African-American Identity against the Surge of Racism and Neo-Racism in Five Selected Novels

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بعتمد ،

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear father, Bassam Khaled AlTaher, who has stood by me ever since I came into being and who gave me all the support and guidance I needed over and above the boundless love that he showered upon me every minute of my life.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to explore an issue that has become the source of embarrassment for one of the greatest empires in history, an empire that prides itself on the one hand for being the leading democracy of the world while at the same time harboring glaring social injustice and racial discrimination. The problem of discrimination or racism will be traced in five novels that follow a certain fictional and historical timeline: *Roots* by Alex Haley (1977), *Captain Blackman* by John A. Williams (1972), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1983), *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (2001), and *A Death in Texas: a Story of Race, Murder, and Struggle of a Small Town's Redemption* by Dina Temple-Raston (2002). In these novels, the African-American characters explore the world of racism, judge their experiences, and make a choice to stand out in a world dominated by a white population.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is the "Introduction" that briefly introduces the problem, hypothesis, and significance of the thesis that discusses the issue of Racism and Neo-Racism and how the African-American establishes an identity in a segregated world. Chapter Two is entitled "The Loss of the African Identity"; it discusses the identity of the Africans, their traditions, behavior, and religion as well as the family bonds and tribal communal life. It also examines slavery and the oppression of the blacks by the white man after enslavement and transportation to the United States of America against their will. The loss of their African identity is replaced with the identity of 'slave', and later on the identity of a 'black man' that comes after the abolition of slavery. This shift is discussed through the characters and events of the novels.

Chapter Three, "Establishing an Identity under Racism" deals with the struggle the black man faces to gain his or her rights under segregation after the abolition of slavery. A new identity comes to light as the African-American starts to realize that a separate individuality must take place in order to break free from the white man's hegemony. Thus, a new religion and language are created along with the strength of family ties in order to shape the core of the contemporary African-American.

Chapter Four entitled "Neo-Racism: The Hidden Threat" attempts to define Neo-Racism and how it is manifested in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is portrayed through a hate crime committed by three white supremacists in Jasper, Texas, 1998. Also in the Vietnam War, 1975 Neo-Racism emerges and the Black

Power Movement takes place. The characters depicted in the novels are faced with many obstacles against a pernicious and covert form of Racism known as Neo-Racism, even after African-Americans have earned their Civil Rights. Many obstacles are found as the African-American tries to establish his identity and equality in various aspects of the American community.

The final chapter, the “Conclusion”, reflects on the answers to the questions asked earlier in the introduction. The identity of the African, black man, and later on contemporary African-American is based on the characters and events of the novels mentioned earlier.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Numerous definitions of identity have been given in anthropology, psychology, and politics. However, the basic component of identity is the sense of belonging in which an individual's characteristics and experiences are molded together in order to produce both similarity and difference: similarity to a certain community and difference from some other community. This attempt at being similar and different at the same time is bound to create tension within one's own community and vis-à-vis the other community against which one tries to define oneself. In the case of the African-American, the tension takes the form of a question about which aspect of this identity has priority: being an African, an American, an African in America, or an African-American? At first, the white population in America thought of the African as an African "slave" in America. This continued for a long time until the civil war abolished "slavery" without abolishing segregation. In the twentieth century, full citizenship was granted to the black population, but in practice, full equality has never been achieved. The history of such words as "Negro," "Colored," "Black," and finally "African American" encapsulates the history of the search for the "African American" identity.

This struggle for identity has always occupied the African American's endeavor. A lifetime of ordeal resulted from searching for stability, equality, and dignity in the United States of America. The present thesis will examine five novels which make this topic their main concern: *Roots* by Alex Haley (1977), *The Color*

Purple by Alice Walker (1983), *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (2001), *Captain Blackman* by John A. Williams (1972), and *A Death in Texas: A Story of Race, Murder, and Struggle of a Small Town's Redemption* by Dina Temple-Raston (2002). These novels present the African American in various colors, and how the characters struggle in a world of rabid racism. The novels depict a clear image showing how the white people distorted the African people's identity with white tag names, their freedom with slavery, and their pride with shame.

Abolishing slavery in 1865 was not the end of Racism, as *Roots* demonstrates. Freedom was obtained, but ill-treatment and the stigma of inferiority continued. In the Civil War, the African-Americans took arms and fought on the side of the North; their sole reason for risking their lives for a white man's cause is to obtain some land and a decent way of living. The idea of black men fighting in wars taking place between 1775 and 1975 in *Captain Blackman*, shows the inability of the white man to cope with the black man's prosperity and raises the following question: Do these Africans fight for the supremacy of America in the same sense in which the white soldiers do?

In addition, Jim Crow laws allowed Anglo-Americans to dehumanize Afro-Americans. Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States of America enacted between 1876 and 1965. In practice they permitted racial segregation in all public facilities. For instance, President Andrew Johnson neglected to impose reconstruction laws. The reconstruction laws appeared before the Reconstruction of the Union, well before the Civil War ended. The laws aimed at racial equality, and it was to be accomplished by imposing strict political, legal, and constitutional

requirements on the former Confederate states before they would be allowed to rejoin the Union on an equal basis with the other states. President Andrew Johnson, who was one of the Conservatives, opposed such prerequisites on constitutional and social grounds. Furthermore, the ability of white rebel soldiers increased to attain political positions in state and national government; former Confederate general Nathan B. Forrest and his Ku Klux Klan constantly intimidated, terrorized, and murdered African Americans. The Ku Klux Klan are a fraternity of white supremacists, they are more likely to be known as a hate group. However, there were prominent figures in the government like Thaddeus Stevens of Georgia, who was a radical Republican and a very powerful politician in the United House of Representatives. He was highly "committed to full rights for African Americans" (Asante 282). His death in 1868 was an eye opener for how powerful Jim Crow laws were. Stevens' corpse was not allowed to be buried in any cemetery because he defended the Afro-Americans. The only cemetery that allowed his dead body to be buried in was Shreiner-Concord Cemetery that would accept people regardless of race. Moreover, in 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes became president and withdrew all federal troops from the South; consequently, a national attack on African-Americans in the South and North began. Hence, the code of Jim Crow permitted Anglo-Americans to wield their power without any restrictions.

In the 1930s, the United States of America passed through a period of economic hardship known as the Great Depression. In those tough circumstances poverty and unemployment prevailed, and President Roosevelt guaranteed a "new deal" for all American citizens that would secure them from "the cradle to the grave." Many

cultural and economic programs in the "New Deal housing" ("The Depression, the New Deal, and World War II") gave opportunities for blacks to find employment. But these opportunities did not fathom the deep-rooted inequality from which the black community suffered. Many white people demanded that managers dismiss employed black people as long as there were white people who were out of work. By 1932, half of the black population was unemployed. Furthermore, African Americans saw the peek of racism in the South despite the decline of the Ku Klux Klan. In this world of tribulation, the epistolary novel *The Color Purple* is set in the South, mainly in rural Georgia. The idea of converting the African people to Christianity is going to be a part of what this thesis will be focusing on while attempting to answer the following questions: Does an African American feel more at home in Africa or America? And when they call themselves American, do they identify themselves with the values called American? Cultural genocide had its ways in manipulating spiritual and religious matters to gain its selfish aims; the racist Anglo-Americans forced millions of Africans to give up their cultural and religious ways and adopt a European way of life. The white colonizers took advantage and built Christian schools on their African colonies. The students who attended those schools were forced to become Christians. Missionaries were sent as well for the same reasons. "The acceptance of a blond, blue-eyed Jesus Christ was literally beaten into "heathen" Africans, while the worship of African deities and ancestral spirits was conveniently equated with satanic practices and severely and harshly punished" (Asante 209).

The struggle for equality does not end in the United States of America. During the years 1955 – 1968, the Civil Rights Movement began, and the Black Power

Movement succeeded until 1965 to fight "for racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from oppression by whites." ("African American Civil Rights Movement 1955-1968") Martin Luther King, Jr., an icon and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement, gave his famous speech: "I Have a Dream" on August 28, 1963. He, along with important figures like Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and W. B. Du Bois, called upon the government to solve the problem of inequality. The question constantly asked is: Has his dream come true? *The Secret Life of Bees*, set in South Carolina, 1964, explores the black and white tension through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old white girl named Lily Owens. She discovers in the Boatwright home is a new revolutionary black religion, which helps a great deal in forming their identity. Thus a question is posed: Why do black people create their own version of religion? The novel illustrates a new form of black religion known as the Daughters of Mary.

A Death in Texas: a Story of Race, Murder, and Struggle of a Small Town's Redemption is based on a true story that happened in Jasper, Texas, in 1998. James Byrd, Jr., a forty-nine-year-old African-American was murdered by Shawn Allen Berry, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and John William King who were well known as white supremacists. Byrd's death caused shock and outrage in Jasper, around the state and across the country. In these new forms, the African American faces Neo-Racism, a new form of xenophobia and discrimination practiced on the so called minority races in America: Arabs, Asians, and African-Americans. Etienne Balibar has reasoned that a new edifice of racial segregation has surfaced, "a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural

differences." (John Walters, "Neo-Racism, White Universalism, and the Double Bind of 'White Trash", elkilombo.org) Neo-Racism is also known as Contemporary Racism, Hidden Racism, or New Cultural Racism. The different ways of naming this phenomenon does not change the fact that it exists. Once again, the African-American seeks a path to form his or her identity in such circumstances. A reaction towards Neo-Racism is bound to happen; nay, it may have already started to manifest itself.

John Kerkering in *The Poetics of National and Racial Identityin Ninteenth Century American Literature* states that there are two categories of an identity linked to elements within a continuous historical narrative: national and racial identity. They are sequential and compatible notions; national identity "is succeeded by racial identity, both of which are organized according to a common pattern of thinking" (Kerkering 6). He argues that inhering identity in formal literary effects is a commitment that links national, racial, and cultural identity. The characters in the novels undergo radical changes that cause the change of their identity. Africans who are captured and enslaved have identified themselves as slave. Later on, after the abolition of slavery, the identity of a captive slave is set free and has changed into a black man. The black man struggles in the white man's world, and he or she is forced to accept injustices and copy the white man's attitudes, ambitions, and way of thinking in order to at least gain mutual respect. After the Civil Rights Act, the black man could no long take the wrong doings of white supremacists and so he follows his own individuality to separate himself from the white man and become the African-American. With this new identity, contemporary thought, religion, and attitude flourish in the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

This thesis will answer the questions asked above and explore the issue of what it means to be an African in America or an African-American. The microcosmic worlds created in the novels selected for study speak of not one, or two, but of millions of African Americans who struggled and are still struggling to establish their identity within a larger society. Moreover, the aim of this thesis is to examine and define the African-American identity as revealed in the world of literature. Literature is frequently used as a means of embodying a social cause. Thus it has captured certain aspects of the African-American struggle, and made it possible for the voices of the past to be heard.

"The Loss of the African Identity" reveals the traditional African and how writers emphasize the importance of African lineage in order to create a bond of historical background for their contemporary African-American characters. History is a major part in understanding one's identity. In this chapter, many customs and habits of the African tribes are depicted in Alex Haley's *Roots* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. On the whole, these novels paint a vivid picture of a typical African, as well as and show the relevance of his customs, religion, and language in elucidating how an African lives his life. Held captive and transformed into a slave clarifies the concept of the African who lost his identity. He is ordered to give up his African-Identity for the sake of being an obedient white man's slave. Haley's character Kunta Kinte undergoes the crucial journey from being an African at the beginning of his life, and later a slave struggling to keep a part of his African heritage for his children. Nettie in Walker's novel also finds a spiritual journey in her trip to Africa as a missionary; she realizes that the Christian dogma will not change an

African's demeanor. Each tribe has its own ways to keep its culture alive. Whatever faith the Africans followed, it is important for them to sustain what is left of Africa after many years of colonization. Captain Blackman, John William's character in *Captain Blackman*, reflects how a slave and a free man during the Revolutionary War lined up to fight for their country, not only to gain freedom and equality, but also to assert their dignity in the face of white racism.

Through the events of the novels and the facts related to these events, the chapter concludes that an African-American has transformed from an African to a slave, and then into a black man who finds freedom after the abolition of slavery. The shift in the African-Americans identity is related to the circumstances depicted in the novels and is aided with historical facts. The loss of the African identity is replaced with fear, submissiveness, and a desire for equality among the white man. Slavery has only taught the Africans to hate the injustices inflicted upon them, and in order to cope with the white masters and mistresses, they had to learn the language the white man spoke, behave the way the white man did, and mould his ambition according to the white man's expectation.

Chapter Three "Establishing an Identity under Racism" surveys the awakening of the black man's struggle for his rights. He is called 'nigger' and is discriminated against in various aspects in society. Finding a decent job to make a decent living is something next to impossible. Medical care, education, and public places were all marked with signs for black men not to enter, or note where a black man should stand, sit, or go into. The laws of Jim Crow and the supremacy of white racists were highlighted in *Roots, The Color Purple, The Secret Life of Bees,* and *Captain*

Blackman. In this world of segregation, the individual black characters from both genders go through a journey where each individual struggles to create an identity completely separate from white domination. Therefore, characters always return to their roots, where they find comfort in the realization of having an African heritage. With that sense, they move on in establishing their own African identity in America. Family is a recurrent theme in the novels in which family ties, no matter what obstacles they face, hold the characters together. Religion is also a vital aspect in establishing their identity. They believe in the spirituality of things, as Celie in *The Color Purple,* and the bond between slave and Savior is depicted in the Daughters of Mary in *The Secret Life of Bees*. Family and religion create the essence of the black man who has evolved into an African-American, with emphasis on the word "African" because it connotes pride in one's roots. This pride is also depicted in *Captain Blackman*, where Blackman fights in many wars to prove his patriotism. Moreover, language is important in breaking away from the standard white English language. Their pidgin English is used throughout the novels as a means to get closer to the African-American's personality. Each character holds this language close in order to shape his or her identity in a distinguishable manner.

The Fourth Chapter deals with the enduring form of Racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through Dina Temple-Raston's novel *A Death in Texas*. The novel is a true story written in the form of a crime scene investigation, in which the author narrates the events that followed the murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas. Temple-Raston digs deeper into the history of the town, interviews many citizens of Jasper, and relates many of the outcomes of the murder to a hate crime

occurrence. Finding a lynching case in 1998 is hard to fathom; furthermore, statistics made from a recent study show growing numbers of murders related to racism. Furthermore, Captain Blackman in *Captain Blackman* faces many challenges in the Vietnam War, and as the African-Americans had the Civil Rights Acts enacted in 1968, white supremacists were forced to abide by the law. Yet, segregation lingered, and thus Racism has taken a new form called Neo-Racism. The African-Americans have come a long way to achieve their rights, and have struggled to be where they are today. Nonetheless, the struggle for true equality continues even today.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE LOSS OF THE AFRICAN IDENTITY

> Glory is not a conceit. It is not a decoration for valor. Glory belongs to the act of being constant to something greater than yourself, to a cause, to your principles, to the people on whom you rely and who rely on you in rerun.
>
> George Bernard Shaw

But what becomes of that glory if it alters into a silent injustice rendered by a race that thinks of itself as superior to all races, and with that belief, a quest for more authority and power through exploitation and force? Throughout the history of the United States of America, the chapter of slavery comes to light in the form of many literary works, documentaries, and historical books. As facts reveal injustice in many tales told by slaves, blacks, and then the African-American, one realizes the inequality.

British America or the thirteen former British Colonies, now known as the United States of America, showed its valor in the Revolutionary War and gained its independence from Great Britain; its slogan was freedom, equality, and justice. However, amidst the scenes of glory, the story of the African-Americans who fought in all of America's wars, planted the Anglo-Americans' fields, and raised their children portrays the adversity they faced. Literature is used as a means of embodying this hardship and to keep its memory alive. Thus, literature has captured certain aspects of the African-American struggle, and made it possible for the voices of the past to be heard.

In order to understand the African-American identity, it is important to first understand the African identity, for it is essential to comprehend its evolution. The concept of identity has always been hard to define. Whether identity is related to time, place, culture, or all three factors, each aspect in life plays a vital role in defining man's identity. Ross Abbinnett defines identity as the "I" which is the "self that emerges through the conflicts and negotiations which define the realm of the human culture." (Abbinnett, 1) Therefore, the "self" interacts with the other and society to establish responsibility and social structures. The early twentieth century sociologists questioned the fundamental issues of race and ethnicity. All of those questions gave insight of the racial and ethnic relations. However, those questions generated more questions which demanded answers from the academic field. Scholars of literature responded with many essential themes on race and ethnic relations. Many of those themes were based on some of the most critical creation of ethnic identity, the "origin and dynamics of group boundaries", and "the impact of postindustrial and postmodern forces on ethnic relations" (Stone 57). Apparently, ethnic identity is one particular form of social identity, and it can be seen that on both the individual and group level interaction happens between the external and internal forces.

