dalton donating to Black education while profiting from segregated housing, exemplifies Wright's critique of how the American Dream ideology obscures its own contradictions. For Wright, the dream functions as ideological control rather than genuine possibility, legitimizing inequality while blaming individuals for structural failures.

Adichie's contemporary perspective presents a more complex relationship with both social class and the American Dream. Ifemelu's journey from Nigeria to America represents voluntary migration mediated by education and relative privilege within her country of origin. Unlike Bigger's fixed position at the bottom of America's racial hierarchy, Ifemelu experiences class as fluid and contextual middle class in Nigeria, working class upon arrival in America, eventually achieving professional success through cultural navigation and educational credentials. Her ability to reinvent herself professionally and culturally demonstrates how contemporary global mobility creates alternative pathways to social advancement that were unavailable in Wright's era. However, Adichie reveals that accessing the American Dream requires forms of cultural sacrifice straightening her hair, adopting American speech patterns, navigating racial dynamics absent in Nigeria that may ultimately prove psychologically costly.

The fundamental difference between these authors lies in their treatment of individual agency within class structures. Wright's deterministic worldview suggests that economic

and racial conditions overwhelmingly constrain individual choice, making the American Dream not merely difficult but actively harmful in its false promises. Bigger's moments of apparent agency reveal themselves as traps that reinforce his subordinate position. Adichie, while acknowledging structural barriers, demonstrates how certain forms of cultural and educational capital can provide genuine mobility within American class hierarchies. Ifemelu's eventual return to Nigeria, where her American experience becomes valuable cultural capital, suggests alternatives to the traditional narrative of permanent American assimilation.

The novels also reveal how national identity intersects with class mobility in distinct ways. Bigger Thomas represents the native-born African American experience his family's presence in America predates many white immigrant families, yet he remains perpetually excluded from national belonging. His relationship to the American Dream reflects the particular ways anti-Black racism operates within American class structures, creating barriers that transcend individual effort or merit. Ifemelu's status as a voluntary immigrant from Africa complicates traditional American racial categories and provides her with options unavailable to native-born African Americans. Her ability to choose departure from America reveals how contemporary immigration creates new forms of class mobility while exposing continuing racial hierarchies.

Wright's urban naturalism and Adichie's globalized realism thus offer contrasting visions of American opportunity. Wright presents a closed system where structural oppression crushes individual aspiration, making the American Dream a mythology that serves

power rather than possibility. His Chicago offers no authentic pathway to social mobility for Black residents, revealing how promises of individual advancement obscure collective oppression. Adichie's more open system acknowledges both the limitations and partial accessibility of American opportunity, demonstrating how global capitalism has created new pathways for social mobility while maintaining older forms of exclusion. Her work suggests that the American Dream remains achievable for those with sufficient cultural and educational resources, though at considerable personal cost.

Ultimately, both authors reveal how social class intersects with race, nationality, and historical moment to shape access to American opportunity. Wright's pessimistic vision reflects the harsh realities of pre-civil rights America, where systemic barriers rendered individual effort largely meaningless. Adichie's more ambivalent perspective captures contemporary complexities where global mobility and educational credentials can provide access to American advancement, while revealing the psychological and cultural costs of such achievement. Together, these novels demonstrate how the American Dream operates differently across historical periods and social positions, serving as both genuine possibility and persistent illusion depending on one's relationship to America's evolving class structures.

Both Wright and Adichie critique the American Dream, though from different angles. Wright highlights its unattainability for African Americans, trapped in systemic oppression and urban poverty. Adichie, meanwhile, portrays it as a seductive but conditional ideal for African immigrants, who must navigate race, class, and identity in a foreign land.

Despite these differences, the novels converge on a central point: the American Dream is not equally available to all. It is shaped by race, class, and social context. Wright presents the dream as a cruel illusion ending in tragedy, while Adichie presents it as an incomplete promise that forces immigrants into negotiations of identity. Both authors ultimately expose the limits of a cultural myth that continues to shape, and disappoint, those who pursue it.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL CLASS IN *NATIVE SON*

3.1 Analysis of Bigger Thomas Experience and struggles

Richard Wright's *Native Son* is one of the most powerful literary works to emerge from twentieth-century America, and at its core is the figure of Bigger Thomas, whose life and actions unfold as a complex response to the brutal intersections of social class, racial oppression, and the myth of the American Dream. Wright situates Bigger in Chicago during the 1930s, an era defined by the Great Depression, heightened racial segregation, and the consolidation of class hierarchies that consistently excluded African Americans from upward mobility. In Bigger Thomas, Wright crafts a character who embodies the failures of a society that promises prosperity and self-realization while denying these very opportunities to entire racial and class groups. The narrative's force lies in its ability to expose how systemic poverty and racism combine to produce psychological entrapment and violent rebellion. Bigger's experiences, particularly as they unfold in the middle section of the novel, demonstrate how social class functions as both

an external barrier and an internalized burden that corrodes his sense of self. His struggles, when read alongside the concept of the American Dream, reveal the devastating contradiction between national ideals of freedom and the lived reality of black working-class life in America.

From the opening of the novel, Bigger's environment is rendered as an emblem of class immobility. The crowded, rat-infested apartment where he lives with his family signifies more than mere poverty; it is a physical manifestation of social confinement. Critics such as James Campbell (1995) have argued that Wright uses the setting of Chicago's Black Belt as "a naturalist device to depict Bigger's lack of choice and agency, where the ghetto becomes a prison without bars." In this sense, social class is not simply an economic category but a material condition that shapes Bigger's daily decisions and psychological responses. The inability of his family to escape the slum reflects the wider entrapment of African Americans within limited housing options enforced by discriminatory real estate practices, something Wright himself experienced. Thus, Bigger is trapped in a cycle where ambition collides with structural barriers, and the frustration that simmers beneath his surface erupts in moments of violence.

