Tribhuvan University

Land and Its Politics in Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Kabindra has completed his thesis entitled “Land and its Politics in Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2066/05/01 B.S. to 2067/06/18 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Land and its Politics in Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Kabindra has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This study aims at looking at the land and its politics in Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* published in 1976. It shows how women under patriarchy are victimized, in the same way the blacks are victimized and rendered powerless due to their bodily difference that is colour. Focusing on the struggles and triumphs of the Logans, a poor African-American family, it explores the themes of racism, family heritage, sacrifice, pride, and accountability in Depression-era Mississippi. The Logans live on land they own, and although half of it is still mortgaged to the bank, the family considers the land their legacy and as means of power. That legacy is put in danger when nine-year-old Cassie's parents help organize a boycott against the local market, leading to decrease in the Black power. The study also examines how the book was inspired by stories Mildred D. Taylor heard growing up and by her own family history, which like that of the Logans, includes ancestors who were slaves. Though she stresses that the story is not autobiographical, Taylor has also said the book is an acknowledgement of the difficult lives, and many sacrifices, of the generations before hers--generations that ultimately paved the way for the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Contents

I. Mildred D. Taylor's Struggle against Racism

This research focuses on Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* in order to explore the Black family Logans's emerging consciousness about the significance of land which the family ultimately comes to regard as a source of asserting Black power. In the novel, the Logans family is faced with many different hardships, some more serious than other. The main character Cassie lives with her Mom, Dad, Grandmother and three brothers. The book mainly revolves around Cassie and the events that happen to her family. These events make Cassie a much stronger person and help her to understand that having land of their own is her family's source of pride and strength. Cassie also finds herself coming to conclusions about everyday life for a black person and their family living in Mississippi. The land, the 400 acres of land her family owns, is more important than anything. It is what has kept Logans together. It gives them their livelihood and their courage, and nothing, not even Mr. Granger, could take it away from them. With this land, the Logans possess something that no one could take away from them. Even though the Logans had the land, that didn't make times any easier. Mr. Granger and the Wallaces didn't like the fact that the Logans owned the land and they would try to do anything within their powers to take the land from them, "because he's [Mr. Granger] one of those people who has to believe that white people are better than black people to make himself feel big" (276). When T.J., a friend of the family, gets into serious trouble with the law, Cassie watches her family's strength defy Mississippi racism as Taylor notes, "I cried for T. J.for T. J. and the land" (*Roll of Thunder* 276).

Mildred D. Taylor's birth, in Jackson, Mississippi, on September 13, 1943, was sandwiched between two significant periods in U.S. history, the Great Depression and World War II. When Taylor began her writing career thirty years later, both periods would provide essential background material for her books. Today, she is one of America's best-known authors of historical fiction for young readers, and although two of her stories are set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she draws heavily from the history of 1930s and 1940s for most of her fiction.

As important as American history is to the work of Mildred D.Taylor, the soul of her stories springs from two more-personal sources: her family and racism. Much has been written about the influence of Taylor's father on her life and storytelling, but equally important are her mother, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Her extended family has always provided support and encouragement for Taylor, but they also have contributed to the basis for characters and plots in her novels. More important, though, the idea of family is a central thematic concern in all of Taylor's books. It's impossible to read any one of the Logan stories without understanding better the benefits of a close-knit, loving family.

In addition to the influence of family on Taylor's writing, her experience of being born in the racist South, being raised in a segregated country, and being among the first African American students to integrate American public schools impressed upon her the injustice of racism and segregation, and that injustice—in all its complexities—surfaces in every Taylor story. In her acceptance speech for the 1997 ALAN Award, Taylor

revealed both her authorial intention as well as the impact of family and racism on her writing:

> From *Song of the Trees* to *The Well* I have attempted to present a true picture of life in America as older members of my family remember it, and as I remember it in the days before the civil rights movement. In all of the books I have recounted not only the joy of growing up in a large and supportive family, but my own feelings of being faced with segregation and bigotry. (3)

For Taylor, there is a strong connection between family and racism. Her stories make clear how a large and supportive family is essential if one is to survive and perhaps even overcome the obstacles of segregation and bigotry.