> In his learned essay, Kevin Avruch provides further insight into the social construction of ethnicity which has probably become the dominant mode of academic interpretation of race and ethnic relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century. He notes how variable the definitions of race, color, and community have become, whether in Morocco, the United States, Quebec or Nigeria.
>
> (Stone 57)

With this definition of the self and the purpose of identity, whether it was related to race, community, or ethnicity, the African-American has struggled to find ways to prove his identity in a multi-cultural society of the United States of America. To begin with, the identity of the African is highlighted. Many of the African customs and culture mold the African identity into place. First of all, Africa has always been the land of fertility and natural wealth, as well as being populous. Moreover, in the 1880s the Race for Africa resulted among competing European powers that saw it as an opportunity for instant riches and slaves. This chapter will focus on two novels that discuss the African identity: Alex Haley's *Roots* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.*

In Alex Haley's *Roots*, a graphic picture is drawn of Africa and its people from the 18th century to the 19th century. Haley, after twelve years of struggle in researching and writing, was finally able to combine his ancestral story with history and fiction and produce a vivid portrait of the African before and after slavery. As *Roots* unfolds, Africans are seen to be clearly as sophisticated in their own ways as any other race. Therefore, it is important to highlight several characteristics that make up the African identity, like their beliefs, traditions, or customs. The African-American literary hero is a character who makes his own destiny in a world that is against him. Characters like this are capable of absorbing all that society throws at them, but somehow they are able to manage their way into a consciousness of self-determination. This can all be seen in the novel of *Roots*, which begins with the birth of Kunta Kinte in 1750, deep in the village of Juffure, West of Africa, near the coast

of Gambia. According to Emma Gregg in *Rough Guide to the Gambia*, Juffure is a village that was able to outlive time:

> it's the simplicity of the place that makes the biggest impression. Like any other unremarkable Mandinka village, Juffereh has its corrugateroofed, mudbrick [sic] cottages, its shady *bantabas* [kind of trees], goat pens, dusty lanes, gigantic trees and gaggles of scruffy kids squawking "*toubob*!" [white man] when any white visitor comes in range.
>
> (Gregg 170)

Among its traditions is the tradition of naming a new-born child. The Mandinkas, the African tribe living in Juffure, believe that a name should be filled with "history" and "promise", so the child "would develop seven of the characteristics of whomever or whatever he was named for." (Haley 2) Thus Omoro, Kunta's father, spends the traditional seven days pondering over a name that would befit his first-born son. This ancient tradition of naming a child seems highly important for Africans. Teodros Kiros in *Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity, Community, Ethics* affirms that

> The elders, the wise ones, carefully chose the names for the newly born babies. For instance, children were named after familial ancestors, significant events of the day, epochs, pathos, and ethos. This naming tradition is still alive in many parts of Africa…At a naming ceremony the child in question was passed from hand to hand…the birth celebration began to prune children's identities as moral entities and as individuals within a community
>
> (Kiros 153)

Thus, the Mandinkan tradition in *Roots* reveals how this tradition would reflect upon the child's characteristics when he or she becomes a member of society. More likely, he or she would thus bear honor and pride in his or her name. Clearly,

Africans instill honor and pride in an individual. According to Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, the author of *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, African individuality is affirmed when the new-born child is given "a name that reflects his/her membership therein, and it is expected that the name so given will guide and control the child by being a constant reminder for him/her of his/her membership in the family and the circumstance of his/her birth" (Eze 130). In this sense, Eze makes it clear that the African name plays a great role in the making of the individual's identity.

Kunta Kinte is named after his grandfather Kairaba Kunta Kinte. His grandfather was an icon of peace, holiness, and innovation. Clearly, heritage is a vital point for the Africans, especially when Kairaba's history speaks of saving Juffure from a famine. Kairaba Kunta Kinte was a thirty-five year old who became a holy man after being blessed by his teacher. He followed the tradition of a holy man that ran in his family for hundreds of years from the time of Old Mali. He pledged his life along with his wife and children to be Allah's servant, so he traveled for fifteen years from village to village as proof of his piety. When he trekked southward from Mauritania, he came upon Juffure; its remaining citizens lay hopelessly on the floor of their huts, starved, sick, and dying from the famine. Thus, Kairaba "kneeled down and prayed to Allah – almost without sleep and taking only a few sips of water as nourishment – for the next five days. And on the evening of the fifth day came a great rain, which fell like a flood, and saved Juffure." (Haley 11)

Here Ira Marvin Lapidus' *A History of Islamic Societies* can be helpful in illuminating the history of the Muslim holy men in Africa in the sixteenth century. They were known as "*faqis,"* they settled in Funj, a monarchy with a "patrimonial

regime that was built upon a Sudanese concept of semi-divine kingship." The holy men "were scholars of the Quran and Muslim law and Sufi mystics and magicians. The *"faqis"* gained considerable influence because they could intercede with and even rebuke the rulers, and because they were venerated by the common people for their magical powers. The *"faqis"* founded lineages, settled in villages, established schools, and won the populace over to Islam." (Lapidus 431) In fact, Islam seems to be the prevailing religion in Juffure. Therefore, it is important to note that Islam is dominant in the North and West of Africa. The history of Islam in Africa began in its earliest days, when Muslims fled the harsh harassments they received in Mekka and went to the Aksumite Empire. The Aksumite Empire was sometimes called the Kingdom of Aksum, and was a prominent trading nation in Northeast of Africa. Thus, Islam spread to Africa via roads that go through the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt, as well as through Muslim Arab and Persian traders and sailors. From 1869 to 1914, Islam in Africa spread further throughout various countries. Despite its large contribution to the makeup of the continent, Islam is predominantly concentrated in Africa's North, Northeast, and the Sahel region. This has served to further differentiate the various cultures, customs, and laws of different parts of the African continent, and hence played a crucial role in its development.

Muslims have played important roles in Africa since the introduction of Islam. They became important in the process of state-building, in creating a set of connections between various parts of the continent, and introducing literacy, as well as in exchanging inter-state diplomacy within Africa and beyond. In fact, the first prayer-caller in Islam was Bilal ibn Rabah, who was an Ethiopian slave. When

Prophet Mohammad, Peace Be Upon Him, arrived in Al-Medina, he appointed Bilal ibn Rabah to be the Muslims' prayer-caller, and was also given the task to call for prayer in the holy month of Ramadan to wake people for their suhoor, the time to eat before the fast. Edward E. Curtis IV says in *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* that Alex Haley "identified this ancestor as an exemplary model for African-American identity…[for Bilal] was a viable symbol of black Muslim success. Bilal had thrown off the shackles of slavery by refusing to serve his master after taking the *shahada*, the declaration of faith that makes a person Muslim. His example was lauded in a number of sources, including biographies that are still read in various African-American Muslim communities" (Curtis 119).

Moreover, Muslim Mandinka traders were able to spread Islam to the upper Ivory Coast region. "These traders settled at first in villages along the trade routes and brought a measure of prosperity to the pagan people among whom they settled. During the nineteenth century the Muslim groups made various attempts to gain political control, and small states were formed." (Anene 239) Haley depicts this in Omoro's half brothers, Janneh and Saloum, who are building a new village. Among the people who visited the village were several important people, like griots (historians), jalibas (drummers), senior elders, and "other important people in the town ahead, each representing such distant home villages as Karantaba, Kootacunda, Pisania, and Jonkakonda…A griot from the kingdom of Wooli was there…and even a prince sent by his father, the King of Barra." (Haley 74) What is interesting about the village is the mixture of different African tribes living in it; there are Mandinka, Fula,

Wolof, Serahuli, and Jola. Each tribe is distinguished by their appearance and behavior. The Fulas are known for their oval faces, long hair, thinner lips, and sharp features with scars alongside their temples. The Wolofs are blacker than any other tribe, and are well known for being the reserved kind of people. The Serahulis are lighter-skinned and have a small stature. The Jolas are recognized immediately from their scars that cover their entire bodies, as well as for their ferocious expression. Michael Crowder states that the bulk of the Gambia's population are "Mandinka, Wollof and Fula. Of these the majority are Muslim. Ethnographically the Gambia is as much part of Senegal as it is geographically. Many villages alternate between the two territories regularly, and every ethnic group in the Gambia is represented in Senegal in greater numbers." (Crowder 260) With this environment, Kunta grows up in a traditional Islamic African manner as his father Omoro teaches his first born son all about Islam and the tribal Africa.

Needless to say, there are many religions prospering in Africa. However, paganism will be focused upon because it is vividly described in *The Color Purple*. This pagan belief is relevant in order to present the right picture of the African's faith. In *The Color Purple,* the Roofleaf Worshippers belong to a tribe called the Olinka, an imaginary tribe created by Alice Walker herself. Dave Kuhne believes that Walker's "scenes take place in an ancient, unnamed region in Africa…Olinka…is much more than a village or a tribe…Olinka is a west African nation with an Atlantic coast and considerable inland territory." (Kuhne 69) Therefore, whatever Walker alludes to in her descriptions of the Olinka tribe, there is a sense of Africanism in her imagination, and that makes it important in order to comprehend the various traits Walker is trying

to give to the African identity. First of all, Nettie, the second main character of the novel, describes her African adventures in letters addressed to her sister Celie. She retells the story behind the Roofleaf forms of worship; it began when the village's chief became greedy and wanted land that belonged to the people in order to produce more crops to trade with the white men on the coast. The Olinka tribe relied on roofleaf leaves as roofs for their huts, and when the chief exploited most of the lands that grew roofleaf trees, the leaves became scarce. Soon after that, a flood hit the village, destroying all of the village's roofs; as a result, many people got sick, and died. Some villagers moved elsewhere to find a better place, and "On the day when all the huts had roofs again from the roofleaf, the villagers celebrated by singing and dancing and telling the story of the roofleaf. The roofleaf became the thing they worship." (Walker 137-138) It is obvious that no matter what the African Olinka worshipped, they are down to earth with their faith; they believe in what they see and experience, and in their humble way, they find greatness in the roofleaf's purpose. "Scholars argue whether African nature gods were actual personifications of physical forces or simply the ghosts of dead ancestors. In African culture, ancestors were the most recognized spiritual force. But whatever these deities meant to the ancients, the nature god had powerful control over the natural world." (Andrews 7) The nature gods were worshipped by early Africans because they manifested power; naturally, myths perceived by ancient people were based on the most powerful sources witnessed by them. Although the concept of the Olinka is a fictitious tribe it gives an authentic picture of African culture. Africans regard natural objects and phenomena as being inhabited by living beings, or having a mystical life. More importantly,

Africans see nature as a friend, but also as an enemy; therefore, they believe in preserving nature, as the Olinkas believe in preserving the roofleaf tree. Nature must be used wisely and mercifully in order for the Africans to survive. This also applies to *Roots*. Tribal ways forbade Kunta or any other Mandinka "to eat the abounding monkeys and baboons; nor would they touch the many hens' eggs that lay about, or the millions of green bullfrogs that Mandinkas regarded as poisonous. And as devout Muslims, they would rather have died than eat the flesh of the wild pigs that often came rooting in herds right through the village." (Haley 12) These taboos were even followed during the hungry seasons.

Children are a main concern in the eyes of each parent. The Africans are as devoted to their offspring as any other race. In *Roots* when Kunta becomes a first kafo, a term given to three-year-old children, he is joined with other children of his age and is taken care of under the watchful eyes of many grandmothers while their parents work on their fields. The grandmothers help educate the children through various fables that contain valuable lessons. Among the old women looking after the children is Old Nyo Boto; she teaches the children valuable lessons that leave an impact, especially upon Kunta. One of her fables is about a boy who finds a crocodile tied to a net, and when the boy tries to help the crocodile, he is snatched by the crocodile's teeth to be eaten. The young boy begs the crocodile not to eat him until he asks the advice of the first three passers-by; unfortunately, the first two are a donkey and a horse that are dismissed by their masters and are resentful of human cruelty, so they encourage the crocodile to eat the boy. However, the last passer-by is a wise rabbit who does not want to judge until knowing the details of the whole story. As

soon as the crocodile opens his mouth to speak, the boy leaps to safety. The rabbit urges the boy to get his family and kill the crocodile for dinner, so he brings back people from his village, but the villagers bring a dog with them that eventually hunts and eats the wise rabbit. Thus, Nyo Boto's lesson to the children is made crystal clear in their minds that day, as she ends it by saying "goodness is often repaid with badness." (Haley 9) Margaret Carlisle Duncan confirms in *Diversions and Divergences in Fields of Play* that physical and verbal threats in games are part of cultural management strategies in the upbringing of Mandinka children. By "looking for adult values that may be socialized through children's games, it may be more useful to use the data as a microcosmic reflection of various themes of cultural significance in everyday life and the kinds of interactive behaviors that are socially acceptable." For example, the game of tug of war is accompanied by a song with a repeated refrain referring to "'Child of peace, may the child whom the mother says should live for a long time, may he live.' This reflects a social concern for high mortality during the first and second years of life." (Duncan 70) Moreover, Haley reflects how children of the first kafo are taught to respect their elders; they would always thank a grandmother after her story, saying "May you be blessed, have strength and prosper!" (Haley 9) Furthermore, when the children play, they would always stop and pay respect for an adult that passed by. "Politely looking the adults in the eyes, the children would ask, "*Kerabe?*" (Do you have peace?) And the adults would reply, "*Kera dorong.*" (Peace only.) And if an adult offered his hand, each child in turn would clasp it with both hands, then stand with palms folded over his chest until that adult passed by." (Haley 20)

Parents also persist in home-training their children; Kunta found it a very strict one. His mother Binta would "get a cuff on [Kunta's] head" if he dared to look at food that was not his. He is also forced to wash off the dirt covering him as she would scrub him with her bar of homemade soap and sponge that was made of dried plant stems. Moreover, whenever Binta and Omoro or any other adult are in serious conversation, he is not allowed to interrupt. Also, parents urge their children to always speak the truth. In addition, it is tradition that children at the age of Kunta help their elders during the harvest season. They go with their fathers to guard the crops and collect couscous and groundnuts that their fathers have cut and test if they are ripe or not, as well as for carrying gourds of cool water for the men to drink:

> they worked all through the day with a swiftness equaled only by their pride…After the dawn's suba prayer, the farmers and their sons…went out to the fields and waited with heads cocked, listening. Finally, the village's great tobalo drum boomed and the farmers leaped to the harvesting…everyone began to sing…Kunta's kafo sweated alongside their fathers, shaking the groundnut bushes free of dirt.
>
> (Haley 25)

With this kind of upbringing Kunta and his kafo mates receive, they gradually learn the value of hard work and the prosperity that results from it.

The Mandinka family and the way they raise their children is similar to other African families around Africa, no matter what religion they follow. Eze clarifies that point by stating:

> The process of socialization begins right from birth. The mother constantly communicates with the baby by tracing the family tree from the beginning, reminding him/her of the nobility of his/her birth and the uniqueness of the family. Co-wives (step mothers)

> are on hand to tease the growing child, chanting the family praise-names and demanding gratification in return…The structure of the family compound makes the process easy…There is a large covered corridor into which all the wives' rooms lead and there they all sit, play and eat in the daytime with their children, and at night they retire to their rooms. Inside each apartment, the children of co-wives and other elderly members play together and overseen by the elders. A child who misbehaves is corrected immediately and may be punished by any of the elders.
>
> (Eze 131)

Elders play a crucial role in guiding the African child to the right course they see fit. Furthermore, elders can intervene when a misunderstanding arises between the co-wives and an elder male or female and do their best to sort out the misunderstanding. If the problem is not solved, it is taken to the head of the compound, the elder of the family to solve it. With this microcosmic world reflected in a simple African family presented by Eze, it is obvious that family is the root of the African identity. Moreover, Eze makes it clear that as soon as the child enters society, he learns about the values of his community. Thus, he finds his or her own individuality as an African, especially when he sees how his parents work hard on their fields to make ends meat, and how the warriors of the tribe risk their lives to save and protect their village. The simple African saying explains the importance of family, community, and traditions: "I am because we are; I exist because the community exists." (Eze 131) Hence, a communal sense of belonging is a crucial part in the making of the African identity.

Education with a sense of responsibility is of great importance in Juffure, for as soon as Kunta became a second kafo, a child at the age of five, he is given the task

to herd the family's goats, bring in wood for the night, and go to school in between the tasks. During classes, each child of the second kafo carries "a cottonwood writing slate, a quill, and a section of bamboo cane containing soot to mix with water for ink." (Haley 30) The teacher is called arafang and the lessons will be taken twice a day as morning and evening classes, every day of the week. The morning class would start immediately after breakfast, and the evening class begins after they tend the goats. The students are expected to learn how to read, memorize, and recite certain verses from the Qur'ān, as well as for learning how to read, write, and speak the Arabic language. Strictness is a major part in teaching; the arafang made it clear to every child in his first day of school that he would be punished with a rod, and immediately sent to his parents if he showed mischievous behavior. That warning applies also to late comers. Matt Schaffer notes that the ability of the Mandinka tribe to write has truly "set them apart and has been throughout the centuries a source of enormous pride and a power over non-believers." (Schaffer 7) He states that Islam has played a great role in establishing the "Koranic Schools" in which children learn how to read and write the Arabic language, as well as for reciting verses from the Holy Qur'ān.

The girls of the village are not allowed to be educated; this applies to both the Mandinka and Olinka tribes described in *Roots* and *The Color Purple,* who train their daughters to be housekeepers, which they believe to be necessary before marriage. The second kafo girls help their elder sisters and mothers to collect bamboo baskets full of ripe medicinal roots and cooking spices, and then they spread them under the sun to dry. "When grains were being pounded, the girls brushed away the husks and

chaff. They helped also with the family washing, beating against rocks the soiled clothing that had been lathered with the rough, reddish soap the mothers had made from lye and palm oil." (Haley 33) It is tradition also that men and women remain separate from each other, even husbands and wives. The husband resides in his own hut and his wife in another. Most of all, he would not take her opinion no matter what the situation was, and she is expected to respect her husband at all times, and never once disobey him. However, if she annoys her husband and turns out to be a trouble maker, the husband would go to the next village and hire a "mumbo jumbo to come to his village and shout fearsomely at intervals from concealment, then appear and publicly discipline that wife, after which all of the village's women were apt to act better for a time." (Haley 73) With this hierarchal relationship, neither the men nor the boys would help their wives, mothers, and sisters during the rice harvest, claiming that it is a woman's job. The women would load the dried long stalks on canoes to be taken to the village. After that, the women with their daughters would take what is enough for their family's supplies. When the rice harvest is over, women help men in picking the cotton.

