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Socio-Economic Struggles: Unmasking Power Dynamics, Racial Discrimination, and Historical Realities in 'Maria Clara at Ibarra'

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Abstract

This study delves into the socio-political intricacies of the Spanish colonization era in the Philippines through a comprehensive analysis of the television series "Maria Clara at Ibarra." Employing Historical and Marxist lenses, the research unveils systemic inequalities, racial discrimination, and power dynamics prevalent during that historical period. By dissecting episodes and incorporating theoretical frameworks, the analysis sheds light on the oppressive nature of the friars, the struggles faced by the lower class, and the catalyzing impact of socio-economic conflicts. This exploration not only enhances historical understanding but also prompts a critical examination of contemporary societal issues. The study underscores the enduring relevance of historical injustices and the need for continued efforts towards social justice. It recommends future research that bridges historical analyses with present-day implications, fostering a holistic understanding of persistent socio-economic challenges and encouraging proactive measures for a more equitable society.

Keywords: Spanish colonization, Socio-economic conflicts, Racial discrimination, Power dynamics, Marxist literary analysis

Introduction

The passage of time and the influence of technological advancements often cast a shadow over the relevance of historical narratives, with younger generations sometimes neglecting the profound lessons embedded in the past (Iglesias, 2022). This tendency is evident in the contemporary reception of Dr. Jose P. Rizal's seminal novels, "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo," which, despite being mandated subjects under Republic Act No. 1425, often fail to resonate with students beyond recognizing Rizal as the national hero. The challenge of instilling an appreciation for historical significance becomes the focal point when exploring innovative educational approaches. Visual mediums, particularly

films, have proven to be potent tools in engaging diverse learning styles and enhancing comprehension (Buckingham, 2003).

GMA Network's television series, "Maria Clara at Ibarra," stands as a modern attempt to bridge the gap between historical literature and contemporary audiences. Integrating the "isekai" genre, the series immerses a character from the present, Klay, into the intricacies of Rizal's narrative universe. This narrative experiment not only sparks intrigue among viewers but also provides a unique platform for evaluating the series' effectiveness in communicating historical and Marxist themes. By navigating Klay's journey through the 105-episode series, viewers witness her interactions

with characters and socio-economic structures reflective of the Spanish era in the Philippines.

To underscore the significance of this analysis, this paper employs a dual lens—Marxist and Historical. The Marxist perspective facilitates an examination of class struggles and socioeconomic dynamics depicted in the series, while the Historical lens assesses the accuracy and relevance of the narrative portrayal of colonial-era Philippines. The goal is to unravel nuanced insights into how the series captures and communicates the complex tapestry of historical and Marxist themes to a contemporary audience.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study involved a historical and Marxist analysis of the TV series "Maria Clara at Ibarra." The research process began with an extensive literature review, incorporating insights from A. Leverkuhn's work on Historical Criticism (2023), and foundational Marxist theories by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, particularly elucidated in "The Communist Manifesto" (1848), and Georg Lukács' perspectives on literature reflecting society. The selected episodes were subjected to systematic analysis, ensuring historical accuracy by referencing credible sources such as Macarayan (2016) and scrutinizing socio-political depictions during the Spanish colonial era. Insights from Georg Lukács and Frederick Jameson guided the application of Marxist literary criticism to discern class struggle dynamics, social hierarchy, and power imbalances within the series.

Critical discourse analysis of dialogues and character actions was conducted, following guidelines from Buckingham (2003) on media literacy. Ethical considerations, including historical accuracy and cultural representation, guided the analysis process. Comparative assessments with the source material, Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere," were integral to evaluating fidelity to historical and social aspects. Viewer perspectives, gathered from online reviews and academic reflections, enriched the study's depth. The synthesis of findings resulted in nuanced conclusions regarding the series' effectiveness in portraying historical realities and societal issues, providing a robust foundation for future research in media studies (Leverkuhn, 2023; Marx & Engels, 1848; Lukács, n.d.; Buckingham, 2003; Macarayan, 2016).