Mildred D. Taylor was the second child born to native Mississippians Wilbert Lee Taylor and Deletha Marie Davis Taylor. Her extended family had been in Mississippi for at least three generations, and on her father's side, the family traced its Mississippi heritage to Mildred's great-grandfather, the son of an African American slave woman and a white slave owner in Alabama. As a young man, Taylor's great-grandfather had a falling out with his white father and ran away from home, eventually settling in Mississippi in the 1880s. There, through hard work and his sharp wit, determination, and courage, he was able to purchase land, a remarkable achievement for a poor young African American man in the racist South at the end of the nineteenth century. Holding on to the land was not easy for the great-grandfather or his children and grandchildren, but despite a variety of economic and social hardships, her great-grandfather and his family were able to retain the land, even after a time

add to it. Many of his descendants were raised on that property, and the land remains in Taylor's family to this day.

About a month after Taylor's birth in 1943, her father, who had been working for a trucking company in Jackson, quit his job because of a racist incident and left Mississippi in search of work in the more tolerant North. Leaving Mississippi, the home of his father, grandfather, and extended family, was difficult, but Wilbert Taylor was determined to raise his two daughters in a place where the color of their skin wouldn't limit their potential or threaten their lives. A week after arriving in Ohio Toledo, he found employment in a factory, and his wife and daughters joined him in Toledo shortly before the Christmas holidays. With both parents working, Taylor's family soon had enough money to purchase a home, and in the years following, that house became a way station and gathering place for cousins, uncles, and aunts who themselves were migrating from the racist South to the North.

Even though Wilbert Taylor hated the oppressive Jim Crow culture of the South, he loved his homeland and the family who had remained in Mississippi, so throughout his life, he regularly took his wife and daughters to visit family and friends in the state they had left. He even hoped that in time he would be able to move back to the home established by his grandfather. In her Newbery Award acceptance speech, Taylor explained her father's dream of returning home:

> He had never forgotten the feel of the soft red earth. He had never forgotten the goodness of walking on acres of his own land, of knowing that land had a history that stretched back over many generations. There, next to the house which my great-

> grandfather had built, he hoped to build his own house, surrounding it with flowers and fruit trees, with horses and cows, tending his own land with the love he had felt for it as a boy. (409)

Unfortunately, Wilbert Taylor died in 1976 before he was able to realize his dream of moving back to the land of his birth. For young Mildred, the frequent family trips to Mississippi taught her to love the place as her father had, but they also acquainted her with family and Jim Crow culture. When her extended family came together during Taylor's visits to the South, her father and uncles would hold forth as storytellers, entertaining the children and other relatives with lively tales from their family history. At the feet of these men, Mildred learned about her rich heritage in Mississippi and how that heritage was affected by racism.

> There were stories of the great-grandfather, born the son of a white Alabama plantation owner and a black woman, then a slave. There were stories about how the great-grandfather had made his way into Mississippi and had accumulated land. There were stories about the Indian great-grandmother who died young. There were stories about the brash young men who were my great-uncles, stories about cousins and neighbors and chain gangs and clashes with the white law. But the stories that delighted me most were the stories told about my father and his brothers and sister growing up on the family land. (741)

When she began writing about the fictional Logan family, the hours she had spent listening to the men in her family telling stories would provide her with both the narrative tradition and the material for writing stories of her

own. In addition to family gatherings and storytelling sessions during these visits, Taylor and her sister sometimes experienced the day-to-day existence of her Mississippi cousins. If school was in session, they would attend classes in the same small community school her father had attended. In summers, they would go into the fields and help pick cotton. Her father encouraged these activities because he wanted his daughters to experience, in a small way, what life had been like for him and his wife. He knew that such experiences would help his daughters appreciate the comfort and freedom they enjoyed in suburban Ohio. Taylor wrote that her father explained to them "that without understanding the loss of liberty in the South, we couldn't appreciate the liberty of the North" (272).