Sylviane Anna Diouf presents a different picture on the question of educating girls, and she actually proves otherwise in *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*:

> [W]omen in other parts of the Muslim world, including Africa, were recognized for their knowledge. Merriam, a daughter of Usman dan Fodio, the leader of the jihad in central Sudan (Nigeria), was so reputed, as was his mother, Ladi. Nevertheless, female literacy was not as extensive as male literacy…Not only were the Koranic schools accessible to boys and girls in a coed setting, but they

> were also open to non-Muslims. Some parents sent their children to the marabout (teacher, cleric) because literacy was prestigious and useful…This phenomenon was mentioned by Mungo Park, who visited Senegambia, Guinea, and Mali from 1795 – 1797.
>
> (Diouf 7)

The Olinka in Walker's novel have harsher judgment on females; they believe that a girl has no existence, and the only way for a girl to be recognized is by marrying and devoting her life to her husband. As Nettie begins teaching classes in the missionary's school, she notices that Olivia, Celie's daughter, is the only girl to attend classes. No boys would talk to Olivia except for her brother Adam, simply because she "is where they are doing 'boys' things". (Walker 141) However, Olivia has an African playmate called Tashi, who is also eager to learn; "when Tashi can get away from all the chores her mother assigns her, she and Olivia secret themselves in [Nettie's] hut and everything Olivia has learned she shares with Tashi" (Walker 141).

No matter how African women are oppressed, every now and then, when something does not appeal to them, they show their disapproval. Kunta's mother Binta, for example, changes her manner towards Omoro upon learning the fact that he is going to take Kunta on a long journey to see his half brothers who have established a new village. "Binta loudly muttered her disapproval of his and Kunta's traveling in the bush when the drums of different villages were reporting regularly of new people missing." (Haley 63) Catherine, Tashi's mother, also strongly shows her disapproval of her daughter going to school and learning with the boys, when she ought to be at home and do her chores. She even goes farther and belittles Nettie's duty as a teacher and missionary by saying: "You are not much…The missionary drudge" (Walker

141). This shows how the characters of the African women drawn in both novels are able to stand out in a world of paternal oppression and are able to show their individuality when they feel it necessary to do so.

When the African children reach the stage of puberty they need to learn how to be responsible adults; the Mandinka and Olinka invented manhood and womanhood training in order to produce strong, independent people. The characters of Kunta and Tashi undergo this training with pain and pride. At first, Kunta will leave his village Juffure for a year; he is taken by surprise as a white hood covers his head, and is placed on a stool to sit still for an entire day. The village comes alive with drumbeats and dance as they celebrate the manhood training for the young boys who were waiting restlessly in their huts, their fears hidden under their hoods. After the dawn's prayer, the great drumbeat of the tobalo sounds, the crowds gather, and music of koras and balafons (musical instruments) begin to play. With a sharp rhythm of drums, Kunta is jerked out of the hut and is led in a line of ten year old boys, each covered with a white hood. They reach a "compound, dotted with several small, mud-walled, thatch-roofed huts and surrounded by the tall new bamboo fence." (Haley 91) This compound is called the jujou; in it they meet their master whom they call Kintango. The Kintango has two assistants from the village: men in their mid thirties. For the first six days, Kunta and his mates march all night in the forest for a long hike. Each time, the hike gets longer than the preceding one. Then, they are taught how to find their way in the forest at night depending on the stars. The challenging part of the lesson is to be silent throughout the march in order to develop their hunting skills. The next lesson is to learn how to imitate the sounds of animals, especially the

various ways of bird calling. Moreover, Kunta and his companion would follow the animals and watch how they hunt their prey. All this is in order to gain the skill of detecting and following the invisible signs of the animals and stay unseen and unheard by the prey. Hunting and cooking their prey is also an important lesson in survival in an abandoned forest. During the process of training, beating seemed the main punishment if any of the boys misbehaved, or did something wrong; the whole kafo would be punished if one of them did such a thing. The lesson is that "the welfare of the group depended on each of them – just as the welfare of the *tribe* would depend on each of them one day." (Haley 97) The boys also learned the meaning of the signs left by each Mandinka beside his hut; for example, a rag folded and hung in certain ways near a man's hut shows when he will return; crossed sandals in various ways outside a hut sends messages only men would understand. After the boys learned the skills of survival and the importance of protecting each other, the Kintango teaches them how to become warriors, how to navigate and strategize a war. He emphasizes the fact that they should never harm any "traveling marabouts (holy man), griots (historians), or blacksmiths, for an angry marabout could bring down the displeasure of Allah; an angry griot could use his eloquent tongue to stir the enemy's army to greater savagery; and an angered blacksmith could make or repair weapons for the enemy." (Haley 100) Stories of the Mandinka wars and warriors are told, along with lessons given to them from visiting professional wrestlers and griots who teach them everything about history and wit.

In order to complete the manhood training, the kasas boyo operation must be done, which means that a boy is purified and circumcised. This is the final test for the

boys to become men. While they are healing from the kasas boyo operation, they are given one last instruction to follow:

> When you return home," said the kintango, "you will begin to serve Juffure as its eyes and ears. You will be expected to stand guard over the village – beyond the gates as lookouts for toubob [white man] and other savages, and in the fields as sentries to keep the crops safe from scavengers. You will also be charged with the responsibility of inspecting the women's cooking pots…to make sure they are kept clean, and you will [be] expected to reprimand them most severely if any dirt or insects are found inside.
>
> (Haley 108)

Emma Gregg states that the boys' circumcision marks "an important step in the transition from childhood to adulthood." The tradition of the circumcision is no longer upheld in ceremonies nowadays, simply because of the availability of sufficient clinics. However, in rural areas, "ancient tribal practices persist." The rituals held in the ceremony are basically secret, and the initiates, the boys, are forbidden to ever speak of what happens in the ceremony. The process begins when the initiates are rounded up to be taken away for their period of preparation:

> Among the Mandinka it is the *kankurang* that does the rounding up, a devil dancer who comes in various guises but is usually dressed in a costume made of leaves and the red bark of a camel-foot tree…He also waves a cutlass, intended to scare off any malign spirits that may attempt to prey on the initiates while they are most vulnerable…The boys are circumcised in the bush by the village blacksmith, and while they are healing they undergo a period of private instruction at "bush school" at the hands of a *marabout* or a tribal elder.
>
> (Gregg 255)

The initiates learn all about the tribe, the essentials of good conduct, and the importance of respecting elders.

This is similar to the Olinka, though it is a fictitious tribe, a girl must undergo the facial scarification ceremony and the rite of female initiation (circumcision). The character who goes through it is Tashi, she undergoes the rituals in order to please her mother and the tribe, even though her friends Adam and Olivia are strongly against it, for they taught her to reason things out before taking any course of action. Nnaemeka explains further in *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge* that female circumcision has been given "different names in different contexts by people with different agendas. Basically, female circumcision denotes a set of surgeries performed on females in some African and Islamic societies…the preferred term used by feminists is "female genital mutilation (FGM)"…[it] has become problematic in recent time for both Western and non-Western societies." (Nnaemeka 112). In fact, Nnaemeka reflects the comparison made by Ajayi-Soyinka between two writers; Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) and Alice Walker (The United States of America). Soyinka clarifies the fact that both writers explore the tension in the exploration of a hierarchy between "Third world women and women of color congregations of the feminist project, and the marginalization of African women in knowledge production" (Nnaemeka 10). With Soyinka's instructive approach towards both writers, she clarifies the idea of the African identity:

> Between Aidoo's and Walker's efforts, there is a phenomenal world of difference in the construction of the identity of the African and the person of African descent. The production of knowledge in *Dilemma* and *Possessing* communicates radically contrasting pictures of self-awareness, concept of self and ways

> of knowing…On the one hand, Aidoo strives for unity between two different peoples by investigating and understanding their superficial similarities. Critically informed by the present, Aidoo digs perceptibly deep into history, reexamining facts and fiction in order to build a more solid future…Alice Walker perches on a pedestal placing her [African] characters below her in a hierarchal paradigm she has constructed. It is a sad commentary that *Possessing* perpetuates and most uncritically reproduces the most abject stereotypical images of African women as ignorant, fatalistic, and malicious partners in their own victimization.
>
> (Nnaemeka 11)

In order to control the society they live in, especially in Juffure, the Mandinkas created a Council of Elders. Six senior elders of the village gather in a meeting every full moon under the command of a Juffure's ancient baobab, an elderly wise man. Their traditional clothing is a white robe and a round skullcap. In the court room, the people who have troubles and dispute sit before the elders. "Behind the petitioners, in rows, according to their ages, sat junior elders such as Omoro, and behind them sat the new men of Kunta's kafo. And behind *them* the village women could sit, though they rarely attended except when someone in their immediate family was involved in a matter to be heard." (Haley 135) However, when administrative affairs are discussed, no women are allowed to attend. Judgment begins when the senior of the elders raises his stick, which is decorated with bright colored beads, and strikes a drum that spells out the name of the first person who is to be on trial. The petitioners are assorted according to their age, the oldest gets the privilege to present his or her case first, never to be interrupted by the elders or the audience, and questions are asked by the elders as soon as he or she finishes presenting his or her case. "If the matter involved a dispute, the second person now [presents] his side [of the story],

followed by more questions". (Haley 136) As soon as everything is answered, and the case presented, the elders huddle together in a circle, giving their backs to the audience and petitioners in order to discuss the matter privately among themselves and reach a decision. Then, the senior elder announces the decision taken, and the drum declares the name of the next person in line. Most requests submitted to the Council are for permission for having more plots of lands to grow their crops if there is an addition to their family, like the birth of a new baby, or marrying a new spouse. Also, new plots of lands are given to the new men of the society such as Kunta and his companions; they are also given a new hut built by their fathers to live in separately from their families. Other disputes that arise in the Council are matters of land, like which fruit belonged to whom. Also, there is the matter of breaking or losing tools that are borrowed from an irate lender. There is also the case of accusations such as "accusing others of inflicting bad fortune on them through evil magic…If presented with enough impressive evidence of evil magic motives and results, the Council would command immediate corrective magic to be done by the nearest traveling magic man, whom a drumtalk message would summon to Juffure at the expense of the evildoer." (Haley 136) Another interesting case is when couples ask for permission from the elders to marry. The Council would need a month to give their decision, after investigating their backgrounds, and based on the given time, it is enough for any person who has any sort of objection to come forward to the council and object to the couples' marriage. For example, if the bride or bridegroom has stolen anything when they were kids, and the incident was not reported out of compassion, the incident is later reported to the elders and the marriage is forbidden.

Most problems the senior elders face usually come "from married people – especially from men with two, three, or four wives." (Haley 138)

Apparently, Mandinka people predominate from the Gambia to what is today called the state of Guinea. "The pattern of [politics] in all Mandinka states was the same". according to Anene in *Africa: in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, "The village units were under the authority of the elders. Superimposed over these elders was the king who was venerated by the members of the state…[the king] is constrained to rule in close consultation with the elders of the village units. The king did not possess the administrative paraphernalia with which to control such matters as local justice, the collection of trade duties and the distribution of land." (Anene 237)

One question that cannot be avoided in the discussion of the African identity is the question of slavery. It is a fact that there were slaves in Africa possessed by Africans, but the treatment the slaves received from their owners was quite different than that of the Anglo-American. For example, Haley introduces Old Nyo Boto, who happens to be a slave in Juffure, and the issue of slavery comes to the fore when Lamin, Kunta's younger brother, asks about it. Omoro clarifies the difference between the slaves of an African and the slaves of the toubob, the white man. Omoro first explains the situation of slaves in Africa:

> Slaves aren't easy to tell from those who aren't slaves…slaves' huts were roofed with nyantang jongo and free people's huts with nyantang foro, which Kunta knew was the best quality of thatching grass…But one should never speak of slaves in the presence of slaves…people became slaves in different ways. Some were born of slave mothers…Others…had once faced starvation during their home villages' hungry season, and they had come to Juffure and begged to become the slaves of

> someone who agreed to feed and provide for them…Still others…had once been enemies and been captured as prisoners…being not brave enough to die rather than be taken.
>
> (Haley 52)

Though they are called slaves, Omoro makes it perfectly clear to Kunta that they have rights preserved by the laws of their forefathers. they are also very much respected and are considered as members of society, for each master is obliged to provide for his slaves a house and farm plot to work on and receive half of the shares, as well as for food and clothing. If a slave is alone and is in n5eed of a spouse, the master must provide one for him or her. No cruelty or punishment should be inflicted upon those slaves except for those who were murderers, thieves, or criminals. Those kinds of slaves were the ones who were beaten or punished when they misbehaved. "Except for convicted criminals, no slaves could be sold unless the slaves approved of the intended master." (Haley 53) Nevertheless, a slave can buy his own freedom with the money he saves from his shares of the farming. Another way is by marrying into the family that owned them. "[S]ome slaves, in fact, prospered beyond their masters. Some had even taken slaves for themselves, and some had become very famous persons." (Haley 53) Omoro adds glory for a crippled, brilliant slave General who won in the battle for the great Mandinka Empire by using an army of runaway slaves found in the midst of swamps and unknown places.

Haley's depiction of slaves in Africa is similar to the depiction of Donald R. Wright. In *Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, The Gambia*, Wright claims that a third of the African society is made up of slaves. "Estimates made from the late eighteenth century into the colonial period suggest that from two-

thirds to three-fourths of some societies in West Africa consisted of slaves". (Wright 51) Slaves over time could be part of the family household and are trusted; furthermore, slaves with "royal lineages" are allowed to work in "offices of state, as soldiers or administrators, and become particularly important in such matters." Slaves in Africa were given their freedom to become individuals in society, as long as they returned to the family that controlled them. It is also important to note that they "never entirely lost their personal status as being persons other than kin [sic]" (Wright 51). Obtaining slaves in West Africa came through war, banditry, and kidnapping. Prisoners of war were made slaves and put to work or sold to pay for the cost of the war. A less harmful way of obtaining slaves in Africa was the "condemnation through judicial or religious proceedings for civil crimes or supposed religious wrongdoing." (Wright 53) Apparently, the increase of slave trade made slavery a common punishment when offenses were committed against society. Wright also finds evidence that there were individuals who volunteered to be slaves, simply because poverty, famine, or inability to take care of a family forced them to choose slavery. However, Wright claims that a free Mandinka African can marry from any tribe as long as that person is freeborn, but can not marry if the person "belonged to the group of skilled artisans or slaves, regardless of the person's language or ethnic identity." (Wright 49) Nevertheless, Asma Gull Hasan in *American Muslims: The New Generation* finds Haley's depiction of slaves in Africa and slaves in America quite overwhelmingly different:

> Juffure's slaves, which were held according to Qur'anic guidelines, were treated much better than America's slaves. When Kunta was still young,

> Omoro [Kunta's father] told him and Lamin [Kunta's young brother] what he and his brothers, hiding in the bushes, had seen of Africans the toubob had taken to their big boats. He tried to make his boys understand the severity with which the toubob dealt with their slaves and how their method was different from how the slaves in their village were treated by their owners. The toubob's slaves were beaten, sometimes burned, their heads shaved, bodies greased, teeth, throat, and private parts were examined, and they were chained to each other.
>
> (Hasan 16)

All in all, the Mandinka tribe and the Olinka tribe depicted in both *Roots* and *The Color Purple* help reveal several African traits needed to define the African identity. Based on ethnicity and inter-ethnic social relations, the social anthropologist Fredrick Barth and his colleagues are pioneers in defining them:

> Barth's original view of ethnicity consists of a number of elements. Pride of place must be given to the insight that ethnicity is not an immutable bundle of cultural traits which it is sufficient to enumerate in order to identify a person as an 'X' or a 'Y' or locate the boundary between the ethnic collectivities. Rather, is situationally defined, produced in the course of social transactions that occur at or across (and in the process help to constitute) the ethnic boundary in question. Ethnic boundaries are permeable, existing despite the flow of personnel or interaction across them; criteria of ethnic ascription and subscription are variable in their nature and silence.
>
> (Stone 59)

Barth emphasizes the transactional nature of ethnicity; these transactions are of two basic kinds: The internal definition and the external definition. The internal definition is based upon the individual's definition of himself, his identity. Whereas the external definition is based upon what society defines the particular individual, making their

definition the individual's identity. With Barth's definition of the internal and external identity, it is possible to apply it upon the characters of Kunta Kinte and Nettie, which are the focus of this chapter. Kunta is depicted in *Roots* as a typical model of an African child who was raised and brought up in certain traditions, cultures, and religion. His internal definition of his identity is that he is proud to be a Mandinka, a tribe in which other tribes look up to for strength and wisdom. With this in mind, Kunta's internal definition of himself as a proud African changes when he is captured by the white man and is taken against his will to the slave ship. In the slave ship, Kunta could not believe the torment he is going through. His wrists and ankles were shackled as he is stuffed in a windowless pit with dozens of other captives. All of them were stripped naked as they lay beside each other with no space for movement and waited in the midst of rats, flees, and filth. Later on when they finally reached land, he is chained in the neck, and is dragged along with the surviving captives and is sold in an auction to the highest bidder. Here comes the external definition which was mentioned by Barth earlier, the white man's society defined the captive African as the slave, and a piece of commodity being bought and sold. A slave is not allowed to think, feel, or defy his or her master:

> He saw a black one moving forward behind the toubob to whom the shouter had handed his chain. Kunta's eyes entreated this black one, who had distinctly Wolof features…but the black one seemed not even to see Kunta as, jerking hard on the chain so that Kunta came stumbling after him, they began moving through the crowd…the black one grasped Kunta around the hips and boosted him up over the side and onto the floor of the box, where he crumpled into a heap.
>
> (Haley 198-199)

In this passage, the black slave is forced to do as he is told, even in taking Kunta by force and brutality to his master. What Kunta perceives with his own eyes is the difference between him and the slaves. He can not imagine how an African would allow such injustices to be upheld. With this struggle, Kunta tries his best to keep his African identity among the slaves in slave row. He realizes their language differs from his and so he stays introverted and isolated. The first thing Kunta does upon arriving at the new farm after his escape from the first one, he makes a charm made out of feathers to protect him this time from the evil white man, and carries it around in his pocket. As Kunta observes the slaves, he realizes how many of them seem from known African tribes; the Mandinka, Wolof, and many others:

> Ignorant as they were, some of the things they did were purely African, and he could tell that they were totally unaware of it themselves…And the way these blacks moved their bodies was also identical [to the African ways]…Black women here wore their hair tied up with strings into very tight plaits – although African women often decorated their plates with colorful beads…even some of these black men wore their hair in short plaits, too, as some men did in Africa…Kunta also saw Africa in the way that black children here were trained to treat their elders with politeness and respect…[Also,] these blacks' great love of singing and dancing was unmistakably African.
>
> (Haley 225)

From the perspective of an African who came into the new world, he sees his own people being transformed into what they are called slaves. This transformation is seen clearly in the way they talk, dress, and behave. Even Kunta realized how slaves try to act and speak like the white man, and how obedient they are to their masters. He could not believe how simply an African would let go of his Africanism as simply as

that. But as time lapses, Kunta finds his isolation discomforting and decides to join the slaves in their nightly meetings. He soon learns the reason why they act the way they do:

> Kunta just sat there watching and listening impassively and fingering his saphie charm…'See what I means? You got to put away all dat stuff,' said the brown one, pointing to the charm. 'Give it up. You aint goin' nowheres, so you might's well face facks an' start fittin' in, Toby, you hear?'…Kunta's face flashed with anger. 'Kunta Knte!' he blurted, astonished at himself…The brown one was equally amazed. 'Looka here…I'm tellin' you, boy, you got to forgit all dat African talk. Make white folks mad an' scare niggers. Yo' name Toby. Dey calls me Fiddler.' He pointed to himself.
>
> (Haley 255)

Thus, this external power forced Kunta to suppress his African identity as he fights and struggles to keep it alive. His African name is already changed into Toby, a name used commonly by the white man. The clothes Kunta wears like those of the white man, and the language the slaves are using is the language of the white man as well. With this constant battle Kunta fights to remain African, he compromises on many traits in order to fit in the new society he lives in. First of all, he learns their language, which is English. He eats their food, but stays away from pork. He studies them well and realizes that most of them wish to be free like him. With this sense of adapting, the African identity has evolved into the black identity, and also known at the time of slavery as slaves. Apparently, they kept their African traits subconsciously in mind to keep a part of it as a definition of their inner state. Kunta is a very good example of this transformation. He keeps his identity when he is with his wife Bell. He proudly names things in the Mandinka language and teaches how to pronounce them when

they are alone in their cottage. Moreover, to keep Africa alive in his family, he names his daughter an African name, Kizzy. It means "you sit down [or] you stay put" (Haley 344). Naming the child with this name was an important task for Kunta, for it is an African tradition passed down to him, and it is his duty as a father who comes from African origins. When all is safe and sound from the white people, Kunta takes the time to explain to little Kizzy about Africa, their ways, language, and religion. By doing so, he keeps that part of Africa inside of him vital, which plays a great part in maintaining his Africanism and identifying his daughter's personalities.

However, the blacks' fear of the white masters made them chide Kunta every time he opened his mouth to speak about Africa. Thus, an internal struggle arises between Africans and blacks. Kunta after twenty years finally meets a man from a sixty-six-year old African man. Kunta being so happy to finally meet someone who could understand him made it more difficult for him and his friends. The blacks were always scared of bringing up Africa and anything related to it because of the white man's insecurity. They ended up quieting Kunta and let him change the topic. Apparently, the blacks are haunted with constant fear and captivity; they were not able to see the bigger picture Kunta has the advantage of seeing:

> Kunta quickly turned off slave row to take the back path that led to the barn, wanting as much distance as he could get between him and those heathen blacks whom the toubob had trained to shrink away in fear from anything smacking of the Africa that had been their very source-place.
>
> (Haley 342)

> after all these years of talking to them, he was finding out things he hadn't known before…It didn't really bother Kunta to find out how ignorant he was, since

> they were helping him become less so; but it troubled him deeply to learn over the years that even he was better informed than the average slave. From what he'd been able t o observe, most blacks literally didn't even know where they were, let alone who they were.
> (Haley 335)

Constant fear and suppression always have their limits, and so the blacks started figuring out ways to gain their freedom. The mere thought of being free became a large part in the black man's identity. Freedom, equality, and justice were the main concern of the black slaves at that time. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was issued, which proclaimed their right to self-determination and their establishment of a cooperative union. In the American Revolutionary War, the rebellious states defeated Great Britain, the first successful colonial war of independence. The Philadelphia Convention adopted the current United States Constitution on September 17, 1787; its authorization the following year made the states part of a single republic with a strong central government. The Bill of Rights that was ratified in 1791 comprised ten constitutional amendments to guarantee many civil rights and freedoms. Slaves' dreams of freedom started to become a reality. During the war for independence, many slaves participated in the war in the hope to gain their freedom. They were used as drummers, fifers, and pioneers. Apparently, the blacks were used in the front; the free and the slave, all huddled together in the face of fire. In *Captain Blackman* by John A. Williams, a vivid description is given of various wars as Captain Blackman leaps through time and faces the British army: "They spread out over the Lexington Green. Some lay down, others sat. The riders trotted around, placing groups of men. The blacks were in the first group facing the

road the British would come on. Campfire positions were set and weapons stacked." (Williams 6)

Nigger is what the white people called the black people, whether they are free or slaves. The white man's point of view of the black people joining the army brought a lot of controversy amongst soldiers. White soldiers during the battle with the British army were refusing black soldiers to carry fire arms; only sticks, clubs, or pitchforks were permitted for them to use. Williams shows how outrageous this segregation was by depicting it through Blackman:

> [A]s his fingers, slowly and insinuatingly, were left gripping nothing but cool air and cooler earth, he came awake and like a flash his hand moved swiftly in the direction of the gun, recaptured it. He felt it being pulled away again, being sucked into the darkness, and he pulled too, peering intently into the night in which he seemed to see shadowed there, grey and ghostly, the face of his battalion commander, Major Whittman. Blackman felt the gun returning to his control; tiumph welled up in him even as a flash of paining, yellow light blossomed silently in his head, then faded slowly to a darkness tinged with red…The blacks threw more wood on the fire and pressed cold stones to Blackman's head. No word passed between them; they understood.
>
> (Williams 8)

Many free blacks came to war, especially freed slaves from the North. They demanded to fight alongside the white man saying that it was their country as well; "but some free niggers up Nawth is arguin' dey's part of dis country an' wants to fight" (Haley 278). Patriotism was not the only reason why the black people wanted to fight, they wanted equality with the white man. However, even in war, segregation makes its way between the black and white races. This continuous discrimination went on throughout the Civil War between the North and the South. Eleven Southern

slave states announced their secession from the United States. They formed what was called the Confederate States of America (the Confederacy). The Confederate army, led by Jefferson Davis, fought against the Union, which was supported by all the Free states and the five border slave states. In the presidential election of 1860, Abraham Lincoln campaigned against the expansion of slavery beyond the states in which it already existed. When the Republican victory was achieved, seven Southern states declared secession from the Union even before Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861. This secession was rejected by US administrators, for they considered secession a rebellious act. Thus, violence broke out when the Confederate army attacked a US military installation at Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 12, 1861. A volunteer army was then formed by Lincoln that called on each state, leading to declarations of secession by four more Southern slave states. Both sides raised armies as the Union assumed control of the Border States early in the war and established a naval blockade. The black population, freed or enslaved, had one driving force that led them to risk their lives for freedom, equality, and human rights. To live in racism-free world, the black community made that goal their daily basic struggle. As a result, their identity was affected with the want for freedom. Whites from the North were mostly supporting the issue of black freedom, which encouraged many black men to enlist in the war at the first opportunity. In the South, slaves were oppressed. Their voices in the war were not present as the free blacks in the North. "Slaves' desire for freedom pushed white Southerners in the county to consider the consequences of enlisting them before war broke out" (Boritt xvii). The black man was the core reason that divided the North and the South, but for the black man, a greater freedom is

worth risking their lives. Williams and Haley depicted the black man's desire for freedom, and they were able to mold this desire into the identities of their characters. Faced with a world of racism, Williams uses his main character Blackman to portray both desire and segregation in the Civil War:

> The colored division moved out from our works in splendid order. Growlers were put to shame, and most of them fell into line, to go forward. Some few declared they would never follow "niggers" or be caught in their company and started back to our lines but were promptly driven forward again. When the colored assault halted, broke, and streamed back, the bravest lost heart and the men who distrusted the Negroes vented their feelings freely. Some colored men came into the Crater, and there they found a fate worse than death. It has been positively asserted that white men bayoneted blacks who fell back into the Crater. This was in order to preserve the whites from Confederate vengeance. Men boasted in my presence that blacks had thus been disposed of, particularly when the Confederate came up
>
> (Williams 55)

In September 1862, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made ending slavery in the South a war goal, and dissuaded the British from intervening. Freedom was finally obtained, and slaves were no longer slaves. As free black people, they sought to claim their freedom. Yet, their journey into the land of opportunities was faced with many challenges in the face of segregation and racism. Thus, they identified themselves as free people, but still were called blacks, colored, and niggers by the white community. The coming chapter will discuss how the black man endures Racism and is no longer passive towards it. Thus, the term African-American becomes the main defining point for the black community.

CHAPTER THREE:

ESTABLISHING AN IDENTITY UNDER RACISM

Incident

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

This poem by Countee Cullen depicts the very essence of the African-American's internal thoughts. Countee Cullen was one of the promising poets of the Harlem Renaissance; he wanted to achieve success on the basis of traditional English standards and did not prefer to be considered a Black poet. However, his most fruitful poems were his race-conscious lyrics. After the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation which was issued in two executive orders, a whole new world opened its doors for the suppressed slaves who had lost their African identity through force, fear, and oppression. However, many white supremacists attacked the Emancipation Proclamation for freeing slaves in states of which the Union had no power over. Most slaves were not freed immediately as expected, but ever since the Proclamation came into effect, it brought freedom to thousands of slaves daily in the nine parts of the ten

states to which it applied; Texas was the exception. Yet, slavery was not made illegal, and that worried abolitionists. As many former slave states began to pass out a law that forbade slavery, a few states continued to consider slavery legal until those states were stopped on December 18, 1865. Approximately four million slaves were freed according to the 1860s census.

Former slaves were now identified as black people, and were often called niggers. As freedom was obtained, the black community began to realize its goals, needs, and rights. First of all, these black people needed to establish themselves firmly in a society that treated them with indifference and racism:

> someone would always say…that their African pasts of living in jungles with animals gave them a natural inheritance of stupidity, laziness, and unclean habits, and that the Christian duty of those God had blessed with superiority was to teach these creatures some sense of discipline, morality, and respect for work – through example, of course, but also with laws and punishment as needed, although encouragement and rewards should certainly be given to those who proved deserving.
>
> (Haley 353-354)

After the Civil War, fourteen percent of the United States' population was African. Thus, a new era began for the black community, the Reconstruction period extending from 1865 and 1877. The government sought to restructure the lives and property of the people in the South. For the first time, the black community was optimistic about the future after 246 years of enslavement. Patriotism and common goals were the aims of the Reconstruction, making a new Southern spirit. Supporters of the Reconstruction in the Congress demanded a stronger military in the South in order forthe black community to have full rights as citizens, for their lives were constantly

threatened by Southern racists. A freed black man had a right to establish a new reasonable life. Haley depicts the story of a freed black man who is trying to start a new beginning. In *Roots* we find Kunta's grandchildren; Chicken George and Tom:

> Chicken George told them now that he had found for them all a western Tennessee settlement whose white people anxiously awaited their arrival to help build a town…Tom began planning that afternoon how to alter a farm wagon into a covered "Rockaway," of which about ten could move all of the units of the family to this new place. But by that sundown a dozen other heads of newly freed families had come – not asking, but demanding that their families, too, were going – they were black Holts, Fitzpatricks, Perms, Taylors, Wrights, Lakes, MacGregor's, and others, from local Alamance County plantations.
>
> (Haley 645-646)

Many resisted the idea of granting full rights to the black community. To make things more complicated, President Andrew Johnson did not aid the black people. He had been Abraham Lincoln's vice president. Johnson granted pardons to some of the worst Confederate offenders of the black community. He also vetoed all of the bills that Reconstructionists introduced to remove certain provisions that favored white Southerners. A Freedmen's Bureau was established nevertheless, and it continued for seven years serving the interests of blacks in the South. Yet, no matter how the Reconstructionists wanted the black man to play a vital role in the Senate, only two men were able to make it there. With difficulty, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, who were both from Mississippi, served in the Senate in an atmosphere full of racism and resistance to their presence. From the years 1868 to 1895, 23 black men served in the House of Representatives, and as expected, many white Southerners went against them through the use of violence, theft, and murder.

Thus, Jim Crow was made by white racist politicians. They needed to keep a constant watch on the black community and remind them of their place in society:

> Well boy…no need of wasting time, we'll get right to the point. You can blacksmith, that's fine. But if you want to do it in this town, you'll have to work for a white man that owns the shop. Had you figured on that?'…'You people got to learn not to let all this freedom talk go to your heads
>
> (Haley 649)

Jim Crow is defined as a system of ideas, social norms, mythoforms, role-play symbols, and devastations created after the Civil War. Life of the black community was affected greatly by this oppression Jim Crow created. Hence, a hierarchy was formed as Jim Crow aimed at the level of social reality and psychological manifestation. Jim Crow found its support in the Supreme Court, for they declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 as unconstitutional. This sense of hierarchy can be interpreted as social Darwinism. This is a term created by Herbert Spencer, one of Darwin's countrymen and contemporaries. He assumed that "the status quo in human society evolved out of the same evolutionary struggle that shaped the species: the survival of the fittest" (Bay 190). Social Darwinism gave every white supremacist writer the liberty to create a racial hierarchy of their own. Hence, black people were placed at the bottom "as perennial losers in the evolutionary struggle" (Bay 190).

One example of Jim Crow is President Andrew Johnson's neglect to enforce Reconstruction laws. Furthermore, the sharecropping farming system exploited many black people. Sharecropping is defined as an agriculture system that allows the landowner to take a share of the crop produced in his land by the tenant working on it. Sometimes the share taken from it is 50 percent of the crop and even more. This

system seemed to solve many problems after the emancipation of slaves. Many plantations depended on cheap labor; moreover, it largely maintained the status quo between the black and white races.

Jim Crow slithered its way even into the army as white rebellious soldiers were able to hold powerful political positions. Williams clarifies this point in *Captain Blackman*. An incident occurred at Brownsville, where black soldiers were attacked by white soldiers in Fort Brown. As a result, many black soldiers got involved in order to aid their follows. A report was filed the very next day and President Roosevelt found himself pondering upon a discharge claim for one hundred and sixty seven black men. Inspector General of the Army recommended that the soldiers of Companies B, C, and D of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment (Colored) should be discharged without honor, and barred forever from re-enlisting in the Army or Navy and from employment in the government in any civil service capacity. Williams successfully portrays the indifference through this incident:

> Six of the soldiers were holders of the Medal of Honor; thirteen had been cited for bravery in Cuba…Finally the President drew out the papers at the bottom of the stack and signed them. He leaned back. There was a storm a-coming, but he would be away, aboard the USS *Louisianna*, perhaps reading Milton, on the way to see how his Big Ditch was coming. Taft would have to take over. It was done.
>
> (Williams 98)

The black community was exposed to terror and violence. The Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest and his Ku Klux Klan made sure how to intimidate the Black society. General Forrest was a self-educated, innovative leader, and also the

first Grand Wizard of the KKK. He was also accused of war crimes for conducting a massacre of black Union Army prisoners at the Fort Pillow battle.

The KKK has always been a threat to the black people. On December 24, 1865, the KKK was created by six Confederate Veterans from Tennessee right after the Civil War. The origin of naming Ku Klux Klan has always been subject to debate, but one popular idea why the Klan took this name was because “Ku” and the “Klux” formulated the sounds of loading and locking a bolt-action rifle. Known also as the Klan, they were a secret organization sworn under oath to keep the Klan safe. Violence was its main tool in solving everything. This organization was actually made up of several sub-organizations, like the Southern Cross in New Orleans (1865) and the Knights of the White Camellia in Louisiana (1867). During the Reconstruction period, many white supremacists were threatened. As a result of that, many war veterans had the idea of restoring the white hierarchy, and so the Ku Klux Klan came into effect. Violence, murder, and discrimination were the methods of many armed Klan members; most of them were Confederate soldiers. They would burn houses, kill black people, and leave their corpses on the roads. The Klan members had a dress code; they wore masks and robes to hide their actual identities. They attacked and intimidated Southern Republicans and Freedmen’s Bureau workers. The Klan was also famous in suppressing blacks from voting; over 2,000 persons were killed, wounded and injured in Louisiana within a few weeks before the Presidential election of November 1868. The Klan even went to the extent of hunting the black Republicans through the woods, killing them, and piling them in a pit. They

even harmed and killed white allies of the black community. They also forced people to vote for the Democratic side and gave them certificates as proof that they voted.

However, after two years of its violent approaches, the Klan's activities began to decline after 1868. Many charges were pressed against them, and the Klan was facing many prosecutions. Moreover, many Southern Democrats feared that the Klan's behavior would be used against them as the Federal Government's excuse to retain power over the South.