Discussion of Findings

A Critical Analysis of 'Maria Clara at Ibarra' Through the Lens of Historical Criticism

Embarking on a journey through time, this analysis delves into the nuanced historical nuances portrayed in 'Maria Clara at Ibarra,' examining the series through the lens of historical criticism. By scrutinizing the narrative's fidelity to historical events and its interpretative engagement with the past, we aim to unravel the complexities woven into this modern adaptation of Jose Rizal's timeless classics.

Exploring History in 'Maria Clara at Ibarra': A 19th Century Philippines Retrospective

In examining the historical aspects of GMA's series, "Maria Clara at Ibarra," historical criticism, as elucidated by Laverkuhn (2023), involves a comprehensive evaluation of a work within the broader context of human history. This form of analysis, often termed "higher criticism," entails comparing works from the same era and drawing on additional sources to understand how a piece engaged with its historical milieu. Inspired by Jose Rizal's novels, "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo," the series unfolds in the 19th

century Philippines, capturing the political and societal nuances of the time.

While Rizal's novels are fictional, they are grounded in the harsh realities of 19th-century Philippine history, exposing the injustices under Spanish rule. "Maria Clara at Ibarra" serves as a reinterpretation of these literary classics, with Annette Gozon-Valdez, RJ Nuevas, and Suzette Doctolero adapting the narratives for a contemporary audience. The series, by transporting the main character, Klay, into the world of "Noli Me Tangere," offers a glimpse into 1884 colonial society, effectively portraying the stark differences between the 19th and 21st centuries.

The series becomes a lens through which viewers witness not only the evolution of societal norms but also the challenges and horrors of Spanish colonization. It adeptly highlights disparities in dress, behavior, limited education access, and political structures between the two centuries. The thematic representation of historical events in "Maria Clara at Ibarra" underscores the series' commitment to conveying the difficulties faced during the Spanish era and the subsequent societal transformations resulting from various colonial influences.

The accuracy of historical representation in the series becomes a critical aspect, as it draws from the inspiration of Rizal's novels. The themes presented in "Maria Clara at Ibarra" aim to authentically reflect the historical events that unfolded in the 19th century, providing viewers with a nuanced understanding of the societal shifts during that period.

Friar Dominance and Oppression: Unveiling the Power Dynamics

During the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines, the friars held substantial power within the Roman Catholic Church, actively promoting Catholicism across the archipelago. Integral to the Spanish government's control over the local population, the friars' influence resulted in the exploitation and oppression of Filipinos, who were subject to their dominion due to the extensive control they wielded over vast lands.

The dramatic narratives vividly portray the far-reaching power of the friars, exemplified in dialogues such as, "Dalawa lang po and pinakamakapangyarihan, una ang alferes, at ang pinkamakapangyarihan sa lahat at nakalaban ni Don Rafael, ang praile" (Episode 14). This quote highlights the hierarchical power structure, emphasizing the friars' unmatched authority, surpassing even that of local officials. The narrative suggests that the friars possessed the capability to either bring heaven or hell to the people, showcasing their influence over both spiritual and earthly matters.

Moreover, Crisostomo Ibarra's statement, "Ang totoo niyay mas lalong katakutan ang mga praile at ang mga makapangyarihang mapang-abuso" (Episode 9), underscores the pervasive fear instilled by the friars. Their power extended beyond religious matters, becoming synonymous with abuse and intimidation. These statements collectively underscore the oppressive nature of the friars' rule and the climate of fear they created.

To delve deeper into the abuse and mistreatment faced by Filipinos under friar rule, specific instances from the drama will be examined. These quotes, extracted from Episodes 14 and 9 respectively, shed light on the harsh realities endured by the populace during this tumultuous period, portraying the friars as

formidable figures with the ability to dictate both the spiritual and temporal aspects of Filipino life.

Friar Manipulation and Coercion: Unraveling Ideological Control

In Episode 5, Padre Damaso's sermon during the mass serves as a stark illustration of the friars' exploitation of their influence to instill their ideologies. He warns that those who defy priestly authority, like Don Rafael, will face divine punishment, branding dissenters as "Heretics" and "Filibusters" (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 5). A parallel scenario unfolds in Episode 13, where Padre Salvi, upon learning of Ibarra and Maria Clara's relationship, condemns Ibarra as a "demon" with sinister intentions (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 13).

