



An Analysis of Racism in Uncle Tom's Cabin from the Marxism Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a novel that reflects the cruelty and inhumanity of the slave system. In the novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe created scenes of real artistic power and that her analysis of the capitalistic elements of the slave system were remarkably astute. The racism depicted in this novel is, on the surface, the inhuman oppression and exploitation of black slaves by slave owners. While on the deep level, it is the exploitation and oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, and this exploitation is a major means for the bourgeoisie to extract the surplus value of working workers. Starting from a Marxism perspective, this article analyzes the economic interests and class relationships behind slavery in the novel, studies the relationship between racism, socio-economic structure, and class contradictions, and explores how racism interweaves with economic interests and becomes a tool of class oppression. While the specter of racism still lingers in American society today, the paper tries to figure out the complexity of racial issues in the United States, thus providing more comprehensive thinking and methods for eliminating racism and inequality in the future.

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1. Introduction

Uncle Tom's Cabin is an outstanding novel that exposes the evils of slavery, completed by American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe in the 1850s. It is considered to be a novel that sparked the American Civil War. Since its publication, there are hot discussions about this novel, exposing the brutal rule and oppression of black slaves under slavery in the southern plantations of the United States, and accusing the tragic years of cannibalism in the United States. The protagonist in this novel, Uncle Tom, is a docile and good person who ultimately fails to escape misfortune under slavery, revealing the cruel truth of the slave system in such an inhumane and evil capitalist society.

This article explores the issue of racism in American society reflected in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from a Marxism perspective. The exploitation and oppression of black slaves by white slave owners in the novel, which exposes the issue of racism, is obvious, but it is only a superficial phenomenon. As we unveil the mask of racism, we discover that the essence of racism is the exploitation and oppression of the bourgeoisie represented by white slave owners against the proletariat represented by black slaves, which is often overlooked by the public. This type of class exploitation and oppression is the main means by which the bourgeoisie interweaves racism and economic interests, becoming a tool of class oppression.

In this study, we will re-examine the literary masterpieces of this era and provide a key text for us to understand the racism in the United States. The significance of this study lies in its ability to delve deeper into the complexity of American society in the mid-19th century through a literary perspective. By combining literary analysis with Marxism theory, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the history of slavery and racism, thus providing profound insights into contemporary social issues in the United States.

1.2. Research Questions and Methods of the Paper

As a theory adept at social analysis, Marxism can provide a framework for researchers to interpret the social issues and class relationships involved in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We will use class analysis theory to explore the class relationships between different characters in the novel, and explore the class conflicts caused by the different economic, social, power status, and ideological contradictions between slave owners and slaves. With such a theory, we can better understand the cruel and exploitative nature of American capitalist society under the cloak of slavery revealed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Specifically, this article will start with analyzing how the novel reflects the role of the capitalist system in American racism. By employing Marxism social class analysis theory, the paper tries to explain the relationship between slavery and racism, and figure out how the class oppression is achieved through racism. Finally, the paper will analyze how the characters, plot, and themes in the novel echo Marxism's approach to class exploitation, the theory of class inequality and social conflict.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Paper

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the racism exposed is superficial, but in reality it is the exploitation and oppression of black slaves, i.e. the proletariat, by the bourgeoisie represented by white slave owners. This exploitation reveals the evil essence of the primitive accumulation of bourgeois capital. The article presents a model diagram of this phenomenon as follows:

Figure 1: Surface Structure

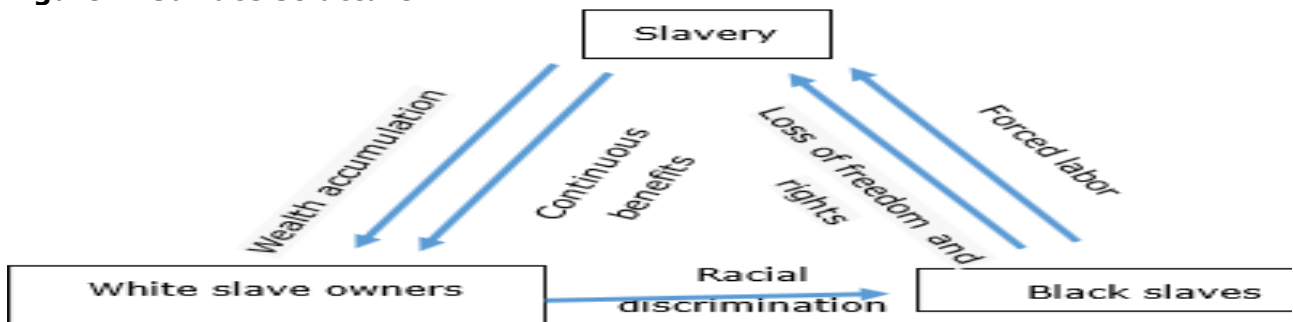


Figure 2: Deep Structure

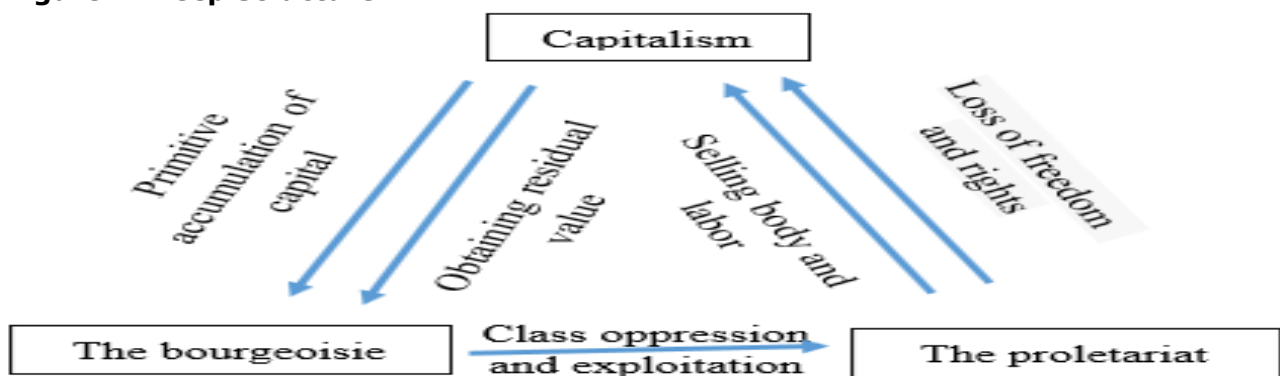
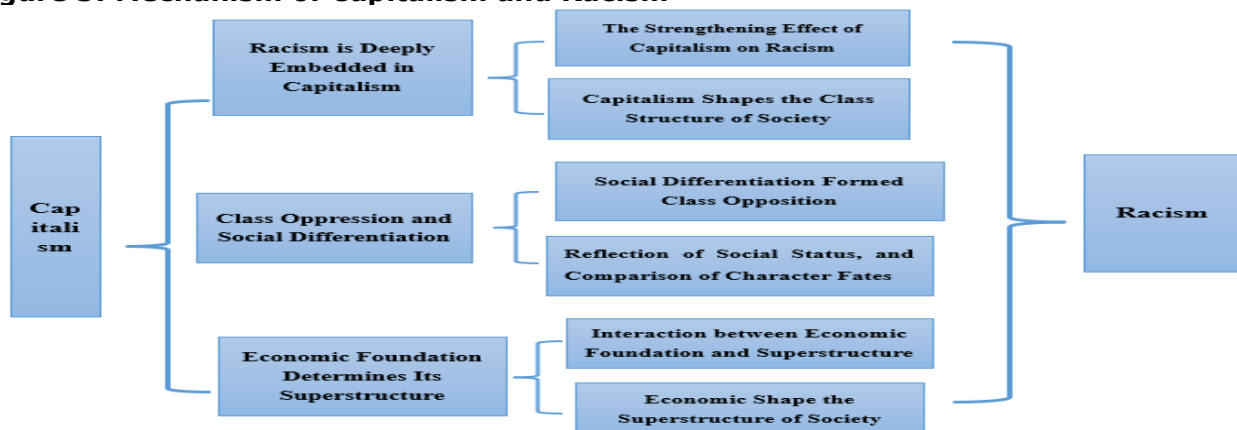