The promise of the American Dream that anyone can achieve success through hard work and determination is constantly dangled before Bigger in cruelly ironic ways. He envies pilots flying planes overhead, recognizing that aviation is a career open only to white men. He wants dignity and independence, yet he is offered only menial jobs that relegate him to servitude. The opportunity to work for the Daltons as a chauffeur appears,

at first, to be a chance at upward movement, but it quickly becomes clear that the Dalton family's philanthropy is paternalistic and hypocritical. Although Mr. Dalton donates to black schools, his real estate business profits from segregating black tenants into overcrowded districts. As literary critic Trudier Harris (1980) observes, "Dalton's charity masks the system of exploitation that sustains his wealth, rendering Bigger not a beneficiary but a captive of the very class order Dalton represents." Here, Wright dismantles the illusion of class benevolence, showing that the structures of inequality are maintained even under the guise of generosity. Bigger's employment, far from elevating him, reinforces his status as a servant whose presence is tolerated only within prescribed boundaries.

Bigger's struggles also take on a psychological dimension, shaped by the internalization of fear and the awareness of constant surveillance. When he enters Mary Dalton's room and assists her while she is drunk, his terror is not merely about being caught in a compromising position but about the lethal consequences of transgressing racial and class boundaries. The panic that drives him to smother Mary is not premeditated murder but a reflex born of generations of fear. As scholar Kenneth Kinnamon (1990) explains, "Bigger's crime symbolizes the collision between personal desire and the oppressive weight of a society that has already criminalized his existence." This analysis underscores how social class and race intersect to render Bigger's very body a site of suspicion. In a world where a black man's proximity to a white woman is already framed as criminal, Bigger's fate is sealed before he even acts. The suffocation of Mary is both literal and

metaphorical: it represents the suffocation of black aspirations under the oppressive social order of America.

After Mary's death, Bigger experiences a contradictory sense of liberation. For the first time, he feels a perverse sense of control over his life. The act of violence gives him agency in a society that has denied him meaningful autonomy. Critics such as Irving Howe (1963) have argued that this is Wright's most disturbing achievement: he forces readers to see how systemic oppression can distort human emotions so profoundly that violence becomes synonymous with freedom. Bigger's exhilaration is not a celebration of murder but a twisted recognition that he has acted outside the boundaries set by his oppressors. Yet this fleeting sense of empowerment collapses under the weight of reality. His attempt to cover up the crime, his subsequent killing of Bessie, and his capture demonstrate that any attempt to resist the constraints of class and race is quickly quashed by the machinery of law and order that exists to protect white interests.

The trial scene is perhaps the clearest articulation of Wright's critique of social class and the American Dream. Bigger's lawyer, Max, constructs an argument that shifts the focus from Bigger's individual actions to the society that produced him. He frames Bigger not as an isolated criminal but as a symptom of systemic injustice: the product of poverty, segregation, and a society that denies opportunity to its black citizens. In doing so, Wright aligns his narrative with a Marxist critique of capitalism, where crime is seen as the natural outcome of oppressive social structures rather than moral weakness. According to scholar Abdul JanMohamed (1983), "Bigger becomes the embodiment of

the alienated subject in capitalist society, whose humanity is distorted by the interplay of economic exploitation and racial hierarchy." This interpretation reinforces the notion that Bigger's struggles cannot be disentangled from the broader class system that shapes his reality. His actions are horrifying, but they are also inevitable within the logic of a society that promises dreams while delivering despair.

The critical reception of Bigger Thomas reflects the difficulty of grappling with his representation. James Baldwin, in his essay "Many Thousands Gone" (1951), criticized Wright for creating a character who was more symbol than man, suggesting that Bigger was "trapped in ideological protest rather than liberated into humanity." Baldwin's critique highlights the tension between Wright's social agenda and his artistic rendering of Bigger's psychology. Yet other critics, such as Addison Gayle (1971), defend Wright's portrayal, arguing that Bigger represents "a necessary mirror held up to America's racial hypocrisy, a grotesque figure precisely because the society that produced him is grotesque." This critical debate underscores the complexity of Wright's project: Bigger is at once an individual and a collective symbol, a man and a metaphor for the failures of American democracy.

What emerges from this analysis is a clear understanding of how social class shapes every aspect of Bigger's existence. His poverty determines his housing, his education, his job prospects. His racial identity compounds this by placing him in a category of perpetual suspicion. His attempt to assert individuality through violence reflects the desperation of someone denied conventional avenues of achievement. The American

Dream, in Wright's depiction, is exposed as a myth that excludes those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. For Bigger, hard work cannot overcome systemic racism; ambition cannot translate into opportunity. The Dream becomes a cruel joke, a reminder of what he can never have.

Ultimately, the struggles of Bigger Thomas illuminate the destructive power of social class as a determinant of human possibility. His experiences expose the hypocrisy of a society that proclaims liberty and equality while enforcing systemic inequality. Wright's novel forces readers to confront the uncomfortable truth that the American Dream, when filtered through the lens of class and race, is often not a dream at all but a nightmare. For students and scholars, the enduring relevance of *Native Son* lies in its unflinching portrayal of how poverty and oppression produce both despair and resistance. Bigger Thomas's tragedy is not only his own but America's: a story of dreams deferred, humanity distorted, and the haunting recognition that social class remains a barrier to freedom.

