**Caged Bird**

 By: MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps

on the back of the wind

and floats downstream

till the current ends

and dips his wing

in the orange sun rays

and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks

down his narrow cage

can seldom see through

his bars of rage

his wings are clipped and

his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze

and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees

and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn

and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams

his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream

his wings are clipped and his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou's poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" can be analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a framework that explores the intersection of race, power, and systems of oppression. Here's a detailed CRT analysis of the poem:

1. **Racial Oppression and Inequality:** The poem uses the metaphor of a caged bird to symbolize the oppression and systemic racism faced by African Americans. The caged bird represents the African American community, constrained by historical and institutional forces that limit freedom and equality. CRT would emphasize how the bird's struggle for freedom reflects the broader experiences of racial inequality.
2. **Intersectionality:** CRT emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, considering how different forms of oppression intersect. In Angelou's poem, race intersects with themes of gender and socio-economic status, as the caged bird's song is not only about race but also about the broader struggle for dignity and humanity. This intersectional analysis is crucial in understanding the complexities of the African American experience.
3. **White Dominance and Narratives:** CRT challenges dominant narratives, and Angelou's poem does this by contrasting the experiences of the caged bird with the free bird. The free bird represents the privileged, dominant group (possibly white society), highlighting the disparities in access to opportunities and freedom. The poem encourages a critical examination of who controls and shapes societal narratives.
4. **Counterstorytelling:** CRT often involves counterstorytelling—narratives that challenge mainstream stories. Angelou's poem serves as a counterstory, offering an alternative perspective on the African American experience. The caged bird's song becomes a powerful counter-narrative, expressing resilience and the refusal to be silenced despite the challenges imposed by a racist society.
5. **Cultural Hegemony and Identity:** CRT explores how cultural hegemony reinforces racial stereotypes and norms. In "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," the caged bird's song challenges these stereotypes and asserts the cultural identity of the African American community. This challenges the dominant discourse and highlights the importance of cultural authenticity in the face of oppressive structures.
6. **Legal and Historical Context:** CRT often considers the legal and historical context of racial oppression. Angelou's poem can be situated within the historical context of slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights era, highlighting the ongoing struggle for justice and equality. Understanding this context is crucial for a comprehensive CRT analysis.

In conclusion, a Critical Race Theory analysis of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" reveals the depth of racial themes and the broader social, historical, and cultural implications embedded in the poem. It encourages a critical examination of power structures, systemic inequalities, and the resilience of marginalized communities.