Figure 3: Mechanism of Capitalism and Racism



3. Literature Review

It is well acknowledged that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a remarkable representative of American realist literature. The novel makes a real and vivid description about the slavery system, especially the discrimination and oppression imposed upon slaves. For its great influence, the novel has been translated into many languages, thus the research on it has also yielded fruitful results.

After a thorough review, we find that most of the western scholars focus mainly on the author, the historical influence and character features of this novel. Reid (2008) wrote her essay *Racial Profiling: Visualizing Racial Science on the Covers of Uncle Tom's Cabin* and adopted the method of new historicism criticism theory. Reid analyzed the racial features embodied in the works, and delved into its history and cultural relations with the United States. Kevin Page (2009) analyzed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by using the method of sentimentalism. Page believed that the work expressed the idea that in Mrs. Stowe's story, every anti-slavery person sympathized and cared for the slaves. Hogan (2012) through the comparative analysis of different scholars' views to Harriet Beecher Stowe and characters portrayed in her work, drew a conclusion that Mrs. Stowe blackened black children in her book and thought that a white supremacist lived in Stowe's sub-consciousness. Besides, Brown (1969) believed that the thesis of *Uncle's Tom Cabin* was the evil of slavery, but its theme was something entirely separate, about the power of love. Bellin (1993) wrote that in its attack on slavery, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fluctuates between these two alternatives, dramatizing not only the struggle of humans seeking to respond to and resist the slave system, but also the struggle of humanity seeking to negotiate and comprehend its proper role in God's design. Simona Tamuli (2020) studied movie adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in order to show how themes change, character are dropped and new emphasize in laid on themes that may not have been anticipated in the narrative discourse of the novel.

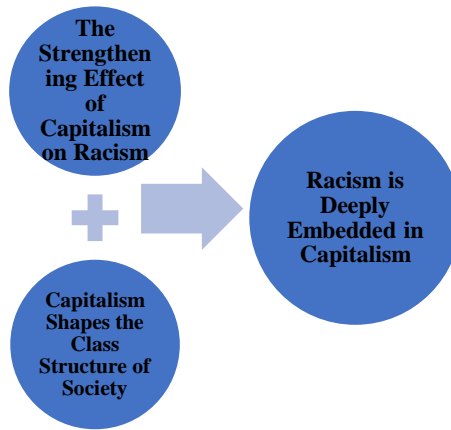
While in China, the researches on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* started late but still made great progress. The first research paper on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in China was published in 1962 by Professor Huang Jiade, from St. John's University. Most Chinese scholars focus on its historical influence, the author's ideology and images of the characters. Meng Fanmao (2010) used the method of social criticism to reveal the delicate relationship between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the reason of civil war. Qiu Aipin (2000) studied two female characters in the novel, the Eliza and Eva. Wu Yang (2010), from the perspective of the new Marxism ideology, analyzed how Mrs. Stowe idealized a mother to against slavery in her book, and concluded that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a book which was a literary work wrote for women and about women. Jin Li (2015) sought to give a comprehensive review of Stowe studies in the 21th-century America and shows that the novel, for its significance in the racial and gender issues in U.S. and Europe, is still occupying an important position in American literary criticism. Pan Shan (2022) explored the in-depth analysis of two typical characters in the work, St. Clare and Ophelia, attempting to explore the attitudes of white people in the South and North of the United States towards the issue of black slaves while seeking a historical literary quality.