Taylor enjoyed a pleasant childhood in Toledo, growing up surrounded by various relatives who at one time or another shared her parents' home. She was an avid reader, an excellent student, and a young woman who was keenly aware of the world around her. When she was in fifth grade, her family moved to a larger house in Toledo, and she went from attending an elementary school where most of her classmates were African American to a fifth-grade class where she had few African American peers. In 1954, the year in which the U.S. Supreme Court would declare that racially segregated schools violated the Constitution, Taylor was the only African American student in her sixth-grade class. It was that year that she began to feel an intense pressure to succeed because she feared that if she didn't, her failure would reflect negatively on all African Americans. This fierce determination to succeed also led her to set goals that would direct the rest of her life.

Phyllis Fogelman, Taylor's editor at Dial Books, wrote that Taylor made many important decisions about her future while she was still young: The first, of course, was about writing—made when she was nine or ten. She was also determined to see the world; at sixteen she decided she would join the Peace Corps upon graduation from college. She wanted very much to be sent to Ethiopia, and from then until she was graduated from the University of Toledo, she devoured everything she could get her hands on about the Peace Corps and Ethiopia. (412)

After four years as a successful student, including membership in the honor society and leadership in student government and the school newspaper, Taylor graduated from Scott High School in 1961. She enrolled at the University of Toledo hoping to major in creative writing or journalism, but her father encouraged her to study something practical, so Taylor declared herself an English major who would also certify to work as a high school teacher. She graduated in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in education.

Upon graduating from college, Taylor achieved one of her longtime goals: to serve in the Peace Corps. Following several weeks of training at the University of Utah and in Tuba City, Arizona, Taylor was sent to Yirga 'Alem, Ethiopia, where she taught English and history for two years. After her release from the Peace Corps, she spent another year working as a recruiter and instructor for that organization before enrolling at the University of Colorado to earn a master's degree in journalism. She completed her degree in 1969 and stayed on at the university for two additional years working as a study skills program coordinator.

Eager to begin her writing career, Taylor moved to Los Angeles in 1971. She found undemanding work that provided enough money to live on and that allowed her to conserve her creative energy for writing in the evenings and on weekends. After almost two years of steady rejection, Taylor discovered that using the storytelling tradition of her family and writing stories based on her family's experiences in Mississippi released her own natural writing voice. In October 1973, she entered a book manuscript in a contest sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. Her story won the contest and was purchased for publication by Dial Books. That novella, Song of the Trees, was published in the spring of 1975 and marked the beginning of Taylor's career as a writer of historical fiction for young readers. A year later, Dial published her second book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,* which won the 1977 Newbery Medal and immediately established her as one of the most prominent contemporary authors in the United States. That success also confirmed what Taylor had learned when writing *Song of the Trees*: her best stories relied on a first-person narrator and on the true-life history of her family in Mississippi. Regarding *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* Jani L. Barker views that the book addresses multiple audiences, providing different reading experiences and benefits for each. Using critical race theory as an interpretive tool, he examines how two African American historical fiction novels, Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, frame anti-racist identifications for readers of all races. He argues that these "identifications are key elements in the novels' rhetorical strategies for engaging readers and opposing racism" (118). Both novels portray strong African American families with whom both black and

non-Black readers can identify and present African American perspectives on race, but they differ in how directly they approach racism and how they frame the identification of white readers.