This manipulation echoes the Spanish colonial strategy to not only conquer lands but also colonize the minds of Filipinos (Schumacher, 1991). The friars sought to emphasize the supremacy of Spanish influence and propagate Catholicism, concealing their ulterior motives of economic exploitation and territorial claims. Such manipulative tactics were intertwined with efforts to denigrate Filipino cultures, traditions, and beliefs, asserting the superiority of Spanish culture through education (Constantino, 1978).

The Spanish friars enforced compliance with their ideologies through various coercive measures. Intimidation tactics involved threats against families, leveraging fear to secure obedience. Punishment methods included imprisonment, with dissenters labeled as "erehe" (heretics) and "pilibustero" (filibuster) to justify oppressive actions. Public displays of physical abuse and torture served as spectacles, intended to instill fear and compel conformity among the masses.

Power Dynamics and Cruelty: Padre Damaso's Dominance and Padre Salvi's Abuse

In 'Maria Clara at Ibarra,' the portrayal of authority and brutality unfolds through the characters of Padre Damaso and Padre Salvi. Padre Damaso, holding a position of religious influence, exploits his power to manipulate Santiago, showcasing the hierarchy that places the friars at the pinnacle of authority (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 8). His passionate control over Santiago illustrates how even wealth and affluence can be subjugated by the clergy's dominant position.

In Episode 8, Padre Damaso's reaction to Maria Clara's visit to San Diego unveils his vindictiveness, declaring, "Tignan lang natin kung sino ang mas makapangyarihan" (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 8). He further threatens Santiago with the fate of Don Rafael if he dares to oppose him, exemplifying the friar's authoritarian demeanor and manipulation of power dynamics.

Meanwhile, the abuse perpetrated by Padre Salvi on brothers Basilio and Crispin exposes the harsh realities faced by many Filipinos during the Spanish colonial period. The sacristans endure physical and emotional torment under Padre Salvi's wrath, as illustrated in Episode 11 when he violently punishes them for falling asleep during their chores (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 11). In a chilling foreshadowing moment, Padre Salvi's threat in Episode 17 foretells the tragic fate that awaits Crispin, mirroring events from the original novel where the character succumbs to the friar's beatings (GMA's "Maria Clara at Ibarra," Episode 17).

This narrative not only sheds light on historical instances of child labor and abuse but also underscores the poignant irony that a man of God inflicts such cruelty. Drawing parallels between the characters' ordeals and the harsh socio-economic conditions during colonization, the series unearths a painful reflection of the hardships endured by Filipinos under the grip of religious authority.

Education Deprivation: A Catalyst for Colonial Subjugation

In the backdrop of 'Maria Clara at Ibarra,' the series illuminates a painful chapter in Philippine history where education, a gateway to enlightenment and progress, was systematically withheld from the majority. The ilustrados, a privileged few like Jose Rizal, had access to formal education, but for the masses, it remained an unattainable luxury due to stringent restrictions imposed by the Spanish authorities (Mojares, 2006).

The Spanish government's adamant opposition to the establishment of Filipino-run schools was a deliberate tactic to maintain control and authority over the populace (Scott, 1994). As expressed in the series, the term "mangmang" (ignorant) encapsulates the plight of the uneducated Filipinos, rendering them unaware of their exploitation by the friars and the larger colonial apparatus (Schumacher, 1991). The lack of formal education left the majority of the population devoid of essential skills and knowledge needed to uplift their lives and communities. The educational landscape of the time heavily favored religious readings, Spanish language, and culture, neglecting the genuine needs and aspirations of Filipinos. The limited access to education became a strategic tool for the Spanish to perpetuate their rule for 333 years (Ileto, 1998). This is succinctly captured in the statement, "Hanggat walang nakakapag-aral na kaparis ni Crisostomo Ibarra, walang mag-aaklas laban sa atin" (EP 9), underscoring the correlation between education and the potential for resistance.

The deliberate restriction of educational opportunities is further highlighted in the statement of a teacher in San Diego (Ep 15), revealing the friars' agenda to limit education to religious instruction, suppressing any potential for broader enlightenment (Agoncillo, 1990). Jose Rizal's belief in the transformative power of education is reflected in Crisostomo Ibarra's dream of establishing a school in San Diego, echoing the sentiments of his father, Don Rafael. These nuanced portrayals in 'Maria Clara at Ibarra' align with historical realities, as the Spanish authorities aimed to keep Filipinos in the dark to perpetuate their control. By weaving these narratives, the series not only exposes the systemic denial of education but also pays homage to the visionaries who saw education as a beacon for national awakening and liberation.