To make a conclusion, many scholars have carried out a lot of researches from different point of views on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but seldom carries out studies with the Marxism theory so far. Therefore, launching studies on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from the perspective of Marxism theory is a new field of vision. Starting from the classic Marxism theory, this article deeply analyzes the cruel exploitation of black slaves under slavery in the 19th century American southern society, revealing the soil of racism under the legal cloak of slavery, the relationship between racism and capitalist class oppression, and advocating that only the proletariat and socialist revolution can ultimately solve the problem of racism.

3.1. The Social Mechanism for Capitalism to Maintain Racism

There is a complex relationship between capitalism and racism. Capitalism requires continuous acquisition of surplus value from the working class for social reproduction, as well as continuous exploitation of the proletariat. In class society, capitalism is clothed in the guise of racism, designed through a series of mechanisms to artificially solidify social classes, prevent class mobility, and maintain its dominant position through government policies, laws and regulations.

Figure 3



3.2. Racism is Deeply Embedded in Capitalism

In this chapter, the paper will explore how the capitalist system embeds racism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The author analyzes how capitalism shapes the class structure of society, making black slaves the property of the bourgeoisie, deprived of human rights and dignity. By analyzing the social status and economic situation of the characters, the paper will highlight the strengthening effect of capitalism on racism.

3.3. The Strengthening Effect of Capitalism on Racism

Uncle Tom's Cabin showcases how the capitalist system embeds and strengthens racism through multiple plots and characters. We will illustrate it in the following paragraph. The treatment of slaves as a kind of tradable property. Under the logic of capitalism, slaves are regarded as tradable property. Eliza and her son, hired by Haley, were treated as commodities, emphasizing the practice of slaves being sold as goods and highlighting the combination of slavery and capitalism. The inequality in economic status led the slave owner to view slaves as property and prioritize economic interests over racial equality, thereby strengthening racism. The exploitation of labor. Slave owners obtained great economic benefits by depriving slaves of their labor value which is a part of the logic of capitalist economy, thus exacerbating racism and belittling slaves as objects that exist solely for profit. Simon Legree was an extreme slave owner who was guided by pure economic interests and disregards the human rights and dignity of slaves. His actions highlighted the strengthening effect of capitalism on racism under the slave system, treating slaves as labor and property rather than humanity. The rationalization of racism. Racism in the slave system is often rationalized and strengthened by the capitalist system. In the novel, some characters and dialogues emphasize the concept of "black people are inferior to white people", which to some extent provides a rationalized excuse for exploitation and inequality, combining racism with economic interests.

The solidification of class. The capitalist system usually leads to class division in society, and under slavery, this division is strengthened into racial divisions. The class relationship between slave owners and slaves has been expanded into a form of racism, emphasizing the unequal status between black and white people. In summary, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* closely combines the economic logic of capitalism with racism, showcasing the role and influence of capitalist economy behind slavery. Economic interests and racial inequality are closely linked, and slaves are deprived of their human rights and dignity, becoming tradable labor in the capitalist economic system. This connection deeply reveals the complex relationship between the class structure and racism in society at that time. This combination exacerbates inequality and oppression under slavery, revealing the deterioration of racism under capitalist logic.

3.4. Capitalism Shapes the Class Structure of Society

Under the slave system in the southern United States, capitalism shaped the social class structure and made black slaves property of the bourgeoisie, deprived of human rights and dignity. The following is an analysis of this process:

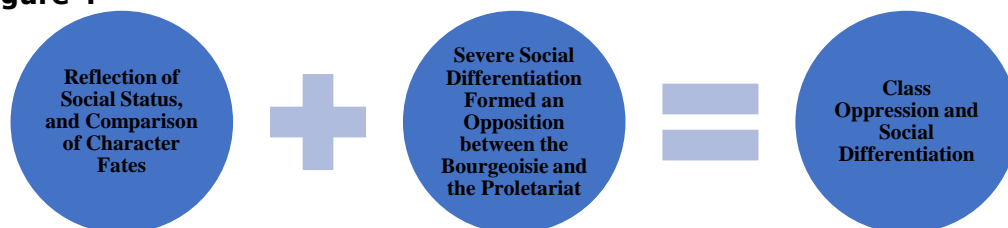
Exploitation guided by the pursuit of economic benefits. Capitalism regards labor as an exchangeable commodity, pursuing the maximization of surplus value and economic profits. In the novel, black slaves no longer retained their human rights and were regarded as tradable