3.2 Representation of poverty, Racism and classim

Richard Wright's *Native Son* remains one of the most significant texts in American literature for its searing exposure of the interlocking systems of poverty, racism, and classism that define the lives of African Americans in the early twentieth century. Published in 1940, the novel dramatizes the story of Bigger Thomas, a twenty-year-old Black man in Chicago whose life is circumscribed by systemic barriers that leave him alienated, fearful, and destructive. Wright uses Bigger's story to critique the illusions of

democracy and the so-called American Dream, demonstrating that for many African Americans, economic mobility and equal opportunity are impossible ideals rather than attainable goals. This section examines how Wright represents poverty, racism, and classism not as isolated social forces but as interconnected structures of domination that trap Bigger and people like him in an endless cycle of deprivation and despair.

The novel begins with a vivid depiction of poverty, which is not simply an economic condition but a physical and psychological prison. Bigger and his family live in a single-room apartment in a rat-infested building in Chicago's South Side ghetto. Their inability to escape this crowded environment reflects systemic practices of racial segregation such as redlining and discriminatory housing policies that confined Black families to deteriorating neighborhoods. Abdul JanMohamed, in his influential study The Death-Bound-Subject, emphasizes that Wright depicts Bigger as "a product of a racially segregated and economically exploitative order that dictates the limits of his existence" . Thus, Bigger's poverty is not accidental but deliberately produced by social structures that deny Black families access to decent housing and the possibility of upward mobility.

For Wright, poverty is not merely about the lack of material goods but also about the destruction of hope. Bigger's cramped apartment, his lack of prospects, and his constant dependence on menial labor reinforce his sense of insignificance. Poverty strips him of the ability to imagine a different future, leaving him in a state of perpetual frustration. Michel Fabre, Wright's biographer, argues that "Bigger is not simply poor; he is structurally barred from the imaginative resources that poverty sometimes leaves intact" .

This is why Wright presents Bigger's violence as both shocking and predictable it is the inevitable outgrowth of a world that denies him the means to assert himself in legitimate ways.

Poverty in *Native Son* cannot be disentangled from racism, which pervades every sphere of Bigger's existence. Racism in the novel is both overt and systemic. Bigger's environment is saturated with racist representations, from the films that depict African Americans as savages to the newspapers that criminalize Black men before trials have even begun. These cultural artifacts feed into the psychological environment that shapes Bigger's self-perception. He absorbs the message that he is already guilty, already monstrous, already outside the realm of humanity. Irving Howe famously remarked that *Native Son* "brought out into the open the hatred, fear, and violence that had been lurking behind the liberal platitudes of American life" . Wright exposes how racism works not only through direct acts of prejudice but also through the insidious shaping of consciousness that leads Bigger to internalize his status as an outsider.

The criminalization of Blackness is one of the novel's most powerful commentaries on racism. When Mary Dalton disappears, the media immediately transforms Bigger into the archetypal "Black rapist," even before evidence emerges. The speed with which public opinion condemns him illustrates what Angela says. Davis later described as the "racialized mythologies of crime and sexuality" that cast Black men as threats to white womanhood. Bigger becomes less a person than a symbol, reduced by the press to a caricature that affirms white fears. In this sense, Wright critiques not only the racism of

individuals but also the institutions the media, the courts, the police that perpetuate racial stereotypes and deny Black men fair representation.

The effect of racism on Bigger is psychological as much as material. James Baldwin, in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," criticized *Native Son* for what he saw as its lack of nuance, arguing that Wright had created a protagonist so consumed by rage and fear that he lost human complexity. Yet other critics, such as Addison Gayle, have defended Wright's choices, noting that the novel's stark portrayal of Bigger's psychology was intended as a mirror of the violence inflicted by racism itself. Gayle asserts that "Wright deliberately strips Bigger of sentimentality in order to reveal the brutalizing impact of a racist society that destroys the very possibility of tenderness" . Whether one sees Bigger as too flat or painfully real, what is undeniable is that Wright shows racism not only as an external force but as an internalized terror that robs his protagonist of agency.

Classism in the novel operates alongside racism, sometimes in disguised forms. The Daltons embody the contradictions of white liberal philanthropy. As wealthy landlords, they profit from the exploitation of Black tenants, charging inflated rents for substandard housing. Yet they also donate to "Negro colleges" and employ Black chauffeurs, congratulating themselves on their benevolence. This contradiction highlights how class privilege allows whites to maintain oppressive systems while believing themselves virtuous. Arnold Rampersad observes that "the Daltons exemplify the hypocrisy of liberal capitalism, where gestures of charity obscure the maintenance of systemic inequality" . Their treatment of Bigger reveals the limits of liberal compassion: they are willing to give

him a job, but only on their terms, and without addressing the structures that keep him trapped In poverty.

The intersection of classism and racism is most evident in the legal proceedings against Bigger. The courtroom scenes dramatize how class power and racial prejudice combine to deny justice. Bigger's defense attorney, Boris Max, attempts to frame him as a victim of systemic oppression, arguing that his crime is the product of an unjust social order. While some readers have found Max's speech overly didactic, it remains significant as Wright's most direct articulation of the Marxist belief that crime is socially determined. As Max declares, "Men can starve, be driven insane, be made criminals, be killed, but the social order cannot be touched". This speech underscores how class privilege insulates the wealthy from accountability while the poor bear the burden of systemic violence.

Finally, Wright represents poverty, racism, and classism as inseparable forces that converge to shape Bigger's life and determine his fate. He cannot escape poverty because racism confines him to the ghetto; he cannot escape racism because class privilege shields whites from recognizing their complicity; and he cannot escape classism because his race predetermines his economic position. Bigger's tragedy is therefore not merely personal but emblematic of the countless lives destroyed by intersecting systems of oppression. By presenting these forces with unflinching naturalism, Wright forces readers to confront the hypocrisy of American democracy and the emptiness of the American Dream for Black citizens in the early twentieth century.