Taylor has published seven more award-winning books: Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1981); The Friendship (1987); The Gold Cadillac (1987); The Road to Memphis (1990); Mississippi Bridge (1990); The Well (1995); and The Land (2001). She plans to write one more novel, tentatively titled Logan, in the saga of the Logan family. Logan will take the family from post–World War II Mississippi to the North and will complete the family history that begins in *The Land*, the story of Paul Edward Logan's growing up, purchase of land in Mississippi in the 1880s, and establishment of the homestead for the Logan family. When she first made up her mind to become a writer, Mildred D. Taylor could not have imagined the success she would eventually achieve. In addition to the Newbery Medal, her books have won many prestigious prizes, including the Coretta Scott King Award, Boston Globe–Horn Book Award, Jane Addams Book Award, Scott O'Dell Award, and Christopher Award. In addition to the recognition for individual books, she has also been honored for the body of her work: in 1997, she received the ALAN Award for her contributions to young adult literature; in 2003, she was awarded the inaugural NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature; and in 2004, the governor of Mississippi, Haley Barbour, declared April 2, Mildred D. Taylor Day.

Despite her many awards and widespread recognition, Taylor remains a humble and fiercely private person, rarely granting interviews or making public appearances. The honors have not puffed up her ego, but they do signify

the importance of her work. Taylor is one of the few authors in American literature to have so successfully presented a personal glimpse into the lives of African Americans of the past. As she said in her ALAN Award acceptance speech, “I have tried to present not only a history of my family, but the effect of racism, not only on the victims of racism but to the racists themselves” (3). More than mere historical fiction, her books help young readers see—and feel—the evils associated with racism and have done much to teach modern Americans about the effects of segregation and prejudice. That is why the books of Mildred D.Taylor are worth reading and studying, today more than ever.

II. Racism and Politics of Land

Racism

Generally, racism refers to intolerance or the hatred towards people of another race or colour. It is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to Racism asserts that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. On a more institutional level, it is an ideological construct as it is based on a policy or system of government. Racial separatism is the belief, most of the time based on racism, that different races should remain segregated and apart from one another.

Racism is the theory that people of one race are superior to another. It often results in hostility towards the race thought of as inferior and in the practice of discrimination, persecution, and, in some cases even genocide. Racism asserts that human beings are divided into races which are distinguished by their physical characteristics, their cultural patterns and their modes of behaviour. These characteristics are supposed to conform to a type and to be inherited and unchanging. But such is the confusion of racism that the stereotypes are often widely variable. For example when racists condemn blacks as lazy and feckless, it is not unusual for the same people also to fear black workers as a threat to jobs which, they argue, should "belong" to white workers. Asian immigrants to Britain are often criticized as primitive and anarchic but they are also seen as an alien influence on the commerce of this country because in some areas they have taken over shops and petrol stations, which could hardly be operated by people who were backward and

disorganised. Some of the ideas that were first used to try to justify racism came from religion.

Racism has existed throughout human history in different parts of the world in some way or the other. It may be defined as the hatred of one person by another -- or the belief that another person is less than human -- because of skin color, language, customs, and place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person. It has influenced wars, slavery, the formation of nations, and legal codes. During the past 500-1000 years, racism on the part of Western powers toward non-Westerners has had a far more significant impact on history than any other form of racism (such as racism among Western groups or among Easterners, such as Asians, Africans, and others). The most notorious example of racism by the West has been slavery, particularly the enslavement of Africans in the New World (slavery itself dates back thousands of years). This enslavement was accomplished because of the racist belief that Black Africans were less fully human than white Europeans and their descendants.

One of the most complex aspects of racism is its illusive and changing nature. The most commonly accepted concept of racism is one that refers to the individual expression of overt feelings or actions. As already has been explained, racism manifests itself not only within individuals, but also through groups, organizations and institutions up to the level of the state. In each domain, racism takes on a different form.

Racism has also been observed to have a specific locus because it has "a geographic, social and historical specificity . . . In any country, at any point of time, the realization of racist practice will be of a specific nature" (Brandt 67).