Racial Discrimination: The Subjugation of Filipinos

The 333-year Spanish colonization of the Philippines cast a long shadow of racial discrimination, as vividly portrayed in 'Maria Clara at Ibarra.' The derogatory term "Indios" used by 16th to 19th-century Spaniards to label native Malays or the impoverished Filipinos reflects the deeply entrenched caste system that perpetuated discrimination and oppression (Retana, 1906). The racial hierarchy accentuated a stark contrast between the 'more desirable and superior' peninsulares, people of pure Spanish descent born in Spain, and the Insulares or Filipinos, born in the Philippines but considered inferior. This mindset fueled discrimination against the native population, evident in Noli Me Tangere and perpetuated in the series (Ileto, 1979).

In a poignant statement by Crisostomo Ibarra (Episode 4), "Wala paring pinagbago rito, Agosto. Ang mga pobrang tindiro ay ganun parin ang pamumuhay hanggang ngayon," the persistence of discrimination reflects the absence of progress and freedom for the natives. Episode 5 further highlights racial categorization, with workers being addressed as "indio" and "mestizas," reinforcing stereotypes associated with negativity and servitude. A flashback in Episode 5 unveils the brutality faced by native Filipinos, where a high-ranking man physically abuses a native child, employing derogatory terms like "Bobong Indio" and "Lak isa yalaw." This violence, tolerated by guards and officials, exemplifies the impunity granted based on racial hierarchy. Don Rafael's imprisonment and demise also carry racial undertones despite his high status, underscoring the systemic prejudice.

Padre Salvi's discriminatory actions (Episode 13) showcase the misuse of power based on race, where he intimidates and threatens a woman, labeling her "India," "erehe," and "bruha." Such acts underscore how racial prejudice permeated social interactions, with frailes exploiting their positions for unchecked dominance. Quoted statements like "Tama lang ang sinasabi ng mga praile, na likas na tamad lang mga Indio kayat sila'y naghihirap" (Fidel, Ep 7) and Padre Damaso's condescending remarks (Ep 15) reveal the pervasive belief that natives are inherently inferior, deserving of poverty and hardship. This racial bias extended to education, wealth, and justice, perpetuating a cycle of discrimination and reinforcing social hierarchies (Joaquin, 1977).

The analysis exposes the deep-rooted racial discrimination endured by Filipinos during colonization, emphasizing the urgent need for societal awareness and introspection to confront historical injustices. Furthermore, the implications extend to contemporary discussions on equity, emphasizing the ongoing importance of dismantling discriminatory structures for a more inclusive society.

Socio-Economic Threads: A Marxist Analysis

Examining "Maria Clara at Ibarra" through a Marxist lens illuminates the enduring socio-economic struggles embedded in the narrative, linking past oppressions to present-day disparities. GMA's modern adaptation of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* serves as a canvas where class conflicts and societal inequalities are dissected, echoing the persistent echoes of historical injustices in contemporary storytelling.

Marxism, as elucidated by *The Economic Times*, is a socio-economic and political ideology delving into the ramifications of an imbalanced distribution of wealth and privileges within a society. The resulting disparities incite laborers to resist the injustices perpetuated by the ruling class, rooted in avarice for maintaining social status and power. This analysis applies Marxist Literary Criticism to GMA's ongoing drama "Maria Clara at Ibarra," a modern adaptation of Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere." The series, echoing historical and societal themes, serves as a lens to scrutinize socio-economic conflicts. Marxist Literary Criticism illuminates the power dynamics between different classes, exposing the domination and exploitation of economically disadvantaged individuals within the narrative.

Critical thinking within this framework aids readers in navigating the story's trajectory. Understanding socio-economic conflicts becomes essential, providing context to characters' reactions, feelings, and attitudes. The socio-economic factors triggering conflicts allow readers to derive assumptions, deepening their

comprehension of the characters' motivations and the unfolding plot.