3.2.1 Racism and systemic Oppression in *Native son*

Racism and systemic oppression form the central framework through which Richard Wright constructs the tragedy of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. Wright does not present racism as a series of individual prejudices but rather as a deeply entrenched social system that permeates institutions, cultural perceptions, and economic structures. Bigger's life is shaped long before the novel begins by the racial hierarchy that dictates where he can live, what jobs he can aspire to, how he is perceived by white society, and ultimately, how he will be judged by the justice system. Through Bigger's experiences, Wright exposes how systemic racism is both pervasive and invisible, operating as the backdrop of everyday life for African Americans in Chicago during the 1930s.

From the outset, Wright situates Bigger in a segregated Chicago that reflects the broader racial divides of American society. He and his family live in a dilapidated one-room apartment in the South Side, not merely because of poverty, but because racist housing practices limit where African Americans can reside. The Daltons' ownership of real estate in Black neighborhoods, combined with their philanthropic façade, illustrates the contradictions of racial capitalism. Scholars such as James A. Miller argue that the Daltons profit from Black tenants by charging inflated rents for substandard housing, a practice masked by their donations to Black institutions. In this way, Wright underscores the irony of a system in which white benefactors appear charitable while simultaneously exploiting Black lives for economic gain. Racism, therefore, is not only cultural but embedded in the very structures that dictate where people live and how they survive.

Wright also foregrounds the psychological dimension of systemic racism through Bigger's consciousness. From the moment he steps into the Dalton household, Bigger is acutely aware of the racial boundary that shapes his behavior. His fear of being misinterpreted in the presence of Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone stems not from guilt but from the knowledge that white society already perceives him as a potential criminal. This awareness is crystallized in the climactic scene of Mary's accidental death. Bigger suffocates her not out of malice but out of sheer panic, driven by the fear that any compromising situation with a white woman would condemn him. Scholars like Hazel Rowley note that Wright uses this moment to reveal how "the fear of racial accusation is internalized to such a degree that it dictates Bigger's most desperate actions". Racism, then, is not only an external system of control but also a psychological prison that shapes Black identity and choices.

The justice system in *Native Son* further illustrates the institutionalization of racism. After Mary's death, Bigger is hunted, captured, and tried with an intensity that reflects not just the gravity of his crime but the racial hysteria surrounding it. The press sensationalizes his case, portraying him as a "Negro rapist" and a menace to white society. His individual humanity is erased, and he becomes a symbol of racial fear. The courtroom becomes less about justice and more about the affirmation of white superiority through the ritual of Black subjugation. Critics such as Houston A. Baker Jr. argue that Wright deliberately frames Bigger's trial as "a spectacle of racial containment," where the legal system functions not to dispense justice but to reinforce racial boundaries. Bigger's death

sentence is thus not only the consequence of his crime but the inevitable outcome of a system designed to protect white privilege at all costs.

Moreover, Wright shows that racism operates not only in direct oppression but also in the denial of alternatives. Bigger's aspirations are curtailed from the beginning, and he is keenly aware that no matter how hard he works, opportunities for African Americans remain limited. His job prospects are restricted to menial labor, his education cut short, and his freedom confined to segregated spaces. This lack of opportunity fuels his anger and sense of entrapment, leading him to act recklessly in ways that confirm white stereotypes. Richard Delgado's critical insights on systemic racism echo Wright's representation, as Delgado argues that racism functions by "locking marginalized groups into predetermined roles while punishing them for the rebellion those roles provoke". Bigger's story embodies this paradox, where rebellion against systemic oppression only results in harsher retribution from the system itself.

In representing racism as systemic rather than individual, Wright advances a powerful critique of American society. Bigger is not portrayed as inherently violent or criminal; rather, he is a product of a racial system that both defines and destroys him. Wright's narrative forces readers to confront the uncomfortable reality that racism is woven into the very fabric of social life, shaping housing, labor, law, and even intimate relationships. By dramatizing Bigger's fear, rage, and eventual downfall, Wright demonstrates how systemic oppression dehumanizes not only its victims but also the society that sustains it. Racism in *Native Son* is therefore not simply a theme but the structural condition that

makes Bigger's tragedy inevitable, revealing the destructive power of an America built on inequality.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL CLASS IN *AMERICANAH*

4.1 Analysis of Ifemelu's Experiences and Struggles

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* has become one of the most widely discussed novels in contemporary African literature because it addresses questions of identity, race, migration, and class. At the center of this novel is Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman whose life trajectory demonstrates how social class operates as a complex, shifting system both in Nigeria and in the United States. Her experiences highlight the tension between aspiration and reality, between the dreams of upward mobility and the barriers of

structural inequality. This section will examine Ifemelu's struggles in depth, showing how her story reflects broader issues of class, race, and globalization.Before analyzing Ifemelu specifically, it is useful to establish the context of social class as presented in the novel. Adichie constructs her narrative across two social landscapes: Nigeria, where class is tied to wealth, corruption, and the fragility of middle-class status, and the United States, where class cannot be separated from racialized experiences of immigrants. Scholars such as Ato Quayson argue that Adichie's novel "maps the itineraries of transnational subjects who find themselves caught in shifting matrices of race, class, and identity". This transnational framework allows Adichie to show how class is never static but changes depending on geography and social structure.

Ifemelu's journey reflects this dynamic. She moves from a middle-class Nigerian background into the precarious situation of an immigrant in America and eventually reclaims her independence and intellectual authority through her blog. Her story becomes a case study in how social class is negotiated in a globalized context.Ifemelu's experiences in Nigeria establish the fragility of middle-class status. She is raised in a family that enjoys relative comfort, but this comfort collapses when her father loses his job. Adichie portrays this moment with vivid detail: the family's financial stability unravels, and their social standing diminishes. This situation resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, particularly his notion that "economic capital and cultural capital intersect to shape class identity". Ifemelu's family possesses education and refinement but lacks the economic resources to sustain their social position.