labor commodities. In the entire chain of slavery, slaves will be deprived of their human attributes and given the attributes of things to become tradable commodities, thus passively becoming part of the capitalist economic system without the freedom of personal choice. The differentiation of social classes and the maintenance of inequality caused by the different economic and social status of slave owners and slaves. As a typical social phenomenon, under the capitalist system, social class differentiation is severe, especially the huge wealth gap. In the southern society, the slave owners firmly occupied the means of production and became the wealthy class of society, while black slaves became a vulnerable class at the bottom of society, causing social polarization. This class division in turn affects society, causing extreme poverty among black slaves and the loss of their most basic human rights and even the right to survival. Due to their lack of possession of social means of production, black slaves were unable to obtain legal status and ultimately became part of the property owned by the bourgeoisie. This concept is combined with the economic logic of capitalism, making slavery considered "reasonable" as a regular process of capitalist production.

Furthermore, black slaves under slavery did not have any personal rights. Capitalism makes property an important symbol of power and social status. Under the slavery system, black slaves were bought, sold, exchanged, and exploited, losing control of their own destiny, and they were forced to become proletarians. This led to the opposition between the bourgeoisie, namely the slave owners, and the proletariat, namely the black slaves. In short, the capitalist system under slavery shaped the social class structure, making black slaves property of the bourgeoisie, deprived of human rights and dignity, and placing them in a state of social inequality and oppression.

3.5. Class Oppression and Social Differentiation

Figure 4



3.6. Severe Social Differentiation Formed an Opposition between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat

By analyzing the slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and revealing the essence of capitalist racism based on Marxism, we can see that racism indeed leads to serious social polarization, forming the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The following are the key points to analyze from this perspective:

The first is the production relations and social differentiation under the capitalist production. Marxism believes that social structure is determined by social production relations. Under the slavery, the slave owners possess the means of production and wealth, while the slaves are forced to engage in labor, and created wealth for the ruling class of slave owners. Secondly, the analysis of the ownership of surplus value reveals that slave owners possess all surplus value for free, reflecting the essence of capitalist production relations under slavery. The slave owners could be regarded as the bourgeoisie, possessing means of production and wealth, and relying on slave labor to obtain profits. Slaves could only sell their labor to become the proletariat. This class opposition exacerbates social polarization.

Thirdly, the analysis of the interrelationship between the capitalist economic foundation and the superstructure. Marxism emphasizes that the economic foundation determines the superstructure. The economic foundation under slavery is the production relations of slavery, which directly shapes the superstructure, including the laws, ideologies, and culture of society. Maintaining racism and social inequality as a part of the superstructure is necessary for capitalism and the foundation for the continued existence of exploitation.

Finally, the exploration the manifestation of the contradictions in capitalist society, namely the potential of class struggle. Marxism believes that class struggle is the main driving

force for historical change in class society. In the novel, Uncle Tom, as a slave, although facing oppression, also exhibits a strong will and a desire for freedom. The class opposition and struggle under the slave system may have laid the foundation for social reform and proletarian liberation. From a Marxism perspective, the slavery system in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* led to profound social differentiation, forming an opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The production relations and class contradictions under the slave system provide profound explanations for the transformation of social history and the reshaping of social structure.