In the face of the Klan's oppression, resistance and backfire are expected from the black community. The black man found it difficult as he crawled out of slavery and was finally called a free man, but the word was hollow. The black man struggled to gain respect, equality, and human rights. Haley portrays resistance through his character Tom, Kunta's great grandchild:

> Tom…recognized a lone rider along the road as the former Cavalry Major Cates, his uniform tattered and his horse spavined. Cates also recognized Tom, and riding near the fence, he reined up. 'Hey, nigger, bring me a dipperful of your water!' he called. Tom looked at the nearby water bucket, then he studied Cates' face for a long moment before moving to the bucket. He filled the dipper and walked to hand it to Cates. 'Things is changed now, Mr. Cates,' Tom spoke evenly. 'The reason I brought you this water is because I'd bring any thirsty man a drink, not because you hollered. I jes' want you to know that.'…Cates handed back the dipper. 'Git me another one, nigger.' Tom took the dipper and walked off, never once looked back.
>
> (Haley 645)

Resistance became the black community's means to fight back these injustices. As in the portrayal of Tom and how he managed to stand up for himself, the black man started to gain confidence in his freedom. He believed that he must fight to gain

peace. And so an anti-Ku Klux was formed, with the same use of violence the Klan used against them; they were able to threaten the Klansmen with vengeance. The anti-Ku Klux was formed by Union Army veterans and armed black forces. Yet, seldom did state and local governments act against the Klan, for the juries rarely included any black jurors, and many Klan members were found innocent of their crimes because of Klan threats.

These dehumanizing codes of behavior and rules for discriminatory treatment against African Americans were called "Jim Crow" laws." (Asante 282). Moreover, Jim Crow manifested itself in the Rutherford B. Hayes decision in removing all federal troops from the South in 1877. By doing so, attacks on the black community rose in number, and it broke out everywhere. Furthermore, white supremacists wrote and carried out certain rules against African-Americans. With the help of white supremacist Congressmen, James Vardaman and Carter Glass, they aided and enforced racism and discrimination.

> The tacit agreement between the Republican Party and the Southern Dixicrats (Southern Democrats), which returned full control over the Southern states to the rebel white supremacists who had become politicians, encouraged local, state, and national movements to create and enact Jim Crow laws and customs to rob, steal, and deny African Americans their civil rights and money, as well as to prevent African Americans from owning land, resigning from jobs, voting, renting land—in short, doing anything without the control of a white supremacist male. This peonage process set the stage for a national challenge to the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that had ensured African Americans civil rights in every aspect of American society.
>
> (Asante 282)

Separated accommodations between white and black people came as one of Jim Crow's outcomes. Places were being set up for black people to sit in public, the bus station, and the restaurants. Signs were posted to say "No Niggers, No Dogs".

Language is another form of asserting difference for the African-American community. In *Roots, The Color Purple, The Secret Life of Bees,* and *Captain Blackman* the African-American's language is clearly seen through the dialogues between the characters. This is called Black English, Black English Vernacular, African-American Vernacular English, and Inner City English. The different terms given to it all come down to one thing, which is that African-American English developed from pidgin English that was created among slaves from various linguistic backgrounds, primarily from West Africa. Pidgin English featured both the West African languages and English. Gradually, this variety of English evolved into a creole, and then more recently, became decreolized, and began to resemble English more closely:

> You wants de straight up-an-down truth, Massa, I b'lieves mos' niggers figger dey's bein' smart to act maybe dumber'n dey really is, 'cause mos' niggers is scairt o' white folks.
>
> (Haley 495)

This African-American pidgin, also known as fro pidgin, began during the time of slavery. It relied on both African and American sources. Paul S. Boyer believes that "Enslaved blacks gave a distinctive twist to the American as well as African components of their culture." (Boyer 361) Apparently, before slaves could create a culture, they had to learn how to communicate. Communication among the slaves was

very difficult due to their tribal differences in culture and language. “In the pens into which they were herded before shipment and on the slave ships themselves…Africans developed a pidgin – a language that has no native languages in which people with different native languages can communicate” (Boyer 361). Later on, when the first African-Americans were born in America, they adopted the fro pidgin as their first language. It is also stated that African-American English is actually a variety of Southern States English, and there are many common features in common between them, such as the Southern Vowel Shift, vowel lowering, and double modals. The pidgin language gave the African-Americans their own habit of speech and distinguished them from the Anglo-Americans:

> Like all pidgins it was a simplified language. Slave usually dropped the verb *to be* (which had no equivalent in African tongue) and either ignored or confused genders. Instead of saying “Mary is in the cabin,” they say “Mary, he in cabin.” To negate, they substitute *no* for *not,* saying “He no wicked.” Pidgin English contained several African words. Some, like *banjo*, became part of standard English; others, like *goober* (peanut), became part of southern white slang.
>
> (Boyer 362)

Pidgin English endured as the African-Americans molded it into their identity and used it as a part of their culture to distinguish themselves from Anglo-Americans. Writers of fiction took pidgin English as an advantage to portray the true African-American character and give him or her well-rounded personality. Therefore, most of the dialogues in the novels selected for this thesis use the pidgin English to depict the traits of the African-American.

The black advocates' reaction was to seek liberty. One method of gaining liberty was the use of rhetoric that addressed black identity. Black Nationalism emerged in this rhetorical form as it addressed the alienation of the black man and challenged the Anglo-American ideology of white racists for believing they are supreme. Pidgin English endured as the African-Americans molded it into their identity and used it as a part of their culture to distinguish themselves from Anglo-Americans. Writers of fiction to this as an advantage to portray the true African-American character and give him or her well rounded personality. Therefore, most of the dialogues in the novels selected for this thesis use the pidgin English to depict the traits of the African-American. In fact, two important rhetorical creations are *Appeal* by David Walker, and *The Ethiopian Manifesto* by Robert Alexander Young. Those two creations were the nineteenth century's first form of black activism. They helped create a topic of the black community that struggles for emancipation.

> *Appeal* and the *Manifesto* challenge the constituted subjects of the nineteenth-century proslavery narrative to fulfill their own ideological agenda: constitute a different collective white subject and, more important, a new collective black subject to contend for the basic humanity and rights of blacks as a people and as citizens. From the basis of their collective black subject, the *Appeal* and the *Manifesto* rhetorically reconstruct both the past and nineteenth century black experience, including the use of the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, to claim a place and a future in America for its black inhabitants.
>
> (Gordon 100)

Thus, the African-Americans' struggle for independence are portrayed in *Roots, Captain Blackman, The Color Purple, The Secret Life of Bees,* and *A Death in Texas*. One fact made clear is that when the Civil War ended, many African-Americans

resided in the rural South. Haley reflects this point in Kunta's grandchildren when they are freed. Family seems to be an important factor in the black community. Nuclear and extended families are considered important since they are oppressed and need to face discrimination together. Haley clarifies this point of view in his own family. His family was considered one of the luckiest since they were not parted from slavery like many other slaves who were sold against their will to other masters. During the restoration period, Chicken George and his son Tom, great grandchildren of Kunta, help and support their families. Chicken George helps find for them a home to settle down in Tennessee and as he and his sons build a house and start a profession, they find that by depending on themselves, they are able to achieve what they thought they could never do. Defiance of the white community makes it harder on them as they seek for jobs and careers. Racism did not weaken over the years, and so to establish themselves firmly in this world of discrimination, they had to keep each other safe and sound from external injustices. Being together on a Sunday for Church is a family ritual. Religion is a basic part in keeping the family strong. Since white people during the time of slavery imposed everything on their slaves, religion was one aspect of the white man's mission of enlightening their slaves. Kunta is not able to practice and preach his Islamic religion when he is a slave, simply because it is called African paganism. Therefore, the white man's religion which is Christianity has spread vastly among slave row, and so when they are freed, they carry their Christianity beliefs with them:

> With all their houses, barns, sheds, and fences built by 1874, the family – led by Matilda – turned its attention to an enterprise they considered no less important to their welfare: the construction of a

> church to replace the makeshift bush arbors that had been serving as their place of worship. It took almost a year, and much of their savings, but when Tom, his brothers, and their boys had finished building the last pew and Irene's beautiful white handwoven cloth – emblazoned with a purple cross – had been draped over the pulpit in front of the $250 stained-glass window they'd ordered from Sears, Roebuck, everyone agreed that the New Hope Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was well worth the time, effort, and expense it represented.
>
> (Haley 651-652)

Apparently, family comes first in the entire decision making. Alice Walker illustrates the importance of family in *The Color Purple*, and how religion manifests itself in the decision making of many homes of the black community. Walker describes Celie as a woman who has been abused all her life, but as she finds her strength in her own spiritual journey, she learns how to take over her own life. The scene drawn in *The Color Purple* is a scene of Celie corresponding with her sister Nettie who is in Africa, and life as a family spent on either side is very important to them. On the one hand, Celie finds her husband called Mr. –, an uncaring person who only finds interest in Shug. But as she contemplates on her situation, she discovers that he has a good side to him as well. That brings her closer to him as well to his children and their grandchildren. The idea of family bonding whether they are happy or unhappy, family is a recurring theme in both characters Celie and Nettie. Nettie on the other hand is left in the care of her own family she found for herself, the priest and his wife. Taking care of her niece and nephew brings her the sense of warmth she has always been looking for in her sister Celie. Being close and keeping the kids safe makes Celie a person they rely on throughout their lives. Bonding with family members seems to indicate hope and a new beginning for the sisters Celie and Nettie. Yet

Celie's experience with being able to prove her own existence in the family and not be taken for granted is a tough journey for her. Celie portrays her deep trust in God as her sole comfort, and with this comfort she is able to cope with her own family. What is expected of her is to be an independent character, but Walker lets her undergo many trials and groundbreaking experiences in order to gain strength. Thus the idea of Christianity comes into perspective, it is an escape for Celie and Nettie, but they can not complain about the conditions down on earth. According to the white man's superior system they will be rewarded in the hereafter if they did not cause any trouble that would upset the peace between both races.

Therefore, a pattern is seen in *The Color Purple* in which two elements are made important: family and God. These elements help create the identity of both characters as they face many obstacles in the novel. Celie, at a very young age is raped by Mr. – and she finds comfort only in telling her problems to God, so every night she writes a letter addressed to 'Dear God,' and complains about her day-to-day problems. In order to connect what is going through her mind at that point, Celie finds peace and comfort in seeking God. This is similar to her sister Nettie, who finds solitude in spending time with her niece and nephew and teaches them Bible. What is striking in the teachings of the Bible is that Jesus is portrayed as a white man; Celie does not lose faith in him because of his skin color, but proceeds in worship:

> I think about angels, God coming down by chariot, swinging down real low and carrying ole Sofia home. I see 'em all as clear as day. Angels all in white, white hair and white eyes, look like albinos. God all white too, looking like some stout white man work at the bank. Angels strike they cymbals, one of them

> blow his horn, God blow out a big breath of fire and suddenly Sofia free.
>
> (Walker 85)

The concept of God, angels, or Jesus Christ as white means that the black community still struggles with the notion of hierarchal race; the depiction of a white Jesus is dominant in the black man's thought, making him always feel inferior towards the white man. Although Celie finds comfort in God who is her listener and helping hand, she does not quite comprehend clearly who God is. Later on, a radical change in God's image happens in Celie's mind through Shug, who happens to be a singer and the mistress of Celie's husband. Shug claims that God is more of an "it". God created the world and wants people to enjoy life and find happiness in God's creation. Ultimately, Celie replaces her patriarchal God with a new concept of God as she writes in her last letter: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God." This shift from one image to another is Celie's journey from a dependent to an independent woman. For years, Celie suffers from inferiority complex and struggles within her own home. She finds obstacles from her father, then her husband and his children. Shug soon becomes part of the family and is able to let Celie reconnect with herself and come to terms with who she wants to be. Particularly Black women who are oppressed find it difficult to cope with the world around them, simply because many of them are oppressed by black men, and then white men and women. The situation of the black woman gets worse when she faces poverty. This situation is known as the subaltern theory.

> 'Subalternity' refers to condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, and/or cultural

> dominance. Subaltern studies is, therefore, a study of power. Who has it and who does not? Who is gaining it and who is losing it? Power is intimately related to questions of representation…Subaltern studies began with the work of Ranajit Guha and the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective in the 1980s.
>
> (Beverley 183)

This is an example of how oppression went far in the United States of America and made it difficult for African-Americans, especially the women, to live in peace: "You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, your ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (Walker 187). Poverty went up into higher rates in the 1930s and that is made clear in *The Color Purple* that takes place during the nineteen thirties. The United States of America passed through a period of economic hardship known as the Great Depression during that time. In those tough circumstances poverty and unemployment prevailed.

Although President Roosevelt guaranteed better opportunities for all American citizens including blacks, many cultural and economic programs that gave opportunities for blacks to find employment did not fathom the deep-rooted inequality from which the black community suffered. Many black people lost their jobs for the sole reason of being black, and so they were replaced by white people. By 1932, half of the black population was unemployed. White supremacy made it difficult for the individual black man to prosper and be able to provide for his family. In this world of tribulation, *The Color Purple* which is set in the South, mainly in rural Georgia, depicts this image:

> there was a well-to-do farmer who owned his own property near town…And as he did so well farming and everything he turned his hand to prospered, he decided to open a store, and try his luck selling dry

> goods as well…his store did so well that he talked two of his brothers into helping him run it, and, as the months went by, they were doing better and better. Then the white merchants began to get together and complain that this store was taking all the black business away from them, and the man's blacksmith shop that he set up behind the store, was taking some of the white. This would not do. And so, one night, the man's store was burned down, his smithy destroyed, and the man and his two brothers dragged out of their homes in the middle of the night and hanged.
>
> (Walker 157)

This is an example of the cruelty the black society had to face. Once again, Jim Crow gives the authority to keep white supremacists out on the streets, antagonizing and murdering innocent black people. Thus, poverty became the black community's situation. They began to struggle and suffer from their unbearable situations. The incident quoted above shows how Celie's father, who was ambitious, lost his life and his life's work. Celie, a victim in all this racism, is raised by a step-father whom she thinks is her real father. Her weak identity drove her into being an introverted, quiet person who longs to be free. Another example of oppression is found in the character of Sophie, the wife of Celie's step-son Harpo. She goes into town with her children with a man who happens to be a prizefighter, and there she meets the mayor and his wife. The wife's mayor stops and eyes Sophie's children. She notices how clean and well-dressed they are, and so she asks Sophie if she would like be her maid. This condescending behavior ignites a hostility in Sophie, and she replied by saying, "hell no" (Walker 81). This answer drives the mayor to back up and slap Sophie for her attitude. Sophie, outraged by this insult, attacks the mayor with all her might and is thrown into prison with the charge of attacking a white man. Sophie declares later on

that she did what she had to do to save her dignity and did not care about the consequences. Her hatred for white people drives her to be bitter towards them when they force her to become the mayor's maid. For years, she served her punishment as a maid in the mayor's home and learned how racism is even taught without saying a word:

> They got me in a little storeroom up under the house, hardly bigger than Odessa's porch, and just about as warm in the winter time. I'm at they beck and call all night and all day. They won't let me see my children. They won't let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you once a year. I'm a slave
>
> (Walker 96)

Hence, Sophie is punished for standing up for herself and expressing her freedom of speech. She is treated like a slave without being called such and is left to suffer the consequences of defying a white supremacist. However, Celie is another matter who actually needs Shug who is able to give her the possibilities. Celie is able to find peace in many ways alongside the comfort she finds in God and her sister Nettie.

The urge to be a member in society and become independent is what happens next in the black community. Their words needed to be heard this time, and so Celie along with Nettie are on a quest to prove themselves as strong individual females – Celie by breaking free from her husbands' dictatorship and Nettie in finding a home with the priest and her nephew and niece. Again, family bonds recur in this novel when the two sisters are reunited.

> Us look round at a lot of peoples knees. Nettie never let go my waist. This my husband Samuel, she say, pointing up. These our children Olivia and Adam and this Adam's wife Tashi, she say.
> I point up at my peoples. This Shug and Albert, I say.

> Everybody say Pleased to Meetcha. Then Shug and Albert start to hug everybody one after the other."
>
> (Walker 260)

For years Nettie and Celie are separated because of their circumstances, but their love for each other remains strong, and that gives them strength to move on and become certain individuals in society. Walker in *The Color Purple* portrays not only family bonds but focuses more on female friendships as a means for women to summon the courage to face reality and refuse to accept oppression and dominance. For example, the character of Sophia finds strength and the will to fight which comes from her solid relationship with her sisters. Nettie's and Celie's relationship helps Celie in rediscovering her forgotten past, and it helps Nettie in surviving the many years in Africa. Above all, Celie's bond with Shug brings about Celie's gradual redemption and her attainment of a sense of self.

Moreover, Nettie discovers many important facts about God and Jesus Christ and realizes how many white supremacists redefine the pictures of the Bible according to their taste. In this process of discovering facts through the Bible and history, Nettie is rediscovering her roots and where she belongs. Her faith grows stronger:

> Over the pulpit there is a saying: *Ethiopia Shall Stretch Forth Her Hands to God*. Think what it means that Ethiopia is Africa! All the Ethiopians in the bible were colored. It had never occurred to me, though when you read the bible it is perfectly plain if you pay attention only to the words. It is the pictures in the bible that fool you. The pictures that illustrate the words. All of the people are white and so you just think all the people from the bible were white too. But really *white* white people lived somewhere else during those times. That's why the bible says that Jesus Christ had hair like lamb's wool. Lambs wool is not straight, Celie. It isn't even curly.
>
> (Walker 120)

With this revelation, Nettie becomes aware of her own roots and in order to rediscover her present and find a future. The relief in finding out that Ethiopia is in Africa brings a sense of gratitude and pride in her Africanism. Nettie at an early age recognizes the value of education and becomes highly intellectual. That alone makes her go back to Africa in order to find out how her ancestors behaved, and how history has a great effect on her life. With the missionary she finds new meaning and purpose in life: to educate the African people. Following the footsteps of the white man, she realizes in time that the Olinka tribe is well off from the missionaries' attempts in converting them. As a black intellectual traveling the world in pursuit of "the uplift of black people everywhere" (Walker 122), what she encounters in Africa shows that oppression of women by men, of blacks by whites, and even of blacks by blacks is actually universal. A parallel is created between the experiences of Nettie in Africa and the experiences of Celie in Georgia. This becomes a microcosmic view of the cosmic hierarchal role of oppression.