Critics have pointed out how Adichie uses this moment to highlight the instability of Nigerian class structures. Madelaine Hron, for example, argues that “Adichie situates her characters in a Nigeria where aspirations are constantly threatened by political corruption and economic decline, making social class precarious and insecure”. For Ifemelu, the loss of privilege is not just financial but deeply personal, shaping her sense of ambition and her desire to seek opportunities abroad.This early struggle foreshadows her later challenges in the United States. It shows that her identity is formed in the tension between aspiration and insecurity. Unlike some of her peers who remain content within the Nigerian class system, Ifemelu begins to imagine a broader world where she might redefine her social identity.

Ifemelu’s decision to migrate to the United States is fueled by both personal ambition and the structural forces of Nigerian society. Like many middle-class Nigerians, she perceives America as a land of opportunity where hard work and intelligence can translate into upward mobility. This vision is tied to the myth of the American Dream, which James Truslow Adams originally described as “a better, richer, and happier life for all citizens”. However, as Ifemelu discovers, the reality of America is very different for immigrants, especially Black immigrants.Upon her arrival, she quickly realizes that the American class system is shaped by racial hierarchies. Her Nigerian identity, which carried cultural capital back home, becomes devalued in a racialized society that views her primarily as Black. Scholar Paul Gilroy notes that “the Black subject in Western societies is denied the

upward trajectory promised by modernity. Ifemelu embodies this reality as she struggles to find employment despite her intelligence and potential.

Her experiences with menial jobs, including babysitting and later an exploitative encounter with a tennis coach, illustrate the desperation of many immigrants who are pushed into degrading labor for survival. This moment is crucial to understanding her class struggles, as it represents the lowest point in her American journey. Critics such as Carole Boyce Davies have noted that Adichie portrays "the indignities of immigrant labor as a way of exposing the gap between the ideal of the American Dream and the lived reality of migrants".Ifemelu's struggles in America are not only economic but also cultural and psychological. To navigate American society, she must adapt to new norms that challenge her Nigerian identity. Her experience at the hair salon, for example, demonstrates how physical appearance becomes a marker of assimilation and class identity. Straightened hair is presented as a symbol of middle-class respectability, while natural hair is seen as unprofessional or inappropriate.

This moment connects to the work of Frantz Fanon, who argued that colonized subjects internalize the standards of the dominant culture in order to gain acceptance. Ifemelu's decision to straighten her hair for a job interview reflects the pressures of assimilation, where success is tied to conforming to Eurocentric standards. Her struggles are not just about securing income but about negotiating her identity within a system that equates social class with whiteness.

Scholars have pointed out how Adichie critiques these pressures. Minna Salami observes that “Ifemelu’s hair becomes a metaphor for resistance and self-definition, as she later rejects assimilation and embraces her natural hair as part of her cultural identity”. This act of resistance signals her gradual reclaiming of agency within the American class system.

A turning point in Ifemelu’s struggles comes when she creates her blog, “Raceteenth.” Through writing, she articulates the complexities of race and class in America, gaining both financial stability and cultural recognition. The blog represents a form of symbolic capital, allowing her to claim intellectual authority and enter spaces that had previously excluded her.

Stephanie Li argues that “Ifemelu’s blog functions as both economic resource and cultural platform, enabling her to move upward in the American class structure while challenging its racial foundations”. This transformation shows how immigrants can use creativity and critical thought to redefine their social standing.However, Adichie is careful to show that success does not erase structural inequality. Even as Ifemelu achieves independence, she remains aware of the racial hierarchies that define American life. Her struggles remind the reader that class advancement for immigrants is always precarious, shaped by larger systems of exclusion.Perhaps the most profound moment of struggle for Ifemelu comes when she decides to return to Nigeria after years in America. This decision is not simply about homesickness but reflects her disillusionment with the American Dream. She has achieved a measure of success but remains dissatisfied with

the emptiness of American class ideals.Ato Quayson interprets Ifemelu's return as "a critique of the global circulation of elites, exposing the unsettled nature of transnational class identities". By returning to Nigeria, Ifemelu rejects the notion that class success must be defined by Western standards. Her decision suggests a search for authenticity and a desire to reestablish herself within a context where she does not have to constantly negotiate her identity against racial hierarchies.

This return also reflects the broader phenomenon of "brain circulation" rather than "brain drain," as educated Africans who once sought opportunity abroad begin to return home to redefine success on their own terms. Ifemelu's struggles, therefore, end not in assimilation but in reclamation of self and place.

Many scholars have examined Ifemelu's struggles as central to Adichie's critique of global class systems. For instance, Sarah Ilott suggests that *Americanah* "exposes the myth of class mobility in neoliberal societies, showing how structures of race and gender intersect to limit immigrant advancement". Similarly, Yogita Goyal contends that Adichie uses Ifemelu's character to "map the contradictions of cosmopolitanism, where mobility is promised but rarely delivered equally across racial and national lines".

These critical perspectives reinforce the idea that Ifemelu's struggles are not isolated but representative of broader patterns in global migration and inequality. By grounding her story in personal experience, Adichie humanizes abstract theories of class and globalization.