Racism is not a natural element in society just waiting for events to cause its manifestations. As Stuart Hall writes:

> It has no natural and universal law of development. It does not always assume the same shape. There has been much significantly different racism - each historically specific and articulated in a different way . . . Racism is always historically specific in this way, whatever common features it may appear to share with other similar social phenomena . . . it always assumes specific forms which arise out of the present – not the past – conditions and organization of society. (26)

Racism – or the ways in which it is constructed and manifests itself in society at any particular point in time – is therefore fluid, dynamic and ever changing affected by the social contexts in which it develops.

In a similar way, Goldberg has recently written that the study of racism provides "a picture . . . of historically variant racism both continuously and discontinuously transformed from one period to another. Subject, objects and modes alter. Developments and changes in racist discourse are demonstrated to be functions of dominant interests, aims, and purposes" (xiii).

Another important dimension of racism is its ability to be so subtly expressed or indirectly implied that its targets are not even aware of it. Conversely, racism is sometimes visible only to its victims. It remains indiscernible to others who therefore deny its existence. This subtle and changing nature of racism helps to explain its prevalence over a period of time. It also explains the difficulties in its definitions and measurement and why so many people are constantly confused by the term. But as Gilroy suggests, the very nature of

racism rests on this mystification of social relations--the necessary illusions that secure the order of public authority.

Another important dimension of racist ideology is that it is part of what Lawrence has called "common sense." Racist thinking is, according to this view, natural and forms part of the ways in which ordinary people view the world. An ordinary person, in other words, does not need to have specialized knowledge about minority groups in order to be racist. "Common sense" racism is not based on theory nor does it have a unified body of knowledge to support it. Rather it contains a "storehouse of knowledge" which guides the thinking of "the practical struggle of everyday life of the popular masses" (49). The construction of racism and belief in a racist ideology help people to understand the increasingly complex societies. Thus, the recently unemployed person can easily blame the new immigrants who -allegedly - have taken his job away. People who are fearful in their homes and on the streets can now blame all those Black people who commit crimes. The teacher whose Black students are underachieving is able to deny the possibility that it has anything to do with his/her racial attitudes or classroom practices. The corporate manager is able to justify refusing to hire and work with those who are racially "different" on the basis of not wanting to change traditional routines or disrupt workforce harmony. At this level, racist assumptions and beliefs provide a set of ready explanations for the stressful realities experienced by many people living in a country undergoing rapid social and cultural change. As Hall notes: Racism is not a set of false pleas which swim around in the head. They're not a set of mistaken perceptions. They have their basis in real material conditions of existence. They arise because of concrete problems of different classes and

groups in society. Racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions, and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected in the same moment (35).

To substantiate this construction of reality, Hall argues that ideology goes far beyond a set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about the world they live in. Ideology carries with it a predisposition to behave in negative, derogative or discriminatory ways towards members of the targeted group. An ideology of racism therefore carries more power than a set of mere attitudes.

Slavery

In fact, the origins of racism in the United States developed from the institution of slavery. One problem in considering racism in the USA is that it operates in so many directions with so many different groups as its targets. Racial prejudice exists not just against blacks but against people of Chinese, Japanese and Filipino origin. Then there is the discrimination against groups like Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Nor is possession of a “white” skin any protection, for racism reaches out to people whose origins are in Europe, whose ancestors immigrated to America from such countries as Italy, Poland and Russia. And, of course, there is prejudice - as there is almost everywhere - against Jews. At the same time these groups may erect barriers against each other. All of this makes the United States - which its politicians and its patriots describe as “God’s own country” and “Land of the Free” - the world's classic case of the complexity and absurdity of racism. It is a situation to tax even the racists’ vocabulary of insults; human beings are sneeringly labelled as “Wops”, “Yids”, “Polaks”, “Nips” . . . . But above all other forms of discrimination there have always been that against black people and this is the aspect we shall

consider in this chapter. The analysis we present, and the comments we make about prejudice against blacks, can also be applied to the other groups we have mentioned.