Working as a missionary raises new hopes in Nettie. She believes that she is able to change the past, to present a better future with a solid background of her ancestors, and educate the so-called heathens. Filled with support from Churches and Christians from New York to England, Nettie rediscovers the slave stories and finds out that many Africans actually sold their own kind to slave merchants. That brings instability in her first impression of the Africans, and even feels dislike towards them before reaching her destination in Africa:

> "Why did they sell us? How could they have done it? And why do we still love them? These were the thoughts I had as we tramped through the chilly streets of London…I became hopeful in spite myself

> that much good for Africa is possible, given hard work and the right frame of mind."
>
> (Walker 124)

However, upon reaching Africa finally and mingling with the Olinka tribe who finds it shocking to find missionaries who are black, Nettie realizes that no matter how hard she tries to change them and help them see how she sees God and Jesus Christ, she cannot force them into being what she wants them to be. Simply, she decides to accept the fact that she has once belonged to them, but now has turned into a different breed. She realizes that Africa will always remain part of her history, but it is not where she belongs anymore. She realizes that America is her home, in spite of racism and oppression. She is able to cope with the black and white community, but this time with a different perspective of the idea of God:

> God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone – a roofleaf or Christ – but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us…Samuel and I will found a new church in our community that has no idols in it whatsoever, in which each person's spirit is encouraged to seek God directly, his belief that this is possible strengthened by us as people who also believe.
>
> (Walker 233)

This reflects how the black man is now able to find his own peace in his faith by not following the white man's footsteps. His belief in God as not an idol brings about the birth of a new religion, a religion based on the spirit and deep faith.

The sense of redefining one's beliefs and making one's own understanding of life has become the quest of the black community. No more do they want to follow the footsteps of the white man, whether in matters of faith, ambition, or rules. Black

people need to change to prove their individuality as a community. Therefore, going back to their African roots seems as a starting point, as Nettie and Alex Haley did in order to be able to know how to redefine their current personality. Through history they learn how to fathom the idea of being and not following. This urge of proving oneself in a multi-cultural community like the United States of America, has led many writers, especially African-Americans, to redefine themselves. Mia Bay states in *The White Image in the Black Mind* that by 1925 many black scholars abandoned the nineteenth-century ethnology for social science. The sole reason for this was because a new generation of new Negroes emerged as products of segregation and not of slavery. This generation began to confront the white world with an open racial hostility. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the black community also saw the emergence of a variety of cultural movements. These movements followed the metaphor of race; for example, the movement of Marcus Garvey's Universal Improvement Association (UNIA) appeared as well as for a number of other nationalist sects that emerged in the 1920s and the Moorish Science Temple Muslim sect. Indeed, Black Nationalism began to flourish as never before in the Garvey movement and the new black sects. "These groups popularized a religious racialism that had a widespread appeal in the black community— particularly among the newly urban black populations of many Northern cities" (Bay 189).

The black voice is now making sure that it is heard. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the irrationality of racism is demonstrated by not only portraying black and white characters with dignity and humanity but by also demonstrating how Lily, a fourteen-year old white girl who hides in the home of the Boatwright sisters, struggles with –

and ultimately overcomes – her own racism. First of all, *The Secret Life of Bees* is portrayed in South Carolina, a town rooted in the South. The focus upon how the Boatwright sisters are able to come across their own prejudices towards the white man and develop their own taste of individuality. First of all, the right to vote is made a great issue at the beginning of the novel, and as times passes, the Civil Rights Act is signed once and for all. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made a breakthrough in giving races their full human rights and meant no more racial segregation in schools, workplaces, and general public facilities, especially in employment. This act replaced Jim Crow laws that approved of such racial discrimination in the South. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1967, as well as for the 1960s civil rights activism, the 1960s and 1970s militant activism, and the Black Studies movements were able to progressively break down and decimate many vestiges of the Jim Crow laws.

When this was enforced upon the American society of all races, many white supremacists still harbored their racist prejudices. *The Secret Life of Bees* depicts this clearly. Rosaleen, Lily's nanny, is determined to practice her legal right to vote immediately after hearing about the enactment of the Civil Rights Act. However, white racists did not take the matter lightly:

> 'Well, look what we got coming here,' he called out. 'Where're you going, nigger?'…Rosaleen…said in this tone like she was explaining something real hard to a kindergarten student, 'I'm going to register my name so I can vote, that's what.'…The man next to the dealer…put down his cards and said, 'Did you hear that? We got ourselves a model citizen.'…the men pushed back their makeshift table and came right down to the curb to wait for us, like they were spectators at a parade and we were the prize float… 'Did you ever see one that black?' Said the dealer…the third man…looked at Rosaleen sashaying

> along unperturbed, holding her white-lady fan, and he said, 'Where'd you get that fan, nigger?'… 'Stole it from a church,' she said. Just like that…Rosaleen lifted her snuff jug, which was filled with black spit, and calmly poured it across the tops of the men's shoes, moving her hand in little loops like she was writing her name – Rosaleen Daise …Thy lunged at her, and everything started to spin. There was Rosaleen, grabbed and thrashing side to side
>
> (Kidd 40)

An overwhelming experience like this only made Rosaleen fight harder for her right. She believes in her legal right to vote, and so she determines to stand up for herself and fire back at the whites' racism. She is then sent to jail for assault, theft, and disturbing the peace, whence the three white men who attack her and leave her bleeding, are free to walk away. Retaliating at injustices caused many of the black community to distrust and even hate white people the same way as the white racists hated them for their skin color. Kidd clarifies this point with her character June, one of the Boatwright sisters. Lily after running away from her father's to seek for answers about her mother, ends up at the doorstep of the Boatwright sisters' home. August, the eldest amongst the sisters welcomes her into the home, whereas June detests the idea of having a white girl living at a home where four black sisters live.

What is interesting about the sisters is the black Virgin Mary that binds them all together. For Lily, it is her sign in finding answers about her mother, and to overcome her racism. The black Virgin Mary, also known as the Black Madonna, seems to ignite the soul of the Boatwright sisters' faith. The Black Madonna is based on one of several black-hued Madonnas throughout Europe. One famous Black Madonna is the one located in Switzerland, called the Black Madonna of Einsiedeln. Moreover, she is

known as the Indian goddess of Kali, who is greatly loved, terribly horrific and entirely black. Yet she represents the strength and power of the feminine side. The archetype of the feminine today is emerging through the renewed interest in the Black virgins. Fred Gustafson attempts to define the Black Madonna:

> the difficulty our culture has always had [is] consciously integrating the feminine side of life, and especially its dark side. Another reason is the nature of the dark feminine itself, which defies attempts to give eternally fixed limits to what she represents. Still she gives intimations of her most essential meaning through images, myths, dreams and fantasies.
>
> (Gustafson 13)

As a statue, the black Mary symbolizes the importance of having faith and believing in something larger than one's self. Thus, the Boatwright sisters take advantage of this symbolic aspect and create their own faith called the Daughters of Mary. August Boatwright leads the congregation in her sermons as she reflects the history of slavery, struggle, and the experiences of overcoming one's obstacles in reality. She gives the black community an African identity amidst the Anglicanism. She is able to embody the African strength, the tolerance of the slave, and the independence of the African-American through using the statue of Mary and her congregation. By removing the white man's image of the Virgin Mary of being white gave her and her followers a sense of belonging to their roots and their present. The story behind the statue of Black Mary is that once there was a slave named Obadiah who was loading bricks onto a boat. Washed up on the beach he saw a statue of a black woman, carved in wood. The woman's right arm was raised and her fist closed. To him, she was God's sent savior for the slaves, their prayers answered as he thought he heard her

whisper, “It’s all right, I’m here. I’ll be taking care of you now.” (Kidd 135) Soon, the statue of the woman was associated with the Virgin Mary as the slaves looked at her for strength. They placed her in their praise house, which is like a small hut made for the slaves to use as a church and people all around slave row went there to find hope and strength from the lady with the fist. Slave row is where the slaves used to live in the master’s plantation, their small huts formed as a row, and so it was called slave row. The presence of the black Virgin Mary amongst the slaves was so powerful that many of them escaped and were able to reach North, while others who couldn’t, found hope and tolerance by touching the heart of the statue. Soon, the master learned about the lady with the fist and took her to the barn where he chained her. It is said that every time she was chained in the barn, she was able to make her way back to the Praise House. Hence, she was called “Our Lady of Chains” (Kidd 137). She was called that not because she was in chains, but because she was able to break them.

With this metaphorical and inspirational story, August Boatwright preached this faith amongst the Daughters of Mary and made the statue a living symbol for all. It is a step forward in becoming independent in the nineteen sixties. An independent religion separate from the white man’s has brought the sense of independence and freedom unattached to the white man’s world. Moreover, the idea of the Black Madonna is actually the manifestation of their thoughts and faith in God. August says:

> you know, she’s really just the figurehead off an old ship, but the people needed comfort and rescue, so when they looked at it, they saw Mary, and so the spirit of Mary took it over. Really her spirit is

> everywhere…Inside rocks and trees and even people, but sometimes it will get concentrated in certain places and just beam out at you in a special way.
>
> (Kidd 176)

Spirituality is the essence in both Kidd's and Walker's novels. They both focus on a faith that carries them beyond the faith of the white images depicted in the Bible, and keep them attached to the spirituality of Mother Nature:

> The Daughters stayed with their arms reaching into the air, giving off the feeling they were raising with Mary. Then August picked up a jar of Black Madonna Honey from behind June's chair, and what she did with it brought everybody back to earth. She opened the lid and turned it upside down over Our Lady's head.
>
> Honey oozed down Mary's face, across her shoulders, sliding down the folds of her dress. A wedge of honeycomb stuck in the crook of Our Lady's elbow…next the Daughters swarmed around Our Lady like a circle of bee attendants and rubbed the honey into the wood, working it into the top of her head, into her cheeks, her neck and shoulders and arms, across her breasts, her belly.
>
> (Kidd 333)

Having faith allows the African-American to go beyond his limitedness and establish a new role in life. Here comes an opposition in the novel in which August's faith faces Brother Gerald's, the minister of the church. August believes that there is peace and harmony in all God's created things that give us inner strength. Discrimination amongst God's creatures is not an issue, for equality is something just. On the other hand, Brother Gerald, a white priest, claims that races are meant to be separated and no changes should be made about that. Lily interprets the Minister's thoughts as he sees Rosaleen enter the Church:

> It's funny how you forget the rules. She was not supposed to be inside here. Every time a rumor got going about a group of Negroes coming to worship with us on Sunday morning, the deacons stood locked-arms across the church steps to turn them away. We loved them in the Lord, Brother Gerald said, but they had their own places.
>
> (Kidd 37)

And this is where August has made her own place; the Daughters of Mary welcome all races, to prove that, she accepts Lily in the group, and welcom her with open arms.

Moreover, strong family bonds create a stabilized African-American home in the Boatwright sister. Support, comfort, encouragement, and love help form a bond of strong personality that empowers their identity to emerge and withstand the trials of Racism. Apparently, this technique in placing African-Americans in a tight family bond is what Haley and Walker apply on *Roots* and *The Color Purple*, simply because the family ties are unbreakable and they are the roots of every identity. Haley focuses on his ancestors and follows the family tree way back to the African Kunta Kinte, and so when he discovers his roots, he is able to live his present with the knowledge and power of his past. With those thoughts, he is able to face the future with his identity and no longer feel that when the black man comes into contact with the white world he will go through an experience of redefining himself. No longer will a black man try to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as an un-equal. Self-motivation emerges in the African-American; the Boatwright sisters live on their own, and support themselves through beekeeping. They make their own business in selling honey, and call it Black Madonna Honey. With the use of honey as their merchandise, they are able to show their individuality. In *The Color Purple*, Celie is able to break free and become independent in her own

business by making pants for all ages and sizes. That also applies to Tom and his family in *Roots* as he opens a Blacksmith wagon, and goes from door to door fixing all kinds of things for reasonable charges.

Yet, with all this stress on individuality between the nineteen thirties and nineteen sixties, a lingering animosity lingered in the hearts of some African-Americans towards the white community. This is depicted in one of the Boatwright sisters, June, who finds it difficult to accept Lily, a white teenager, to live at their home, "But she's *white*, August." (Kidd 107) This kind of prejudice is a way of firing back at white racists who discriminate against black people. This can also be seen in Sophie in *The Color Purple;* she defies the mayor's wife and fights back with all her might to prove her point. In *Captain Blackman,* Blackman undergoes all kinds of racism and riots in order to stay in the army and serve his country. A riot is done by a group of people who join forces against an injustice, in the army many white men cut in line, verbally abused, and degraded black men with unfair chores. Thus, black soldiers strike back with violence and anger. To Blackman, being in the American army is something he wishes to do as a citizen and being black makes him proves his patriotic goals by joining the army, fighting in wars, and getting promoted to higher ranks. His goal is to be equal to the white man in combat, status, and bravery in the battlefield. Yet, white racists still make it difficult for the black community to show their independence:

> Once, wherever the American Army had been, from Guam to Germany, its black soldiers had been its kindest; the stories of those kindnesses were legion. But today, a sickness of laughing and giggling hit everyone. The whites were relieved that blacks at last had joined them, had lost finally that essential human

> quality for which they were well-known. And his black soldiers had been giggling and murdering because they'd come to know what it felt like to kill without fear of punishment, in broad daylight, challenging the universe to break out of position in the heaven; had come to know, like whites who'd done most of it in history, just how…easy it was to kill a colored…'No,' Blackman told himself, waving his platoon into the choppers. 'No! We are not joining them in this…We ain't payin that price for belonging."
>
> (Williams v-vi)

Williams clarifies the way Americans deal with the complexities of the issue of race. He shows how an African-American is willing to put himself in the front to prove his humanity and loyalty for the United States of America. Another striking story in *Captain Blackman* is about the attempts of an African-American named Paul Pierre Belmont. He fights in World War I and is honored by France. He also serves as a spy in World War II for the French underground working with the renowned Cleopatre Terrier. He is wounded severely and smuggled by Americans outside of France. He is later chosen in 1954 to relight the flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris. The irony in his heroic deeds is how he spends the end of his days, as elevator operator in the RCA building. The irony strikes hard as the white supremacists would do what it takes to suppress the deeds of a black man and degrade him at the end of his days.

The African-American faced more trials in the nineteen sixties, even after the Civil Rights Act was signed; the new generation of the black community tried to do its best to achieve equality. One example is portrayed in *The Secret Life of Bees*, in the character of Zach Taylor. He is good at sports, handsome, intelligent, and

hardworking. Therefore, he is praised and paid well because of these traits. However, Zach is at a disadvantage for being a black man in the mid-century South. Nevertheless, Zach does not let his race act as a negative force in his life. The fact that Lily is white does not prevent Zach from being attracted to her and in the end falling in love. Being black never prevents him from dreaming about becoming a lawyer, despite the fact that he does not know any black lawyers at that time. Instead, his being African-American inspires Zach to imagine a better and more productive future for himself. It also does not stop him from doing so when he is imprisoned as a result of his race, and for his refusal to turn in a friend.

> He opened a door into a corridor that led to a single row of four jail cells, each of them holding a black boy. The smell of sweating bodies and sour urinals almost overpowered me. I wanted to bring my fingers up to pinch my nose, but I knew that would be the worst insult. They couldn't help that they smelled.
>
> (Kidd 228)

Zack is not weakened by being thrown in to jail, being discriminated against, and abused. He rather becomes more focused, more empowered, and more intent on changing the course of his life. When the Civil Rights Act was enforced and schools were open for the black students, Zack is the first to join. With the help of Lily, he is able to endure the scorn of white supremacist students. In fact, he not only offers Lily love but also serves as a role model for her. He helps Lily transcend her own circumstances and her own views about race.

Thus, a change does occur with the enactment of the Civil Rights Act. The African-American becomes more persistent than ever to endure racism, whether it is

in the battlefield or in society itself. He or she is determined to prove their individuality in many ways. The novels discussed in this chapter reflect what the African-American is going through and how determination prevails.

CHAPTER FOUR:

NEO-RACISM: THE HIDDEN THREAT

At the dawn of a new millennium comes the promise of freedom, equality, and dignity for all citizens living in a hybrid, multi-cultural society like the United States of America. In this democratic country where justice and equality are its slogans, groundbreaking news shakes the very status of the country on June 7, 1998. The story was made nationwide, and the scandal of former president Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky seemed a tiny speck compared to the hate crime committed in Jasper, Texas. Headlines about the murder spread throughout the country and even made it internationally. For days, newspapers and media reported the hate crime live from the town Jasper, the heart of the crime scene investigation where the crime occurred:

> — A black man was dragged to his death on Sunday from the back of a pickup truck in a rural section of Texas known for racist and Klan activity, and today three white men were charged with the murder…The broken body of James Byrd Jr., 49, was discovered on Sunday morning by residents of an area just outside the East Texas town of Jasper, population 8,000. As he walked home from his parents' house on Saturday night, Mr. Byrd was apparently picked up by the men sometime after midnight and taken to woods, where he was beaten, then chained to the truck and dragged for two miles…Guy James Gray, the Jasper County District Attorney, called the killing "probably the most brutal I've ever seen" in 20 years as a prosecutor. Mr. Byrd's torso was found at the edge of a paved road, his head and an arm in a ditch about a mile away, according to an affidavit…The police charged Shawn A. Berry, 23, Lawrence R. Brewer, 31, and John W. King, 23, with murder. The District Attorney

> said Mr. Brewer and Mr. King had racist tattoos and were Ku Klux Klan supporters, leading investigators to believe the killing was racially motivated.
>
> (Cropper A16)

This article taken from the *New York Times* reveals the brutality of the fact that hate crimes still linger in the last years of the twentieth century. For decades, the African-Americans struggled to have decent living conditions in a stable home of their own, and to maintain their own identity. However, amidst the black and white community, a hidden bond is kept secret, a bond that shows who the dominating race is.

