

## THE LONGEST MEMORY & BLACK DIGGERS

**Both *The Longest Memory* and *Black Diggers* show that the dominant social order is always hard to overthrow. Discuss.**

Fred D'Aguiar's novel *The Longest Memory* and Tom Wright's play *Black Diggers* both illustrate events of profound injustice towards the minority. Living under a higher ruling echelon who institutionalised racism made it much more difficult for those wanting to make a change to overthrow them. Both texts highlight how discrimination was perpetuated through the communities and how the superior social order violated the rights of the inferior race to uphold their power. The dispossession and injustice made the victims weaker lowering the chance that they overruled the dominant individuals and the superior failing to overcome their struggles to change existing orders. On the contrary the authors also portray scenarios in which rules and regulations are modified when the minority are needed in the community. Although the writers display that overthrowing the dominant order is challenging they highlight that sometimes they themselves do, and in order to maintain new changes those who acknowledge its importance should show their support.

Both texts showcase worlds where violence and subjugation are prevailing, resulting in the oppression of the minority. The Virginian ideology of slavery employed physical punishment 'in the hope that other slaves will behave well out of fear' when they witness the outcomes of trying to overthrow existing social norms. This fear is bound to arise in individuals and destroy chances of hope and joy, presented as punishments changed 'children's faces from glee to a stony obedience'. D'Aguiar portrays this notion through Whitechapel as he has accepted his fate and teaches younger Negro slaves to do so too. He has forgotten whether he smiled and begins to see himself through the eyes of others, highlighted through the tetracolon climax; 'I had no name. I was just boy, mule, nigger, slave'. The lack of hope allows the dominant social order to prosper and D'Aguiar presents that without the power and courage to challenge, the superior will maintain dominance. Further, Sanders Senior argues 'with Mr Whitechapel about the treatment of his slaves', trying to imply that they should be provided with less rations and breaks because 'what good is a fat slave to anyone but himself'. However, he fails to do so and is threatened to get married or be eradicated from the plantation. Likewise, Wright portrays racism solely due to racial differences rather than social standings. When Indigenous soldiers returned from war the dragery and oppression continued, being ignored and left homeless, their land being snatched away to provide for settlement plots. Mick tries to fight back saying that their mentality is 'ridiculous', however is overthrown by the dominant and embraces that the war for them is 'never going to end'. Harry sacrifices his life for the country but the superior existing order fails to change, highlighting how difficult it is to overcome social norms. Although both writers display that the dominant norm is very hard to overthrow as individuals facing violence and subjugation lose hope and joy, D'Aguiar however displays that the discrimination can lead to consequential change in the victim and influence them to teach others to lose hope as well. Wright however displays that dispossession gave the community a chance to try and present their importance regardless not successfully overthrowing the upper echelon.

Society impacts one's social standings and how they deal with obstacles regarding the social orders in the community. Mr Whitechapel although believed that slaves did not deserve to be

violated as they were 'miserable enough without...unnecessary hardships', fails to stand up for Whitechapel's rights after staying so loyal. He also believes that teaching slaves literacy is the 'gravest injustice', rather than utilising his power to overthrow these dominant social orders he struggles with what to stand for; moral standings or business. Moreover, Lydia failing to reveal her affair with Chapel and invite her mother to her trip to the Northern states of America, highlights how even stronger individuals are afraid to present their perspective to society and revolutionise the way of life. It is foreshadowed through the stars 'grow[ing] dim, then pale', how Lydia's attempt to alter the dominant existing affair is unsuccessful, D'Aguiar portraying that to change the higher order the whole of society must change. Likewise, Wright depicts through the interference between Ern and the soldier in the dark, how naive everyone was regarding the Aboriginals. The voice in the dark is surprised after 'his pipe, briefly illuminat[ed] [Ern's] face', displaying that although during World War I white soldiers were more accepting of them, they still found it challenging to picture a dark bloke with them in a pub. Furthermore, the exchange between Laurie and the British Captain, highlights that religion links these two men although little else in their lives. However the verse 'And he is afraid and arose a ran for his life', presents the life of the Indigenous soldiers, who run from home in order to get away from the horrific emotional scars. The British Captain replies with the verse that 'I am not better than my father' as a portrayal of the Europeans, foreshadowing that past social orders will return. Both writers elucidate that even for the higher ranked individuals in society that hold opposing views to the dominating social order how they struggle to change their habits. Wright, portrays that although some individuals may have positive experiences with Indigenous soldiers the dominant social order can only be overcome if they are solely expected rather than for their sacrifices. D'Aguiar however portrays that the upper echelon are influenced by the society and even if the society does not change, one individual makes a great impact.

Rules and regulations are often modified to suit the circumstances regardless, going against the dominant social order. Ern, Bob and Norm signing up for war is a prominent example of when the administration of Australia disregarded the social hatred towards the Aboriginals. The Australian government needed extra soldiers and viewed that as long as they can 'fire a gun and stand in the sun' their skin does not matter. Moreover, though the RSL secretary who highlighted that some European Australians 'don't see the skin, [they] see the service' portrays the positive individuals in society who altered the status quo to support their ethical standings. Wright suggests that normalised social order can be dominated if individuals are powerful enough to take a stand. Correspondingly, D'Aguiar utilises the ideology that slaves were to be left illiterate and have little knowledge in any department is overthrown when Chapel runs away. Whitechapel knows that his son has gone to find 'paradise, on earth', Mr Whitechapel imploring him to reveal the details. In this scenario the irony of the principle is questioned and whether anyone is well off with uneducated individuals, whether inferior or not. Furthermore, Mr Whitechapel ordering Sanders Senior to apologies to Whitechapel and Cook displays how he does not support the man in the same race but the one that is equivalent to an animal. It is implied that one's loyalty can influence one to neglect the social orders. Both novelist and playwright highlight that during times of desperate need of the minority, rules can be altered as well as when one has been extremely loyal, Wright demonstrates that dominant societal ways are altered to take advantage of the other. He showcases that specific individual have the courage to challenge the dominant standings as they are.