The first slaves were imported into America from Africa in 1619, twelve years after the arrival of the first settlers from England. At first only a few hundred slaves were imported, to work alongside the native Indian population who had also been enslaved. Treatment of the slaves was much the same as for white people who worked as indentured servants; in most cases they could earn their freedom and were given land of their own to cultivate. Slavery became uneconomic in the northern states and it was quickly abolished there. This might also have happened in the South had not the whole situation been dramatically changed by the cultivation of tobacco. This crop needed a large, hard-working labour force and the tobacco growers looked to the slave trade to supply it. By the 1660s slaves were arriving in America at the rate of about 6,000 a year. Alongside tobacco some cotton was also cultivated but this was not very profitable, largely owing to the laborious, inefficient and costly process of manually separating the cotton fibers from the rest of the plant. In 1794, just as the tobacco plantations were at a low ebb and the whole future of slavery was consequently in question, the cotton gin was invented. This machine, which separated the cotton seeds and fibbers mechanically, had the effect of stimulating a profitable cotton industry. As plantations turned from the cultivation of tobacco to cotton the demand for slaves increased enormously, reviving the trade in them and giving a new lease of life to slavery. The system which developed may be called “plantation capitalism”; money was invested in cotton production, just as it might be in an established

industrial enterprise of capitalism, but the workers involved were not the “free” wage earners characteristic of industrial capitalism but chattel slaves. At about the same time another invention allowed the mechanical granulation of sugar, which created a sugar empire, also dependent on slave labour, in the south. As the demand for slaves grew more urgent their price rose and the vastly profitable, vastly cruel, slave trade was born again, with a body of nonsensical theory to prove that it was all in accordance with Christian principles, or biological fact, or was essential to American prosperity or even in the slaves' best interests. By the 1830s the plantation system was entrenched in the South and so was the planters' determination to defend the institution of slavery.

Meanwhile, in the North things were different. That was the scene of a developing industrial capitalism so that in one formally united country there were two economic systems, and their respective dominant classes competed for control over the new land. The dispute was settled in the Civil War of 1861-65, which was fought over this issue and over the unity of the United States. The southern aim of secession, which would have virtually set up a separate nation with its own economic style, was defeated and among the terms imposed by the victorious Union was the emancipation" of the slaves. For some years after the war, during the time known as the Period of Reconstruction, the South was occupied by northern troops and the freed slaves were given certain civil and political rights. However, when the northern occupation ended in 1876, political power was restored to the plantation owners, which set the scene for the erosion of the “emancipation”

measures, for the slaves, although no longer legally owned by the planters, were still economically dependent on them.

In *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, Dunaway focuses on the impact that slavery had on the African-American community in the mountain south. She challenges previous claims that most masters took care of their slaves and that the African-American family entered Reconstruction "with a remarkably stable base" (273). Dunaway portrays slave owners in southern Appalachia as solely capitalists, dismissing the argument that paternalism influenced how they treated slaves. Positive incentives were just that, tools used by masters to increase production. Because they resided in the geographical heart of the interstate slave trade, mountain masters found it profitable to sell slaves, and did so frequently. Slave owners also failed to provide sufficient rations and shelter for their human chattel. "On mountain plantations," Dunaway writes, "cash shortfalls occurred almost annually, and debt crises occurred about every three years. Thus, malnutrition and inadequate provision of basic survival needs were cost-informed decisions and rational, profit-maximizing strategies" (282). Although constructing "extensive oral documentation of the kinship networks and Diasporas of their own families," high mortality rates and forced migrations destabilized the slave family and community.

As racism led to slavery, it has caused a lot of suffering and emotional pain. The root cause of black emotional pain is white racism. Other causes are the subtle and overt ways that blacks have internalized the values of the white culture: straight hair is “good” hair; thick, tightly curled hair is “bad” hair. Light skin is “good”; dark brown black skin is “bad” (Byod-Franklin 58).

Programming developed by and for white women is not necessarily useful to black women, even when provided by black professional who has adopted the agency's approach to problem solving. For example, traditional "talk" therapy or groups that require disclosure on the part of the client have proven unsuccessful with African-Americans (Bell 21). Additionally, class differences between the middle-class black professional and the poor client can often foster distrust.

