

Compare the ways in which the texts explore the effects of racial prejudice.

Brimming with death and anguish, Fred D'Aguiar's novel The Longest Memory written in 1994 and the 2014 play Black Diggers by Tom Wright both are poignantly effective in portraying the painful and vicious societies in which racism and brutal treatment, as well as prejudice and sheer inequality are prevalent. Both texts are set in different countries under different timelines, and thus depict the consequences of heavy societal racism and prejudice in varying ways, whether they be systemic and subtle, or more violent and obvious. Nonetheless, D'Aguiar and Wright both promulgate the idea that entrenched racism is not merely physically harmful, but emotionally also.

D'Aguiar and Wright both demonstrate that the slavery industry and the treatment of Indigenous Australians respectively are built on a foundation of white supremacy, an intention of creating a division based on social status and race. D'Aguiar presents these ideas primarily through the main protagonist Whitechapel. Through his position as an African-American slave on a cotton plantation, Whitechapel is assigned little power and status. This is made evident early on in the text where he pens the tetracolon climax: 'I had no name. I was just boy, mule, nigger, slave...'. The ascending nature of the statement depicts being a slave as the worst label from the series due to its placement within the list as last. Thus, D'Aguiar elucidates that the racial prejudice towards a slave is seen as worse than being likened to an animal, or defamed with such pejorative language. However, in Wright's Black Diggers subjugation is seen as a product solely based upon race rather than social standing. In the opening scene, an Indigenous infant is likened to 'an abandoned calf' and 'the beast in question'. By employing this zoomorphism, Wright demonstrates the total disregard for Aboriginal Australians as agent human beings, while revealing the systemic racial discrimination ingrained in society. This is later epitomised when Nigel advertises the film Tarzan. The series uttered, 'The ape man. Tarzan. Ape. Man. Lowland Gorilla. From Zanzibar. Ape. Man' symbolises the apparent racial othering that is still evident post-war. That Nigel states these labels himself displays his resignation to his fate as a subject of racial prejudice and the inescapable nature of the pervasive prejudice based upon race in Australia.

Ongoing racial prejudice takes an emotional toll on both the Indigenous soldiers' and African-Americans' lives. In The Longest Memory, the traumatic consequence of racist violence is examined through the whipping of Chapel. Whitechapel, at the loss of his son, wants to 'forget [the memory] as hard as [he] can' as it hurts 'like crying'. By employing this simile, D'Aguiar through Whitechapel's interior monologue suggests that racism has capability to imbue one with such a great deal of misery due to the reference to the distressing nature of 'crying'. Such trauma is also evident across generations of individuals. The Great Grandmother states that her 'dream of Africa' is 'gone' as a result of watching how Chapel's beating 'exacted as much of a toll on his aged body as his son's', emphasising how brutal racial treatment has the effect of reducing hope in others in seeing a life without prejudice. Likewise, Wright in his play suggests that it is the survivors who suffer the most at the hands of prejudice. Many soldiers

during the war experience a life without racism, where 'no one said a bloody word about my skin', however this equality fails to remain on the soldiers' return to Australia. This systemic racism results in Nigel's prestigious position in society becoming a 'sad figure' with a tendency to alcoholism as he takes a 'surreptitious swig' from a bottle. Both texts thus elucidate the potential of prejudice and racial discrimination to undermine hopes and dreams to create a state of misery and devastation.

Violent, brutal and callous acts of prejudice are pervasive in both the American society as well as the Australian environment. In 'The Longest Memory', these acts of racism are often highly cruel and physical, and are normalised and accepted throughout society. Sanders Senior is casual in his intention to punish slaves in subordination. In his personal diary, he expresses his urge to 'swing [his] stick on the back of [the black slaves'] lazy legs with force'. This view of corporal punishment is also shared by Mr Whitechapel, who advocates using 'the whip or stick' on slaves. D'Aguiar therefore emphasises that discipline of misdemeanours is carried out through physical acts. Where D'Aguiar explores the physical effects of prejudice, Wright's play echoes more systematic and ingrained acts of racism purely based of bias and physical appearance, yet with equally devastating effects. Ern, in attempting to enlist in the army, is initially rejected on the basis of 'Deficient Physique' caused by '[Strong] Aboriginal Appearance'. This thinly veiled excuse exemplifies that rejection occurred purely on grounds of racial ideals, with no consideration of dedication, physical capability and strength.

Fred D'Aguiar's The Longest Memory and Tom Wright's Black Diggers examine racial prejudice and the effects it has on the daily lives of the black slaves and Indigenous soldiers respectively. The stage directions of the play and the imagery of the novel both work towards invoking poignancy in the readers for the pervasive bigotry and subsequently, mental anguish experienced. Although at times physical torture elicits opposing outcomes, it ultimately distresses the protagonists and acts as a catalyst for life-long pain.