Racism has altered, twisted, and evolved into a more hidden and devious form, a form already termed Neo-Racism. It is defined as a new form of xenophobia and discrimination practiced on the minority races in America: Arabs, Asians, and African-Americans. Neo-Racism is also known as Contemporary Racism, Hidden Racism, or New Cultural Racism. The concept behind Neo-Racism is related to stereotyping certain races. Gary Grobman explains that "Television, books, comic strips, and movies are all abundant sources of stereotyped characters. For much of its history, the movie industry portrayed African-Americans as being unintelligent, lazy, or violence-prone. As a result of viewing these stereotyped pictures of African-Americans, for example, prejudice against African-Americans has been encouraged." (Grobman 1990) The effects of such behavior towards the African-Americans may lead to hatred between both races, and could even develop into violence.

When looking upon the two worlds of black and white, one wonders how much prejudice and hidden hatred is out there. What makes Neo-Racism more worrying is the fact that the tension between the races is mostly hidden beneath the surface. This quiet injustice led the black population in Jasper to rise in anger as they revealed the

truth about the situation when James Byrd Jr. was brutally murdered out of sheer hate. To shed light on the situation of the African-American in the twentieth and twenty first centuries in America, a time when equality, justice, and human rights are said to have been achieved, a recent study contradicts the claims with actual facts. In November 2007, well-known American research centers released two reports that proved that African-Americans still suffer from inequality. The reports by the Pew Research Center and Brookings Institution illustrate mounting gaps between Anglo and African-Americans; apparently there is a big difference between the black man's income and the white man's. Moreover, there is no economic security for the children of the black community. The Pew report concluded that "African Americans see a widening gulf between the values of middle class and poor blacks, and nearly four-in-ten say that because of the diversity within their community, blacks can no longer be thought of as a single race." Since 1983, Black respondents also were not wholly optimistic about black progress because of the unfairness of the criminal justice system. They believed that "anti-black discrimination is commonplace in everyday life". However, Afro- and Anglo-Americans came to a mutual agreement that in the last decade "'values held by blacks and whites' have converged…most think that blacks and whites get along at least 'pretty well'; and 'more than eight in ten adults in each group also say they know a person of a different race whom they consider a friend'". (Katz)

Thus, the issue of Racism is a constant source of controversy in the American society. Racial equality is a new concept, and so many African-Americans are haunted by the discrimination that happened in the past. This affects their own

judgment; therefore, many African-Americans secretly rationalize hate because of the obscenities that happened generations ago: oppression and slavery. We may think that racism is over and justice is served; however, Jeff Hickman states in "Racism in America: What Has to Happen for White and Black to Unite?" that most Americans claim that they are "not racist individuals", and Hickman believes that those claimers are "either fooling themselves, or just being politically correct" (Hickman). Deep down in the human psyche, Racism is explained away through various reasons. These reasons are connected to "the reverse discrimination of Affirmative Action, ignorance of other races, and the belief in the need for retribution for past injustices. Maybe we should all take some time to look at these issues and into our own hearts, to see if together we can learn to be better as a species." (Hickman) The contemporary African-American comes to light as derived from Hickman's definition. To first define themselves, they become torn in between two worlds, the white man's world and the black man's. It has been a cliché that black people are stereotyped as gangsters or dangerous people. What is more important is that these stereotypes affect the contemporary African-American, who seems to digest the facts bitterly, no matter how hard he tries to be a normal citizen. The result of such stereotyping comes from the rise of active black gangsters and violence. Statistically, research was conducted on nineteenth-century Philadelphia by Roger Lane; the result was that homicide patterns differed between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans. It seems that after the Civil War, black homicide rates increased whereas white homicide rates declined. Lane focuses on New York City and finds that it has been divided between blacks and whites because of discrimination, and as a result a "structurally different

city" is presented. The account of these structural characteristics in the dissimilarity of crime patterns creates "different criminal worlds" (Monkkonen 134). Apparently, felony and crime were more profitable for whites, but even in the world of crime, segregation prevented the more beneficial opportunities for African-Americans and encouraged more violent and harmful crimes.

With the beginning of the twenty-first century, it appears that hate crimes have not decreased in numbers. In 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation made a recent statistical study on various hate crimes. The results are hard to fathom as the rise in hate crimes based on prejudices of race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or national origin, and disability affected 9,652 victims. The following table is simply a mere example on one aspect of the hate crimes committed against race:

Bias motivation	*Incidents*	*Offenses*	*Victims*[1]	*Known offenders*[2]
Total	**7,722**	**9,080**	**9,652**	**7,330**
Single-Bias Incidents	**7,720**	**9,076**	**9,642**	**7,324**
Race:	**4,000**	**4,737**	**5,020**	**3,957**
Anti-White	890	1,008	1,054	1,074
Anti-Black	2,640	3,136	3,332	2,437
Anti-American Indian/Alaskan Native	60	72	75	72
Anti-Asian/Pacific Islander	181	230	239	181
Anti-Multiple Races, Group	229	291	320	193

[1]The term *victim* may refer to a person, business, institution, or society as a whole.

[2]The term *known offender* does not imply that the identity of the suspect is known, but only that an attribute of the suspect has been identified, which distinguishes him/her from an unknown offender.

(Hate Crime Statistics, 2006)

The statistics show that 52.1 percent of the victims were targeted because of bias against race. In fact, 66.4 percent fatalities were victims of anti-black bias, and only 21.0 percent were victims of an anti-white bias. Based on these numbers, it is obvious that there is still prejudice against the black race. Therefore, Neo-Racism appears

more threatening, for it deviates into the hidden subconscious of an individual, who claims to be unbiased and just, whereas his or her actions speak differently. A thin line divides the white and black communities. Once crossed, the black race faces unexpected consequences. Therefore, Neo-Racism is another way of keeping the Anglo-Americans in power, politically, ethnically, or socially over the Afro-Americans. With the use of hypocrisy and claims for equality, Neo-Racism becomes the unseen threat, which is actually a more vital threat than slavery, simply because when discrimination occurs, pinpointing the evidence becomes a difficult task. Therefore, the victims are left wondering how to face it. Many Afro-Americans accept the facts and move on, while others fight and struggle for results, but not all find successful results.

To further highlight the difference of the separate worlds created between the Anglo- and Afro-Americans, President Barrack Obama states in his biography *Dreams from my Father* how the two worlds never collide and are shrewdly kept hidden and apart:

> I had begun to see a new map of the world, one that was frightening in its simplicity, suffocating in its implications. We were always playing on the white man's court…by the white man's rules. If the principal, or the coach, or a teacher…wanted to spit in your face, he could, because he had power and you didn't. If he decided not to, if he treated you like a man or came to your defense, it was because he knew that the words you spoke, the clothes you wore, the books you read, your ambitions and desires, were already his. Whatever he decided to do, it was his decision to make, not yours.
>
> (Obama 85)

Although Obama is considered a hybrid of both races: black and white, his mother is an Anglo-American, and his father is an African from Kenya. The result is that Obama grew up in a world where he struggled to find a place to fit in. Having a lighter complexion than black and darker than white, he himself was lost between the two races throughout his teens. This division between black and white races is clarified in a dramatic and eye-opening way in Dina Temple-Raston's *A Death of Texas: A Story of Race, Murder, and a Small Town's Struggle for Redemption*, which is going to be focused on in this research. The hate crime of James Byrd Jr. in 1998 in Jasper, Texas symbolized the world of Neo-Racism. Temple-Raston digs under the surface to find the thin line that kept black and white people apart throughout the past century.

First of all, Jasper has a population of 8,600, located north of Vidor, which happens to be an hour drive between Jasper and Vidor. Before explaining the history of Jasper, it is important to explain the history Vidor as well. Vidor is the capital of the Ku Klux Klan country, where until the 1990s one could still see warning signs such as "Niggers Get Out of Town After Dark" (Temple-Raston 29) The influence of the Ku Klux Klan is still alive and spreading. Known as The Klan, it has become the name of several past and present hate group organizations in the United States. Those groups' avowed purpose was to protect the rights of and further the interests of the white people through the use of violence and intimidation. The Klan is divided into several minority groups; each group is headed by a name of a certain hierarchal organization. In the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Klan can be seen to arrive at rallies in Executive Campers; making camp

between the crowd and ordering the members to make effective efforts in the audience. This clandestine terrorist organization still strives to maintain the rule of the white race in the United States of America. It has been variously described as "a vigilante organization, a national liberation front, a revitalization movement, a secret order, a fraternal lodge, a status society, a bastion of poor-boy politics and, in the twentieth century, a money-maker for its leaders." (Chalmers, 1981: 424) Its method has been and always will be violence, thrashing, vicious threatening and mutilation, and even murder, all under the claim of upholding justice, traditional morality, and white supremacy. The most important factor in the Klan's main goals of the twentieth century is the fact that they are searching for people who have the same disposition to become members and follow the rules of their fraternity. This ancient, mystic, and so called order has its dress code: the white robes, as well as for rituals and initiations. Moreover, certain hierarchies and secrets are passed out during sacred ceremonials making those that pass a would-be member of the world of "patriotism and Klannishness". However, as times have changed, their so called "Imperial Wizards" no longer use the white robes and guns as their public appearance. They are more likely to appear "in three-piece suits or leisure suits, cut to the prevailing fashion." (Chalmers 426)

The women of the Klan today are the wives and girl friends of the Klansmen, but every once in a while, a prominent Klanswoman appears. For example, David Duke's "innovative realm, which also recruits Roman Catholics, has merged with his Klanswomen and even has a woman who is skilled in the martial arts as head of security." (Chalmers 426) Nevertheless, from the 1980s, no longer does the Klan

fight for dominance but for regaining what they think is lost of the white man's prerogative, taking the lead in businesses and other fields. Consequently, African-Americans still face poverty and unemployment. However, when the nation started to drift towards foreign investments and multi-national companies, the Klan felt powerless against the growing numbers of non-white races. They are so influenced by their so-called just cause that they even believed that "The initials FBI really stand for the 'Federal Bureau of Integration,' Klan speakers explain, and the Department of HEW means 'nigger Health, nigger Education, and nigger Welfare.'" (Chalmers 432)

Nowadays, the term "Cross burnings" has changed into "sacred cross lightings." (Temple-Raston 141), and Michael Lowe, a grand dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, created a new perspective of the Klan. He says that the Klan does not demand African-Americans to return to Africa, or stop immigration. They believe that the Klan must now protect the white race and heritage. Lowe single-handedly recruited 5,000 members in Texas alone using this ideology. In Vidor, right on Main Street, and out by Highway 12 the Klan made a white school bus where T-Shirts are being sold, as well as for bumper stickers and membership information given to passerby.

With this ideology living close by Jasper, the town faced its own history of segregation starting from the timber boom in the 1920s. Citizens of Jasper were lumbermen and their families revolved around the lumber mills. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the people of Jasper seemed to be affected by the simplicity of country life. For example, family times meant spending at a local inn for dinner once a week, or grabbing a couple of cokes and sitting with friends on the steps of Jasper's

courthouse. There were no disco clubs, pubs, or video arcades. Men would later join one of their private drinking circles to play cards or dominoes. But underneath the surface, the stories of discrimination are passed down from one generation to the next among the African-Americans. In the mid-1980s, most of the lumber work was done by hand. Both white and black men cut pulpwood and hewed railroad ties. Actually, black lumbermen were the ones who "hoisted, stacked, and manually loaded the wood. The Afro-American workers knew they were chosen for the task because stacking ties was dangerous work. Fingers and hands were often caught between the logs, crushed or ripped clean off" (Temple-Raston, 2002: 33). Later on, mechanization transformed the business. It saved a lot of the lumbermen's hands and fingers and lowered very expensive worker compensation costs.

Over the years, The African-Americans in Jasper were not able to mingle in the white man's neighborhoods. For decades, segregation existed and left the black and white population separated. The black community lived on the edge of the woods, while as the whites drifted to other parts of towns, gathered together in groups. The situation later grew harder on both Afro- and Anglo-American citizens of Jasper, poverty and unemployment struck both races in Jasper and in 1998 unemployment reached 15 percent, nearly three times the national average. Consequently, the sight of broken men sitting limply on fold-out chairs on their yards and watching eighteen-wheeler trucks move from one side of the road and disappear into the woods was an everyday ritual.

Moreover, Jasper was an isolated town from all events that took place around the nation. African-Americans did not receive their equal rights in 1954 when the

government announced that African-Americans had equal rights as the Anglo-Americans, starting from public places to equal education at schools. “In the white South there was gloom and in Jasper there was disbelief…It took fourteen years to integrate. There was some wiggle room in the Court’s decision, and Jasper’s white community didn’t want to rush things, frankly, they were worried bout whether everyone would get along just because the Supreme Court said they must.” (Temple-Raston 38) The way the Anglo-Americans saw the Afro-Americans, even in the 1990s Jasper, is hard to fathom. They would respectfully call them “black” in public, but behind closed doors, the word “nigger” lingers as a noun to describe the black community. The word “nigger” came out naturally among the Anglo-Americans when they gathered and talked about society. Furthermore, racial relations were complicated in Jasper by the late 1990s. In rural places like Jasper, many African-Americans interacted professionally closely with the Anglo-Americans for generations. The Afro-Americans still introduced themselves to the Anglo-Americans by exchanging the names of the “antebellum white families that ‘brought their people over’” (Temple-Raston 39). This awkwardness came to the extent that even in the twenty-first century rich town whites would drop by without any notice with a “pounding”. The term “pounding” is historical from the time of slavery; they would give a pound of sugar, a pound of butter, a pound of flour, and a pound of beans to their slaves on slave row. Nowadays, these rich white ladies would give a “pounding” to their maids and housekeepers. Even in death discrimination found its way. In Jasper’s cemetery:

> The headstones in the front of the yard had one thing in common: they all marked white graves. The largest was the

> eighty-square-foot expanse of pink granite that Joe Tonahill, the town patriarch, had erected in memory of his wife, Violett…The black graves, marked with colorless stones and plastic flowers, were behind a fence in the back of the cemetery – segregated for eternity.
>
> (Temple-Raston 39)

The African-American community received a wakeup call when James Byrd Jr. was murdered and silence was finally broken as one by one, the black community started to admit the continuous segregation. They began to realize the lost opportunities; only one black person worked in Jasper's bank, and only one black person was able to open a store on Courthouse Square, and only two black people sat on in Jasper's city council. Moreover, R. C. Horn, a black mayor who beat three white candidates in 1997 for the position and was the first black mayor, could not do anything for the black community without the approval of the white people in power. Therefore, Horn was seen less than an ally and a false hope for any kind of appeasement.

With poverty and no chance of change, the African-Americans of Jasper, especially the men, spent their days drinking beer, sitting on the road sides, waiting for a miracle to happen as they watched television outside their trailers. Soon, marijuana and cheap forms of cocaine started to appear among them. Violence and aggression dominated most of their lives. It is hard not to notice that most of the city's businesses were owned by white people. "There were no black bank managers, car dealers, or salesman. Black men only got the jobs white men didn't want, the saying went." (Temple-Raston 59) Jasper Memorial Hospital adds to the unjust world of segregation in Jasper as it refuses to accept any black patient, even though it is the only hospital available in town. Since it is a private hospital, they have the prerogative to choose who gets admitted into it, leaving the African-Americans to

take a long bus trip to the nearest government hospital in Galveston for treatment. Charlene Adams, an African-American living in Jasper, tells her side of the story after the murder of James Byrd Jr.:

> when her two-year-old granddaughter drank a can of lighter fluid…She had trouble rounding up a neighbor to drive her to a doctor. When they finally did take the little girl to Jasper Memorial, there was little doctors could do. They medevac-ed the child to Galveston. 'They had to take her to the black hospital,' Charlene Adams said. The child was on life support for five days before she died.
>
> (Temple-Raston 60)

The irony in Jasper Memorial Hospital is that it hires African-Americans as staff members and pays them good wages. Apparently, hypocrisy plays a vital role behind closed doors.