4.2 Representations of Class Dynamics, Identity and Belonging

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is widely recognized as a profound exploration of social hierarchies, cultural identity, and the search for belonging in a globalized world. Through the lens of her protagonist Ifemelu, Adichie traces how class dynamics intersect with issues of race, migration, and gender. The novel's representation of identity and belonging does not simply reproduce the traditional narrative of the American Dream but rather critiques and complicates it. By situating her characters across transnational spaces, Adichie demonstrates that class identity is unstable, shifting, and deeply tied to both place and cultural context.This section examines how *Americanah* represents class dynamics and the negotiations of identity and belonging that arise from them. It considers both the Nigerian and American settings of the novel, analyzing how characters navigate shifting hierarchies and social expectations. Drawing upon scholarly perspectives, this discussion argues that Adichie presents social class not as a fixed economic position but as a lived experience that shapes and is shaped by identity and cultural belonging.

The Nigerian sections of *Americanah* illustrate a society where class is primarily determined by economic power and social networks. The instability of the Nigerian middle class is evident in Ifemelu's family background. Her father, a civil servant who prides himself on formality and education, is suddenly dismissed from his job. This event destabilizes the family, forcing them into financial insecurity. In this context, social class is fragile and dependent on the whims of political and bureaucratic structures.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital is useful in understanding this representation. Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, social, and cultural capital, showing how individuals use these forms of capital to maintain or advance their class position (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243). In Nigeria, Ifemelu's family possesses cultural capital in the form of education and refinement, yet the loss of economic capital erodes their social standing. Adichie highlights this precariousness to underscore how class identities in Nigeria are easily undermined by corruption and systemic instability.

Critics have also noted this fragility. Madelaine Hron comments that "Adichie portrays Nigeria as a space where the middle class is constantly threatened by forces beyond individual control, including political corruption, economic decline, and infrastructural failures" (Hron 2009, p. 29). For young Nigerians like Ifemelu, these conditions foster a desire to migrate abroad, where they believe opportunities for mobility might be more secure.

Another key dimension of class dynamics in Nigeria is the aspiration for wealth and status. Characters like Obinze embody this ambition, seeking not only financial success but also the symbolic prestige that comes with being part of the elite. However, Adichie complicates this ambition by showing how Nigerian society admires foreignness. The figure of the returnee who has lived abroad is often celebrated as more sophisticated or modern. As Ato Quayson observes, "the circulation of Nigerians through global spaces creates a symbolic hierarchy in which foreign exposure becomes a form of class capital". This context sets the stage for Ifemelu's migration and the challenges she will later

face.When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, she encounters a different set of class dynamics shaped by race and immigration status. Although she migrates with the expectation that hard work and education will secure her a middle-class position, she quickly learns that access to class mobility is mediated by race. Her Nigerian identity becomes subsumed under the category of Blackness, which in American society carries with it historical and structural disadvantages.

Paul Gilroy's analysis in The Black Atlantic is illuminating here. Gilroy argues that Black identities in the West are constructed within systems that deny full participation in modernity. Ifemelu experiences this exclusion as she struggles to find employment despite her qualifications. Her downward mobility into precarious work, such as babysitting and later her humiliating encounter with a tennis coach, illustrates how immigrants of color are pushed into lower-class positions.

Scholars emphasize how Adichie critiques the myth of American class openness. Sarah Ilott suggests that "Adichie exposes the limits of the American Dream by showing how immigrants are often relegated to the margins of society regardless of their intelligence or ambition". Ifemelu's struggles demonstrate that in America, social class is inseparable from racial hierarchies.

Moreover, assimilation into American class structures requires conformity to cultural norms. Ifemelu's decision to straighten her hair for job interviews highlights this pressure. Straight hair, associated with professionalism, becomes a marker of middle-class respectability. Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial identity in Black Skin, White Masks

helps explain this dynamic. Fanon argues that colonized subjects often internalize the standards of the dominant culture in order to be accepted. Ifemelu's hair straightening reflects her temporary acceptance of these imposed norms. Her later embrace of natural hair symbolizes resistance, showing that belonging in America requires both assimilation and defiance.

A central theme in *Americanah* is the way class struggles shape identity. Ifemelu's self-conception evolves as she negotiates between Nigerian and American identities. At first, she experiences dislocation and alienation. Her accent, appearance, and cultural background mark her as different, making her feel excluded from both white American society and African American communities.

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity is useful in this context. Bhabha argues that cultural negotiation in postcolonial contexts creates hybrid identities that are neither one nor the other but exist in an in-between space. Ifemelu embodies this hybridity. She is Nigerian by birth, yet her experiences in America reshape her identity in ways that make her both insider and outsider in multiple communities.Critics have highlighted the significance of this negotiation. Minna Salami points out that "Ifemelu's identity is constantly in flux, shaped by her attempts to belong in spaces that both accept and reject her". This flux reflects the larger reality of immigrants, whose sense of self is continually negotiated across cultural and class boundaries.

Belonging for Ifemelu is tied not only to cultural identity but also to class recognition. Her success as a blogger transforms her from an invisible immigrant into a public

intellectual with authority. Stephanie Li notes that “Ifemelu’s blog represents a reclaiming of voice and power, allowing her to establish a form of belonging that transcends economic and racial marginalization”. Yet even this success does not erase her sense of alienation, as she continues to feel disconnected from both Nigerian and American spaces. Ifemelu’s romantic relationships further illustrate the entanglement of class, identity, and belonging. With Curt, her wealthy white American boyfriend, she gains material comfort and social privileges. Yet she also feels the imbalance of power, as her access to class status depends on him. John Marx argues that “Adichie demonstrates how intimacy often masks structural inequalities, showing that personal relationships can reproduce class dynamics”. Ifemelu’s decision to leave Curt reflects her desire for independence and authenticity, even if it means giving up material security.Her relationship with Blaine, a Nigerian American academic, highlights another dimension of class identity. Blaine represents the intellectual elite, and his life is structured around academia and liberal politics. While Ifemelu respects his values, she often feels constrained by his rigidity. Their differences reflect the gap between an immigrant negotiating precarious class positions and a secure member of the American middle class. This tension reveals that even within shared racial or national identities, class can create divisions.