3.7. Interaction between Characters, Reflection of Social Status, and Comparison of Character Fates

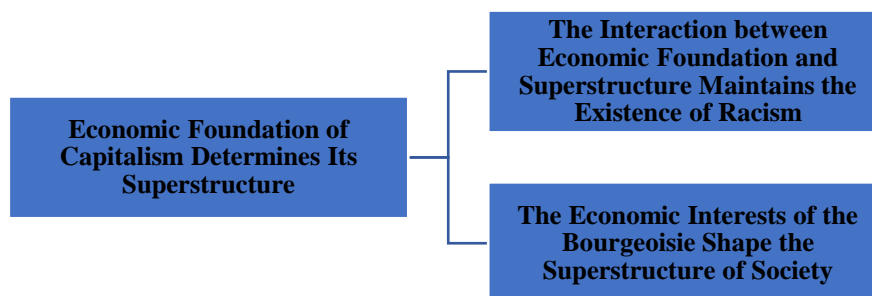
After a further analysis, by carefully exploring the interaction between the characters in the novel, the expression of different social statuses, and the comparison of their different fates, it is clear how class oppression further strengthens racism in the United States. Through the study of the characters and plot in the novel, we can confirm this hypothesis.

Firstly, there is a comparative study between the Mrs. Shelby and Tom. Mrs. Shelby is a slave owner with social power and wealth. Although she sometimes cares about Tom, she is still a slave owner who exploits Tom's labor. Due to different class positions, her so-called goodwill is only a hypocritical sympathy from the ruling class towards the oppressed working people, a continuation of oppression. Then there is the comparison between the cruel Legree and the slaves. In the novel, Simon Legree is a typical and extremely cruel slave owner. He regards slaves as commodities, a cheap and good labor commodity, and treats them as personal private property and tools of production. This class oppression further exacerbates racism and puts slaves in a crueler situation.

Furthermore, under the oppression of racism and the brutal rule of slave owners, slaves have no way to go and ultimately have to run away. In the novel, Eliza and George attempt to escape the cruel rule and pursue freedom and independence. What caused them to flee recklessly, of course, was the inevitable class oppression under the slave system. Racism and class oppression are intertwined, making them objects of deprivation of freedom, reflecting the serious consequences of class oppression. By comparing the different social statuses and fates of these characters in the novel, we can see how class oppression further exacerbates the inequality in American society, which gives the bourgeoisie a transcendent position. To maintain this position, the bourgeoisie will inevitably seek to legalize racism. The power and exploitation of the slave owner bourgeoisie have made racial inequality more apparent, and the social status and fate of black slaves are constrained by the bourgeoisie, forming a vicious cycle of racism. This situation highlights the close relationship between class oppression and racism.

3.8. Economic Foundation Determines Superstructure

Figure 5



3.8.1. Capitalism Economic Foundation Determines Its Superstructure and Maintains the Existence of Racism

According to the classic theory of Marxism, the interaction between the economic foundation of capitalism and the superstructure is a key driving force for the social structure and cultural phenomena of capitalism. In American society, racism has its rich soil in the economic foundation of capitalism. As a social ideology that upholds bourgeois rule, racism belongs to the superstructure of the bourgeoisie and is a discourse construction that upholds the interests of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the superstructure formed by discourse construction that includes racism continues to strengthen the domination of the capitalist economic foundation, thereby continuously influencing and maintaining racism.

We will first examine the composition of the capitalist economic foundation. In the early days of the founding of the United States, the economy of the South mainly relies on plantations and cotton cultivation. Slavery becomes the cornerstone of maintaining this economic foundation. The economic foundation includes production methods, property relations, and the distribution of means of production. Under the slavery, the slave owner class control the means of production, while black slaves are deprived of ownership of the means of production and labor. This economic foundation places black slaves at the bottom of society, becoming property of the bourgeoisie, and a breeding ground for the birth of racism.