The struggles of the African-Americans' in the twentieth century, and their enduring process in facing the unjust world ultimately affected their identity. At first the African-American would find comfort in his or her home when his or her home is a dignified nuclear one. But as he or she grows older and begins to realize the world around him, they begin to see the true colors of discrimination from the white supremacist, and the truth of such a hierarchy of race becomes clearer to them. In fact, many injustices formulate in the human psyche and he or she tends to react in different ways. What is important is how to sustain the self in the presence of others. A question asked frequently by Obama himself as he endured a lifelong struggle in finding his place in a segregated world. The African-American citizens of Jasper are merely a reflection of a bigger picture of discrimination lingering in the Deep South. Over the years, the riots, revolts, and violence spread throughout the country,

demanding human equality and rights. At the turn of the twentieth century, the threat of segregation seems to persist, if not in the streets, but in the minds of racists. With this in mind, the African-American rebels and urges active organizations to oppose the indifference of the white man:

> Truth is, it was kind of a white people's place," Reverend Lyons said. "It didn't say it on the door, but we knew. Some thought that whites got up in the morning and decided about how they could hurt us. But that isn't true. They don't think about us. Period. They've found a way to make it so we're as good as not being there. Signs on the door aren't necessary.
>
> (Temple-Raston 119)

Thus, creating an individual identity comes to a crisis for the African-Americans. Being torn between two worlds, the order of keeping one's freedom bounded by the other race's demands for a limited freedom is an aspect Jim Harper argues about in *Identity Crisis: How Identification is Overused and Misunderstood*. The term identification has wider implications than meets the eye. It is essential in order to comprehend and recognize other people. Through analyzing a person's identity, one could come up with an idea about the community and its behavior to which that person belongs to. Harper explains that identifiers play a vital role in shaping the identification of a person:

> The building blocks of identification are ''identifiers.'' Identifiers are facts that distinguish people and entities from one another. What we often call a ''characteristic'' or an ''attribute'' becomes an identifier when it is used for sorting and organizing people and institutions in our thoughts and records…So identifiers are facts used to sort and categorize people and entities from one another. Although there are many different kinds identifiers have traditionally been grouped into three categories: something you are, something you know, and something you have. An

> additional category—something you are assigned—is sufficiently distinct from the others to be treated separately.
> (Harper 12-13)

Starting from the fact of what a person owns to what he knows shapes his personality. Thus, the contemporary African-American finds it important in being different from the white man for the sake of becoming a contemporary African-American who is independent, socially dynamic, and qualified. These characteristics are what the African-American prefer to be judged with instead of the color of skin. When one looks more closely into Temple-Raston's *A Death in Texas*, one observes the way the black community are isolated from the white community. Everything in Jasper is unjust and indifferent towards the African-American, from job opportunities to medical care. The common African-American finds salvation in drinking, wandering aimlessly during the days, and watch television for 24 hours a day. All this injustice was suppressed until the murder of James Byrd Jr. Media and Press Conferences turned the town inside out as the hate crime became national news. African-Americans were speaking their side of the story for the first time, and the Anglo-Americans' comfort zone was violated, making them ponder what they have really done. In the early days after the murder, yellow ribbons spread out all through town in order to convey a message of unity between the two races. It was worn by everybody and was placed on every door, lapel, and car antenna. The white people were more eager to show their support than the blacks. Soon after the yellow ribbons, a mutual hug was given between them whenever they saw each other. "Whites held doors open for blacks. Hastily called town meetings had white citizens apologizing for racial injustices inflicted years before." (Temple-Raston 116) Whites would let

black motorists pass them first when a green light came on. All those unexpected confessions and ways to recuperate made the black community eye the white people with suspicion. Black community leaders begged them not to react in violence and rage on Byrd's murder. Prayer and patience seemed to be the rational thing to do. At the outskirts of town, many Black activists repudiated such a hate crime; among them were Jesse Jackson, a Civil Rights activist, Walter Diggles, the executive director of the Deep East Texas Council of Governments, Quanell X, a Muslim leader from Houston. However, the New Black Panthers of Dallas made a greater impact on Jasper. The group's leader, Khalid Abdul Mohammad, demanded that he and the New Black Panthers be present at James Byrd's funeral. The reason for their presence in Jasper was to "protect the black community" from similar crimes. This group was established in 1991, following the ideology of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X.

Malcolm X is an icon activist who spoke for both blacks and Islam. He had a rough childhood; his father was killed by white racists and his mother suffered from a nervous breakdown. Growing up in such circumstances led him eventually to petty crimes. In prison, he joined the Nation of Islam. After he left prison, he changed his name to Malcolm X in "conformity with the discipline of the Nation of Islam[,]…which had transformed him and given him a new understanding of his condition and that of all Africans in American society" (Asante 105). The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by W. D. Fard in Detroit, Michigan, and developed by Elijah Muhammad. It is a local African-American socio-religious movement that began as a socio-religious objection movement; its beliefs are largely based on the Qur'an. "The Nation of Islam arose in the United States in response to the crude,

racist bigotry; socioeconomic injustices; lynching; and mob violence against African Americans in the first decades of the 20th century." (Asante 354)

The New Black Panthers moved forward in Dallas following the ideology of black power and independence. When they heard about the murder of James Byrd Jr., action seemed to be the right thing to do at the time. The NBP decided to show up with guns at Byrd's funeral, and reflect the image of justice. Police, Sheriffs, and the FBI could not do anything to stop them from carrying guns, since the state of Texas does not prohibit gun carrying.

On the day of the funeral as the New Black Panthers marched, there were more media, Police officers, Texas Rangers, and FBI agents than NBP members. NBP members paced along Burch Street behind the jail and took left on Martin Luther King Boulevard, and then stopped in the parking lot of Greater New Bethel Baptist Church. Later on, a press conference was held before the jail as Khalid Mohammad shouted "Black Power!" through the microphone.

Two days later, after Byrd's funeral, Michael Lowe and his Klan decided to visit Jasper and take advantage of the town's sudden publicity. The idea of having a Klan rally in Jasper was enough to trigger a response from black militant groups, who found it unfair that the New Black Panthers paraded in Jasper with unloaded guns. These black militants wanted to rebound and challenge the Klan. Ominous public statements confusing white supremacist organizations were made by Quanell X of Houston. He is the leader of the Mental Freedom Obtains Independence, and he was the former national youth minister for the Nation of Islam. However, he was considered to be "too extreme" by some.

What is interesting about all the publicity and media is that when James Byrd Jr. was buried and while the gathered public figures discussed the idea of reconciliation and harmony between the races, "they neglected to note one thing as the last shovel of dirt was patted down around James Byrd's above-the-ground vault: he was buried on the black side of the Jasper City Ceremony, still segregated in 1998." (Temple-Raston 134)

To elucidate further, Neo-Racism has spread into the military in which John Williams clarifies the distinct point between battle and Racism in the army in *Captain Blackman*. The Vietnam War broke out in the mid-1950s as the United States took over from the French, who had colonized Indochina during the nineteenth century. Massive military power moved in the late 1960s, the United States of America eventually withdrew hastily from Vietnam between 1973 – 1975. Williams places his main character Blackman in various situations where racial discrimination is being upheld in various sectors of the U.S. Army. It is also important to note that *Captain Blackman* appears at the end of the Black Arts Movement in which Williams is considered one of the notable literary figures of this movement. He is one of the few novelists who are identified with a movement that was committed to reflecting an aesthetic work that tackles the interests of the African-American:

> The black arts movement (BAM) was an intense, vocal, provocative, and serious intellectual movement devoted to exploring all and every aspect of African life—without reference to the culture imposed by Europe. Often referred to as the artistic sister of the black power movement, the black arts movement is highly regarded among African American intellectuals. The movement changed the function and meaning of literature, as well as the place of culture in mainstream America, by insisting on the right of

> the artists to redefine the roles and characterizations given them by white Americans.
>
> (Asante 114)

The character Blackman sheds greater light upon the whole situation in Vietnam where he is bound to lead his battalion into a death zone where surely none of his troops could survive. He risks his life to save his men. The conspiracy behind him being sent to that particular area of the battlefield with no backup is because Major Whittman holds a grudge against him for being better than he is in the military and for teaching black history to the black soldiers. Blackman as a black soldier and a Captain takes a vow to uphold the morale of the black men in the army, for Racism grew worse every time. Between the groups and battalions, many white men and official soldiers in high ranks took advantage of the situation and conducted oppression. In fact, Black soldiers were treated differently and were kept in "segregated units within the army. Most black soldiers acted as combat support groups or as labor battalions." It is estimated that "three fourths of the Blacks served" in the army. The slogan "freedom to serve the country" (Melvin) was actually meant for the Anglo-American soldiers, and so blacks were not able to participate on equal terms with them in the army.

Captain Blackman thus takes the effort in explaining the history of black soldiers to give the African-American soldiers a reason for being in the army:

> Only yesterday he'd told them again at the end of his black military history seminar that he didn't want any heroes in his company. Things were close to the end, and even if they weren't, they had nothing to prove. He'd told them time and again, these legs with their mushrooming Afros and off-duty dashikis, that they were not the first black soldiers to do what they were doing. He'd gone back to the American Revolution to Prince Estabrook, Peter Salem,

> Crispus Attucks, and all of the unnamed rest, from there to the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Plains Wars, the Spanish-American War – all the wars. He'd conducted the seminar during their off-duty time, without the blessing of the brass, with the obvious, smoldering resentment of the Major, who, for some reason, had let him carry on.
>
> (Williams 2)

In order to achieve black self-determination, the black power movement was formed. In this political, social, cultural, and economic movement between mid 1960s and early 1970s the movement brought forth a generation of black activists who were committed to the struggle for a black agency. The activists were able to transform American society and also infuse peoples of African descent all over the globe with the desire to accentuate and positively identify with black pride and black consciousness. "This was a time that recalled the black nationalist legacy of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), as well as elements of the Harlem Renaissance era of the 1920s, which can be deemed the precursor of the black power movement of the 1960s" (Asante 144).

The Black Power Movement along with the Black Arts Movement are depicted in the character of Captain Blackman who strives to keep the strength of black culture, behavior, and dignity in the minds and souls of his black soldiers throughout the Vietnam War. Yet, no matter how hard he fought for the ideology of black power to take place in the military, his white antagonist, Major Whittman, would always be one step before him:

> Whittman…was more intent on seeing the broken man in the bed. This was white power; this is what he'd done, finally, to the nigger who'd whipped his ass in Korea. And he'd done it to the system, too, that protected Blackman from his wrath…he was ready to unleash when he discovered the black military history seminar. Complaining

to Greer did no good; Greer was afraid of this nigger thing. Everyone was afraid of it. But I did this, Whittman thought, as he drew near the bed and met Blackman's eyes. I sent him in when Intelligence, as usual, didn't know…from Shinola about what was out there. Now we know, with one casualty, this one. No dead.

(Williams 236)

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

The novels discussed in this thesis present characters of various ages and circumstances. By connecting each African-American character to the other with the aid of historical background, the identity of the African-American emerges. Basically, the African-Americans have a sense of dignity and humanity which they seek to establish against the trials of Racism and Neo-Racism. The trials of Racism and Neo-Racism subject the African-American to a cycle of discrimination they so desperately need to end. Racism has always been a part of the American scene, but the struggle of the black minority has resulted in a transformation of the "nigger" into the "African-American", a description that is more dignified although it may not be totally free from discriminatory connotations. The African-American no longer lingers behind the white man; he or she wants to cope rather than to copy him. With pride in finding out his or her roots as an African and learning from their past makes them capable of defining their present vis-à-vis the white society. The novels dealt with above show this new awareness of a different identity evolving.

At first the African-American is identified as a slave. A meager person a slave who is thought to be incapable of knowing what is best for him. His religion, behavior, habits, and language are rejected by the white man, who endeavors to civilize him in the European fashion. Anything related to Africa is to be loathed upon and forbidden to be ever used, practiced, or thought. Therefore, the African is transformed into a slave, who is used as a white man's puppet, and who is following

the white man's way of thinking and behaving. Most slaves preferred to act dumb than project their own opinions. Suppression killed all form of Africanism they had left, and so they chose what they thought was a means to keep them alive and together with the people they loved. After the abolition of slavery, they became aware of their right to live in a society free of oppression and slavery. They were called niggers and blacks to set them apart from the white man and his supremacy. The African-Americans thus started their battle against racism. Fighting for equality and dignity only made them lose a part of themselves in the process by trying to imitate the way the white man thinks, lives, and behaves.

Therefore, many African-Americans chose to separate themselves from this notion, and create their own identity that is separate from the white man and related to their African heritage. Eventually, the black man was called the African-American, simply because he took pride in his African roots and made it part of his identity in the American society. Through the Civil Rights Act as well as for the abolishment of Jim Crow Laws, the African-Americans have been able to work, study in the same schools as white people did, and enter public stores and buildings. Yet, after all that discrimination lingered. To achieve equality between the races again brought so many struggles for the African-Americans among white racists. However, many rights were earned by the African-American.

The concept of Racism has evolved into a pernicious and covert form termed Neo-Racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

> Blacks and whites from neighboring cities still won't stop in Vidor for gas at night. "People aint right here," said one. "They may have taken down the sign they had that said 'Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Vidor,' but that doesn't mean their attitudes have changed. They've just become harder to track.
>
> (Temple-Raston 143)

This statement alone projects the hidden wall dividing both sides, a gruesome hate crime happen to be the key to open up the files of segregation. An African-American is left helpless in the arms of powerful white supremacists; even a black person in power has his or her share of oppression from them; R. C. Horn has been given as an example. From the previous facts, the following conclusion emerges: Neo-Racism has come to be a form of paralysis and a kind of disease infested in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the minorities, especially the African-Americans. This is seen through the murder of James Byrd and how Jasper, Texas is a mere example of many towns in the South that are still suffering from discrimination and are pushed down below the middle class and way into the poverty level. The African-Americans have reasons to be afraid, but instead of having the whole community of all races working together to overcome the problem, some people are fermenting a violent opposition, like the likes of the Ku Klux Klan and their secret societies of white supremacists.

Stereotypes play a vital role in the judgment of the white community. The outbreak of gang activities and violence among the African-Americans in the twentieth century in the United States of America led people to think of them as a community that belongs to the poverty level. President Obama realizes the role of the

black man in his memoirs *Dreams from my Father*. A black man needs more than what the community gives; he needs stability in a world he can create on his own:

> And if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community, I realized, a community that cut deeper than the common despair that black friends and I shared when reading the latest crime statistics, or the high fives I might exchange on a basketball court. A place where I could put down stakes and test my commitments.
>
> (Obama 115)

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الهوية الأ اع مع العنصرية
والعنصرية الجديده في خمس روايات مختارة

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ملخـص

تحاول هذه الأطروحة سبر غور القضية التي أصبحت مصدر عار لإحدى أعظـــم الإمبراطوريات في التاريخ ، تلكم الامبراطورية التي ما زالت تفاخر بأنها رائدة الديموقراطيـــة في العالم، بينما هي في ذات الوقت تحمل في طياتها ظلمـــا اجتماعيـا جليـا وتمييـزا عنصريـا. وستتقصى مشكلة التمييز أو التفرقة العرقية في خمس روايات هي على التوالي: رواية **الجذور** لأليكس هيلي (1977) ، و**كابتن بلاكمان** لجون أ. وليمز (1972) ، و**اللون الأرجواني** لأليـــس ووكر(1983) ، و**حياة النحل السرية** لسو مونك كد (2001) ، ورواية **الموت في تكســـاس : قصة العرق ، و القتل ، وكفاح بلدة صغيرة من أجل الخلاص** لدينا تيمبل راستون(2002) . في هذه الروايـــات تقـــــوم الشخصيات الأمريكية من أصول إفريقية بتحري عالـــم التمييـــز العرقي ، وتنظر فيما مرت به مـــــن تجارب ، و أخيرا تقرر النهوض و الدفاع عن كرامتهـــا في ظل عالم يحكمه العرق الأبيض .

تنقسم هذه الأطروحة إلى خمسة فصـول . يشمل الفصـل الأول "المقدمـة" وفيهـــــا عرض مختصر لكل من المشكلة و الفرضية، ويشمل كذلك أهمية الدراسة و يناقش قضية التمييز العرقـي و التمييز العرقي الجديد، وكيف استطاع الأمريكيون من أصـــول إفريقيـــة أن يشكلـوا هويتهم في عالـــم معزول. يناقش الفصل الثاني من الأطروحة ، وهو بعنوان " فقدان الهوية الإفريقية " ، هويـــــــة الافارقة ، و تقاليدهم ، وسلوكهم، ودينهم، بالإضافة إلى الروابط العائلية و الحياة القبليـة . كما يناقش مسألـــة العبوديـــة والاضطهـاد التـــي مارسهـا الرجل الأبيـــض

على الأفارقة، ومسألة نقلهم إلى الولايـــات المتحدة الأمريكية رغما عنهم . لقد استبدلت بهويتهم الأفريقية هوية أخرى ألا وهي "العبودية" ، وبعد إنهاء العبودية حلت محلها هويـة "الرجـــل الأسود" . وقد نوقشت مراحل التحوُّل هذه من خـــلال شخوص الروايات و أحداثها .

يتناول الفصل الثالث وعنوانه "تكوين الهوية في ظل التمييز العرقـــي" كفـــاح الرجل الأسود لانتزاع حقوقه في ظل العزل العرقي وذلك بعد انقضاء زمن الاستعباد. عندمـــا أدرك الأمريكيون من أصول إفريقية أن الشخصية الفردية المستقلة يجب أن تلعب دورا، وذلـك كي تتحرر من سيطرة الرجل الأبيض، فقد برزت هوية جديدة إلى السطح . وبالتالي ، نشـــأت ديانـــة ولغـــة جديدتان ، جنبا إلى جنب مع تقوية الروابط الأسرية والتـــي شكلـت بمجموعهـا جوهـــر الهويـــة المعاصرة للأمريكيين من أصول إفريقية .

وتسعى الرسالة في الفصل الرابع ، وهو بعنوان "التمييز العرقي الجديد: التهديد الخفـي" إلى تحديد "التمييز العرقـي الجديد" و تجلياتـه فـي القرنيـن العشريـن والحادي و العشريـن ، مـن خلال جريمة كراهية ارتكبها ثلاثة رجال بيض في جاسبر بولاية تكساس عام 1998. تأججـت العنصرية أيضا إبان الحرب على فيتنام في عام 1975، كما لعبت حركة كما سبق أن "القوة السوداء" دورا قويا . تواجه شخصيات الروايات العديد من عوائق العنصرية الخبيثـــة والخفية على شكـــل مايعرف بالتمييز العرقي الجديد، وذلك حتى بعد أن نال الأمريكيون من أصـل إفريقـي حقوقهـم ، وبالتالي فإن هويـــة الأمريكيين من أصل إفريقي تواجه العديد مـن العقبات في طريق محاولتها إثبات أنفسهم وتساويهم في مختلف الجوانب في المجتمع الأمريكي .

يقدم الفصل الاخير إجابات على الأسئلة التي طرحت في المقدمة . فقد تحول الإفريقي إلى ما يعرف بالرجل الأسود ومن ثم تحولت هويته أخيرا إلى هوية الأمريكي المعاصر مـــن أصل إفريقي فقد تم صياغة هذا من خلال شخصيات و أحداث الروايات المذكورة سابقا .