Finally, her enduring connection to Obinze underscores the importance of belonging. Obinze, who himself experiences humiliation and rejection in Britain before becoming a wealthy businessman in Nigeria, shares with Ifemelu a deep understanding of the struggles of migration. Their relationship represents a form of belonging that transcends

external class categories, grounded instead in shared history and mutual recognition.Ifemelu's return to Nigeria marks a crucial moment in her journey. In Lagos, she is labeled "*Americanah*," a term that signals both admiration and suspicion. Her American experience gives her symbolic capital, making her appear more sophisticated. Yet it also alienates her, as she struggles to reconnect with old friends and to navigate a society that views her as both insider and outsider.

Olakunle George argues that "the returnee figure embodies the contradictions of postcolonial modernity, celebrated for global exposure yet distrusted for estrangement from local norms". Ifemelu's return demonstrates that belonging is never simple. Even when she has achieved success abroad, she must renegotiate her identity at home.Her decision to restart her life in Nigeria can be read as a critique of the American Dream. Having experienced its promises and limitations, she chooses to define belonging on her own terms. This decision reflects Adichie's larger argument that true belonging cannot be found in material success alone but requires authenticity and cultural connection.

4.3 Migration, Return and Negotiation Of Social Status.

Migration has always been tied to questions of mobility, aspiration, and survival. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, the experience of migration is not presented as a simple upward journey but as a complex negotiation where social class is both challenged and reconstructed. Through the lives of Ifemelu and Obinze, Adichie shows how individuals who cross borders face dislocation, identity struggles, and unexpected reversals of status. Yet she also emphasizes how migration and return can provide new

forms of cultural capital, social recognition, and economic transformation. This section explores how *Americanah* engages with migration, return, and the negotiation of social status by drawing on the experiences of the main characters, critical scholarship on migration and diaspora, and theories of class mobility.In Nigeria, migration is often imagined as the most direct route to upward mobility. The idea of "going abroad" is deeply tied to aspirations of success and social elevation. As Adesanmi notes, the transnational journey in African literature often embodies "the hope of escaping the constraints of the homeland into the promise of modernity" Ifemelu initially embodies this dream when she leaves Nigeria for the United States to pursue education. Her decision reflects the widespread cultural belief that migration automatically translates to prosperity and higher class status.

However, Adichie complicates this narrative by exposing the hardships migrants face in host countries. Ifemelu's struggles as a student working menial jobs, losing confidence, and even compromising herself for survival show that migration can erode social status instead of elevating it. In Nigeria, she had middle-class privileges, but in America, she becomes invisible, reduced to roles that deny her dignity. This reversal reflects what Hron describes as the "migration paradox," where the dream of better opportunities collides with systemic racism, unemployment, and alienation.Obinze's trajectory highlights a similar paradox. His attempt to migrate to the United Kingdom exposes the vulnerability of migrants without legal documentation. His downward shift from a university-educated Nigerian to a manual laborer cleaning toilets in London dramatizes the precariousness of

social class in diasporic contexts. The humiliation Obinze faces shows how migration is not simply an economic project but also a deeply emotional negotiation of dignity. It echoes Paul Gilroy's observation that the Black Atlantic subject is often caught between "desire for recognition and the burden of racialized exclusion".Adichie demonstrates that migration destabilizes not only class but also identity. Ifemelu's experiences in the United States reveal that race functions as a new axis of social status. She realizes that while she was never "black" in Nigeria, in America her skin color becomes the defining category of her existence. This shift affects her mobility and acceptance in American society. Stuart Hall has argued that diasporic identity is marked by "difference, discontinuity and hybridity" and Ifemelu embodies this hybridity as she learns to navigate racialized spaces.Her blog, "Raceteenth," becomes the medium through which she negotiates identity and reclaims agency. Through her reflections on race, hair, and belonging, she builds a reputation that enhances her social standing in the U.S. context. This reflects Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital, where knowledge, discourse, and symbolic power can elevate one's status beyond mere economic wealth. Ifemelu's cultural capital positions her as a public intellectual whose authority opens doors to networks, jobs, and recognition.

In contrast, Obinze's UK journey reveals how migrants without legal recognition are excluded from both cultural and economic capital. His lack of legal papers relegates him to invisibility. He cannot accumulate cultural authority or social capital in the way Ifemelu does in America. His story underscores the structural inequalities that shape how

migrants experience class mobility differently in the Global North. Critics like Gikandi have pointed out that African migrants in Western literature often occupy “zones of marginality that highlight the contradictions of globalization”. Obinze’s situation fits this description as he remains caught between aspiration and exclusion.

Return migration in *Americanah* provides another dimension to the negotiation of social class. Ifemelu and Obinze both return to Nigeria, and their reintegration shows how migration reconfigures status at home.For Ifemelu, return is both triumphant and unsettling. Having achieved visibility abroad as a blogger, she comes back to Nigeria with prestige. Friends and acquaintances treat her as someone who has been upgraded by her foreign experience. Yet this return also highlights distance. Ifemelu often feels like an outsider in the very society she once belonged to. Her transnational identity complicates her class position: admired for her cosmopolitan exposure but estranged from local realities. Olaniyan argues that the returnee in African literature often occupies a “liminal position,” caught between the prestige of foreignness and the alienation it produces. Ifemelu’s Nigerian friends see her as different, emphasizing how return can both elevate and destabilize social identity.Obinze’s return contrasts with his earlier failure abroad. Though deported from the UK, he eventually becomes a wealthy real estate developer in Nigeria. His success demonstrates how local opportunities can also produce class mobility, but it is framed through his migration narrative. In Nigerian society, the mere fact that he attempted migration gives him symbolic prestige. Akinwumi Adesokan calls this the “prestige of elsewhere,” where foreign exposure even failed enhances one’s class