Secondly, the role of the capitalist superstructure. The superstructure of capitalist society includes laws, political systems, cultural concepts, and ideologies. Under the slavery, the law regards black slaves as property and deprived them of their human rights. The political and social system of capitalism is based on racism, adhering to slavery and class oppression. Cultural concepts and ideologies have strengthened the existence of racism. The interaction between economic foundation and superstructure makes racism a part of society, continuously maintaining and strengthening the legitimacy of racism. The economic foundation of capitalism determines the class structure of its society, and the superstructure built on it maintains and strengthens this class oppression and racism through laws, policies, and culture. Racism is rationalized in the superstructure and becomes an ideology in society.

In capitalist society, racism can only be terminated by class struggle. Marxism believes that class struggle is the direct driving force behind the historical transformation of class society. In American history, the struggle and resistance of black slaves and other oppressed groups have formed a part of social reform. These class struggles attempt to change the economic foundation and superstructure of capitalism, in order to completely bury racism and social inequality. In summary, the interrelationship between the economic foundation and the superstructure plays a crucial role in explaining the issue of racism in the United States. Slavery, as the cornerstone of American capitalist economy, shapes the laws, politics, and culture in the superstructure and maintains the existence of racism. Understanding this interrelationship helps to recognize the root causes of racism and how to achieve social reform and equality by changing the economic foundation and superstructure.

3.8.2. The Economic Interests of the Bourgeoisie Shape the Superstructure of Society

When analyzing how the economic interests of the bourgeoisie shape the superstructure of society, we can focus on the American social context under slavery and how the influence of the bourgeoisie is reflected in laws, moral concepts, and ideologies. Here are some key points of analysis:

The legal system. The bourgeoisie relies on the law to maintain and strengthen their economic interests under the slave system. For example, the law treats black slaves as property and grants ownership to their owners. This legal system ensures that the slave owner can legally deprive slaves of their freedom, human rights, and dignity, thereby safeguarding the economic interests of the bourgeoisie. The shaping of moral concepts. The bourgeoisie has also shaped a set of moral concepts in the superstructure that are in line with its own economic interests. Under slavery, this moral concept rationalized slavery and viewed black slaves as "inferior" to meet the exploitation needs of the bourgeoisie. These concepts have spread throughout society, leading people to accept racism as a legitimate moral viewpoint.

The influence of ideology. The bourgeoisie influences people's thoughts and beliefs through ideology to maintain its economic status. Under the slavery, ideology rationalized the power and privileges of slave owners and regarded the status of black slaves as unshakable. This ideology strengthens racism and social inequality by promoting concepts such as white superiority. The influence of interest groups. The bourgeoisie usually forms interest groups and maintains its own interests through political and social influence. Under the slavery, the slave owner formed such interest groups, which ensured that the formulation of laws and policies was in line with their economic interests by manipulating government institutions and decision-making, thereby consolidating the existence of racism. Through these perspectives, we can see how the economic interests of the bourgeoisie profoundly shape the superstructure of society, including laws, moral concepts, and ideologies. This shaping further exacerbates racism, rationalizing and strengthening racial inequality at all levels of society. Understanding this

interaction is of great significance for understanding the root causes of racism and how to initiate social reform to achieve social equality.

4. The Possibility of Resistance and Liberation

4.1. Enlightenment of Resistance and Liberation on Realizing Social Equality and Justice

We will analyze the rebellious behavior of different characters in the novel and explore the possibility of eliminating racism through class struggle and social reform. In the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the resistance actions of different characters highlight the importance of class struggle and social reform in eliminating racism. The following are supporting materials:

Uncle Tom, as the protagonist, rebelled to maintain his dignity. Although Tom is a slave in the novel, he has a noble soul that still maintains dignity and perseverance. Tom indirectly demonstrated the slave's rebellious consciousness by demonstrating noble character and unwillingness to compromise his own values, which is something the slave owners feared. The flames of struggle could not be extinguished. Unlike the protagonist Uncle Tom's forbearance, Eliza and George in the novel choose to flee, showing their direct resistance to oppression. Their escape is not only a protest against racism, but also a resistance and struggle against economic and social oppression. Eliza and George ultimately manage to escape to a happy and free country, demonstrating the ultimate result of their resistance.