"Maria Clara at Ibarra" follows Klay's journey, a modern college student reluctant to acknowledge the relevance of Dr. Jose Rizal's works. Her immersion into the world of "Noli Me Tangere" exposes her to the socio-economic injustices during the Spanish colonization. Through Klay's interactions with characters from the novel, the series parallels the past and present, highlighting persistent socio-economic problems.

Analyzing the series through a Marxist lens reveals instances where socio-economic conflicts manifest. For example, scenes depicting the disparities in wealth, education, and social status mirror historical realities. The struggles of characters in "Noli Me Tangere" mirror contemporary issues, emphasizing the enduring impact of socio-economic conflicts.

The narrative evidences the parallelism between the Spanish colonial era and the present, demonstrating how socio-economic problems persist across different timelines. Klay's journey becomes a vehicle for viewers to witness and reflect on the enduring nature of social injustices. The analysis of scenes within the series offers concrete examples supporting these claims.

In conclusion, applying Marxist Literary Criticism to "Maria Clara at Ibarra" unveils the socio-economic conflicts embedded in the narrative. The series serves as a bridge between fiction and reality, illustrating the continuity of social injustices. This analysis encourages a nuanced understanding of how historical and contemporary societal issues are interconnected, shedding light on the enduring relevance of Marxist perspectives in literary critique.

Social Strata and Discrimination: Unveiling Class Struggles

In "Maria Clara at Ibarra," the echoes of the Spanish colonization era reverberate through the depiction of socio-economic issues, particularly the stark divisions between the upper and lower classes. Episode 2 unveils a poignant scene where the hegemonic power of the upper class is openly wielded to discriminate against and shame the lower class. Examining this episode through a Marxist lens allows us to unravel the complexities of social hierarchy, illustrating how the ruling class exploits its influence to maintain a grip on power. The oppressive actions of Padre Damaso, a symbolic antagonist representing the friars during that historical period, epitomize the abuse and manipulation faced by the proletariat. However, a deeper analysis of this scene also reveals the gender bias inherent in societal norms, highlighting the plight of a *mujerzuela* forced into prostitution as a consequence of poverty.

The series effectively captures the socio-economic struggles prevalent during the Spanish colonization, emphasizing the influence of social hierarchy on individuals' treatment. Padre Damaso's forcible act of cutting a woman's hair and publicly shaming her underscores the blatant discrimination faced by the lower class. The friar's actions serve as a stark reminder of the power dynamics inherent in a society where the upper class exploits its authority to subjugate those beneath them. The *mujerzuela*, forced into prostitution due to dire economic circumstances, becomes a tragic figure, highlighting the desperation and limited choices faced by the proletariat.

While the conservative nature of the Spanish era is acknowledged, a nuanced examination of the scene reveals underlying gender biases. The *mujerzuela* is singled out and labeled solely based on

her actions, disregarding the socio-economic factors that led her to prostitution. The patriarchal nature of the society becomes evident as the friar condemns the woman while overlooking the men involved in the act. This biased perspective contradicts the professed Christian values and exposes the inherent hypocrisy in the friar's actions.

Episode 2 of "Maria Clara at Ibarra" serves as a microcosm of the broader socio-economic and gender struggles faced by the Filipino society during the Spanish colonization. The Marxist lens helps unveil the power dynamics at play, emphasizing the hegemonic control of the upper class. Simultaneously, it exposes the gender bias perpetuated by societal norms. Understanding these intricacies provides viewers with a profound insight into the complexities of historical class struggles and their lasting impact on societal perceptions.

Klay Embodies the Call for Social Equality

Guided by the principles of Marxist literary criticism, which posits that literature serves as a mirror reflecting the inequalities perpetuated by capitalism, the GMA series "Maria Clara at Ibarra" offers a contemporary exploration of these socio-economic issues. Klay, the protagonist, time-travels to the past through Jose Rizal's "Noli Me Tangere," becoming a symbolic representation of Karl Marx's ideas on societal inequality. In episode 9, Klay engages in a heated debate with Fidel, who contends that the wealthy deserve their riches due to greater effort. Fidel echoes the friars' narrative that native Filipinos are inherently lazy, justifying their impoverished state. However, Klay vehemently opposes this perspective, advocating for a more egalitarian society. Through her character, the series underscores the pressing need for equality and challenges the narratives that perpetuate class-based discrimination.