standing at home. Obinze's wealth, combined with his returnee status, secures him a place within Nigeria's upper class.Migration in *Americanah* reveals that social class is not fixed but constantly negotiated across borders. Ifemelu and Obinze move between different class categories depending on their geographical location and social networks. In America, Ifemelu experiences downward mobility but eventually rises through intellectual recognition. In the UK, Obinze faces downward mobility with little opportunity for recovery, yet his return to Nigeria allows him to re-enter the elite. Their experiences highlight the fluidity of class and the role of both structural factors (racism, immigration policies, labor markets) and individual agency (education, networks, resilience).This negotiation reflects what Vertovec calls "transnational social fields," where migrants sustain multiple identities and resources across borders. For Ifemelu and Obinze, their mobility is not linear but oscillates between gain and loss, humiliation and triumph. Adichie portrays these negotiations as part of a larger critique of globalization, where migration simultaneously opens and closes doors of opportunity.Adichie also uses migration and return to critique the Nigerian national context. Migration in the novel exposes the failures of the Nigerian state to provide opportunities for its citizens. Ifemelu's departure is motivated by the strikes and instability of Nigerian universities, while Obinze's migration reflects the stagnation of the local economy. Critics like Mbembe argue that African migration must be read against the "crisis of postcolonial citizenship" where people seek belonging outside failed national systems. In this sense, migration is not just personal aspiration but also a response to structural

breakdown.Return, however, is equally political. Ifemelu's and Obinze's return reflects the ambivalence of Nigerian modernity. On one hand, their reintegration suggests hope for renewal, as returnees bring back skills, capital, and new ideas. On the other, their privileged reinsertion highlights deep inequalities, since not all returnees have the same resources or networks. Adichie thus presents migration and return as part of a wider conversation about Nigeria's place in a globalized world.By showing both the pain and promise of migration, Adichie forces readers to confront the uneven realities of globalization. Migration is shown as neither wholly liberating nor wholly destructive but as a field of struggle where individuals constantly negotiate identity, dignity, and status.

In *Americanah*, migration, return, and the negotiation of social status are presented as central to the modern Nigerian and Returnee experience. Ifemelu's journey shows how migration can destroy class privilege but also provide new forms of cultural authority. Obinze's trajectory demonstrates the vulnerability of migrants in foreign lands while revealing how return can restore status in surprising ways. Adichie critiques the notion of migration as automatic upward mobility, instead showing it as a complex and uneven negotiation shaped by race, legality, culture, and national politics. In doing so, the novel contributes to a broader literary tradition that situates African class identities and how people's way of life and who they are changes as the world becomes more connected and people move to other countries.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This research has focused on how social class and the American dream are represented in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's

Americanah. Both novels deal with the struggles of black characters as they try to find their place in societies that are shaped by race, class, and power. By studying the two works side by side, it becomes clear that although

they were written in different times and settings, they both show how social class strongly affects people's opportunities, choices, and dreams.

In *Native Son*, Wright paints a very dark picture of life for African Americans in the 1930s. The character of Bigger Thomas is trapped in a world that does not allow him to rise above poverty or prejudice. His life shows how the American dream, which promises freedom and success, is often only available to those who are white and wealthy. Wright uses Bigger's story to reveal the deep inequalities in American society, and many critics have noted that his novel exposes the failure of the dream for black Americans. As James Baldwin once commented, Wright's Bigger is not just an individual but a symbol of a society that has been built to crush the poor and the powerless.

On the other hand, Adichie in *Americanah* presents a modern view of migration, identity, and class. Through the character of Ifemelu, she shows how moving between Nigeria and America brings both opportunities and challenges. Ifemelu's journey reveals how race and class are negotiated in different spaces. In America, she is faced with racism and the difficulty of being black in a society where skin colour often determines status. In Nigeria, she also notices how class shapes relationships and opportunities, especially when she returns after living abroad. Scholars like Ato Quayson have argued that Adichie's work highlights the global nature of inequality, showing that class

struggles exist both in the West and in Africa.When both novels are read together, one can see that Wright and Adichie, though writing from different generations, are both concerned with the same question: Who gets to enjoy the American dream, and who is left out? Wright shows how race and poverty combine to deny black Americans access to equality and dignity, while Adichie demonstrates that even in a modern, global world, social class and race continue to determine how far one can go. The novels, therefore, remind us that social class is not a fixed position but something people are always negotiating, whether through migration, education, or survival.

The significance of this study is that it shows how literature gives us a mirror through which we can see the real struggles of people. Wright's *Native Son* challenges readers to face the brutal reality of racism and poverty in America's past, while Adichie's *Americanah* challenges us to think about migration, belonging, and identity in today's world. Together, they remind us that the American dream has always been uneven and that those on the margins often have to fight harder for recognition, respect, and dignity.

In conclusion, this project has shown that both Wright and Adichie use their novels to question the fairness of social systems and to expose the limits of the American dream. Their works emphasize that the dream is not equally open to all, but is shaped by structures of power, race, and class. By placing these two writers side by side, we can see a powerful connection between the struggles of African Americans in the early twentieth century and the experiences of Africans navigating migration in the twenty-first century. The conversation between the two texts shows that while times have changed, the

question of who belongs and who can rise in society is still a pressing one. Literature, therefore, becomes a tool not just for storytelling but also for understanding and challenging inequality in our world.

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