Class struggle also awakes the attention of some slave owners to the tragic situation of slaves under racism. Some white characters in the novel, such as Eva and St. Clare, express concerns about the slave situation and attempt to change social reality. St. Clare believed that racism was unfair and unethical, and attempted to confront it in his own way. Although these efforts in the novel did not bring about a complete change, they quickly ignited the flames of slavery and ultimately imposed a heavy blow to racism in American society. Through these characters and plots, the novel conveys a message that class struggle is an important way to promote social reform and eliminate racism. People of different classes and races can unite to oppose inequality and oppression. Social reform, including legal, political, and cultural changes, can break the structure of racism and promote greater equality and justice. Struggle for survival and change provide hope and direction for eliminating racism.

4.2. The Upcoming Social Reform in Addressing Racism in the United States

According to the classic theory of Marxism, social reform is not only a change in social systems and production methods, but also an accompanying ideological change. In other words, when society undergoes changes, there will also be sharp changes in the field of ideology. The Marxism perspective provides a profound understanding of social reform, with its core ideology emphasizing the relationship between class struggle, economic foundation, and superstructure, as well as how to achieve greater equality and justice through social reform. To address racial issues, we must start with economic inequality and change the unequal economic status of oppressed classes. In class society, the economic foundation determines everything, and economic inequality is the root cause of social inequality. Therefore, in American society, the essence of racism is a system construction that continuously maintains the transcendent economic status of the bourgeoisie, thereby maintaining economic inequality. So, by reducing economic inequality and providing equal opportunities and resources for all members of society, racial inequality could be alleviated.

Solving the inequality in capitalist society under racism also requires all proletarians to unite and form a collective force. Marxism emphasizes the unified protest of the proletariat, which has a deep social foundation in the United States where racism is prevalent. The racism and inequality in American society affect various social classes. Through the unity of different races and social classes, the collective force of the entire proletariat can be formed, becoming an important force in promoting social reform.

To eliminate inequality and racism, it is necessary to reform the discourse system of the ruling class, that is, to transform the superstructure. Marxism emphasizes the decisive role of the economic foundation on the superstructure, while also recognizing the counterproductive effect of the superstructure on the economic foundation. The bourgeoisie has established a series of political and legal systems to ensure the continuation of racism. So transforming the superstructure of bourgeois society, changing the legal system and political governance system,

can provide guarantees for racial equality. By ensuring equal application of the law and eradicating the soil of racism, the goal of establishing a more just society can be achieved. However, it should be noted that the racial issues in American society are complex, including multiple aspects such as history, culture, and social psychology. Social reform is a long-term and complex process. The Marxism perspective provides a framework for thinking about social reform, focusing on the economic foundation, the collective efforts of the proletariat, and the transformation of the superstructure. It has certain guiding significance for solving the long-standing racial problems in American society.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example and, from a Marxism perspective, delves into how the capitalist system plays a role in the issue of racism in the United States, deepening our understanding of racism in the United States, and exploring its social roots through the novel's characters, plot, and themes. By analyzing the characters, economic structure, and social relationships in the novel, we find that the existence of the capitalist system is an important cause of racism, and to some extent, it maintains and exacerbates racism. The pursuit of profit maximization in capitalist economy may lead to economic inequality, which is closely related to racial issues in the history of the United States. The existence of slavery and capitalism together provided soil for racism. The economic interests of the bourgeoisie can lead to the intensification of racism, which in turn maintains social class inequality. The economic foundation of capitalism shapes the laws, political systems, and cultural concepts in the upper echelons of bourgeois society, which contributes to the existence of racism. By reinterpreting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through Marxism, we can gain a deeper understanding of the root causes of racism in the United States and reveal the relationship between racism, socio-economic structure, and class contradictions. This helps us to see the complexity of racial issues and provide more comprehensive thinking and methods for eliminating racism and inequality in the future. At the same time, it can also enrich the understanding of the application and influence of Marxism analysis in other literary works.

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