Marxist literary criticism advocates literature as a catalyst for revolutionary change, aligning with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' assertion in the Communist Manifesto (1848) that class struggle propels historical transformation. In an episode aired on February 18, 2023, the series portrays the tragic death of Sisa, a character subjected to relentless abuse. Sisa's plight symbolizes the oppressive class structure prevailing during the Spanish colonization, leading to her eventual descent into madness. The episode further introduces the concept of hegemony, illustrating the domination of the upper class over the lower class. This oppression becomes a pivotal factor fueling characters like Simon and Basilio to plan and execute a revolution. The death of Sisa and the harassment of Juli serve as poignant examples of the consequences of hegemonic rule, pushing characters to retaliate against the injustices inflicted upon them. The series effectively utilizes Marxist principles to unravel the complexities of socio-economic conflicts, showcasing literature's potential to ignite societal upheaval in the face of systemic oppression.

The Exploitation of Power by Friars: Unmasking the Social Cancer

The Marxist approach asserts that political organization and power are instrumental in class struggle, where reigning ideas reflect the power dynamics. This perspective finds resonance in the historical portrayal of people in positions of power, especially friars during the Spanish colonization in the Philippines (Rummel, n.d.). The fusion of church and state created an unchallenged alliance, with the church wielding immense power over societal decisions, enabling friars to exploit and abuse the lower classes. The church, predominantly led by friars, exercised control over education,

minds, and even the law, as evidenced by Marcelo H. Del Pilar's observations (Academic Kids, n.d.). In the series, the episodes vividly illustrate how the friars manipulate the legal system to serve their personal agendas, framing innocent individuals like Don Rafael for crimes they did not commit.

Padre Damaso, an embodiment of power abuse, frames Don Rafael for fallacious crimes, showcasing the friar's manipulation of the law to eliminate perceived threats. In Episode 5, Damaso's cunning strategies lead to Don Rafael's demise, emphasizing the unchecked authority of the friars. The series further exposes the friars' oppression in the treatment of Crispin and Basilio, innocent brothers accused of theft by Padre Salvi (GMA News Online, 2022). Salvi's unfounded accusations result in the destruction of a family, illustrating how even the youth cannot escape the injustices inflicted by those in power. The abuse of power by friars becomes a symbol of societal ills, representing a social cancer that pervaded the Spanish-era Philippines. The Marxist lens unveils the oppressive nature of those in authority, shedding light on the historical struggles against an unjust system that favored the privileged few at the expense of the oppressed majority.

Conclusion

In delving into the historical and Marxist lenses applied to the analysis of "Maria Clara at Ibarra," a profound understanding emerges regarding the socio-political landscape during the Spanish colonization in the Philippines. The historical lens unravels the systematic deprivation of education, the racial discrimination ingrained in society, and the oppressive nature of the ruling class, exemplified by the friars. Simultaneously, the Marxist perspective highlights the stark class divisions, emphasizing the power dynamics and the exploitation of the lower classes by those in authority. These lenses collectively illuminate the intricate web of injustices, discrimination, and abuse that plagued the Filipino society of that era. "Maria Clara at Ibarra" serves as a powerful narrative medium, exposing the historical wounds and societal cancers rooted in the past, prompting a critical reflection on the persisting echoes of these issues in contemporary times. The series not only provides a poignant depiction of a tumultuous historical period but also becomes a mirror reflecting the enduring relevance of these themes, inviting viewers to confront the social and economic inequalities that persist in the present day.

Recommendations

This study on "Maria Clara at Ibarra" offers valuable insights into the socio-political complexities of the Spanish colonization era in the Philippines. The analysis, employing historical and Marxist lenses, uncovers the systemic inequalities, racial discrimination, and power dynamics embedded in that historical context. Such an exploration not only enriches the understanding of the past but also prompts a critical examination of contemporary societal issues. This study recommends further research to bridge these historical analyses with present-day implications, fostering a deeper comprehension of persistent socio-economic challenges and encouraging proactive measures toward social justice and equality.

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