An African-American underclass has developed in the United States which has at its core a culture shaped by the legacy of slavery and which is defined by drug and alcohol abuse and addition. The black underclass includes second-and third generation welfare recipients has gangs as a social institution, and has an underground economy built on drug traffic and prostitution. Today, the black underclass includes increasing numbers of the rural poor, as well as those who were raised in large urban environments.

Land as a Means of Power for Blacks

The white Europeans and Americans in the past grabbed the land from the natives of Africa and the blacks living in America enforcing them to cultivate the land. It consequently created hierarchies in colour and division of land. The whites established a system of privilege in terms of oppression and exploitation. This rendered the blacks powerless. As a result, as time passed, the political activism to resist the white domination began. The political activism associated with the empowering the Black efforts involve different actors and leadership than that activism associated with the pursuit of liberal public policy. Much of this new activism, as stated earlier, involves the idea of controlling of land in black urban communities. This immediately

distinguishes it from traditional white ethnic political activism. Although white ethnic politics was based on territory and neighborhood turf in the initial stages of ethnic mobilization, it eventually moved away from the question of land controlled as the result of economic and cultural integration in the social structure of American society. As sociologist Donald Warren has pointed out, “White ethnic groups are different not only in the likelihood that many become indistinguishable members of the anonymous majority community, but also that in the instructural terms territory no longer needs a basic of organization and power” (qtd. in Gilyard 96). This integration happens because at some historical juncture, “ethnics become whites”, as activist William Fletcher noted. Thus in many instincts, a racial hierarchy allowed European ethnic groups to assimilate into American economic and social structures on the basis of race, not land.

Black empowerment activism, however, focuses on control of the land. Indeed, the question of land control is measured under a politics of empowerment. It surpasses affirmative action, job discrimination, or school integration as priorities, many Black activists felt that control over land or urban space was much more important than other issues. Under the political umbrella of empowerment, the issues that are supported focus on institutionally strengthening the Black community, empowerment activism does not advocate strongly for public policies whose effects primarily benefit Black individuals or enhance the possibility of individual black mobility within the American economic system. In the later case, control of land by a group is not as important as individual characteristics such as education or available opportunities for entering economic and occupational structure. The

focus on control of land as basic of Black political power is not a new idea – it has a long history. Prior to the 1970s, there were basically “two positions on the land questions . . . one of these positions presupposes the existence of what is termed a new African nation with its homeland being the ‘Black belt’ south US, the other positions presupposes Africa as the national homeland of Black people” (qtd. in Gilyard 9698).

But a third position regarding the politics of land and race emerged in the last two decades, this position posits that Blacks should control economically, and politically the land occupied in the American city. In the early 1980s, this was one of the major platforms of the national Black Independent political party. The control of land by the blacks and Latinos was also a major theme in the community control Movement in the New York City in the late 1960s, and early 1970s.

The argument for economic and political control of land is supported by political economist Lloyd Hogan, he argued that both rural and urban control of land was critical for the physical and social survival of black in this country .he suggested further more ,that the control of land represented a major evolving conflict between blacks and whites and between dominant and subdominant groups. Conrad Worrill, national chairman of the national black United Front, also suggested this: The expanding African-American population in the United States inner cities has been a major concern of white decision maker since the passage of the 1949 Urban Renwal legislation. Since that time, strategies have been attempted to hold down the pattern of African –Americans becoming majority, or close to the majority population in cities like Chicago ,Philadelphin, Pittsburg, St Louis, Washintong D C, Newyork, Detroit

,Cleveland Konsiscity, etc…the question for the African – American community in Chicago and other inner cities of the United States where this trend exist is why should we again be maneuvered from the land we occupy ?Our history in America has been one of forced and manipulated migration. It is obvious that we need massive organizing strategy to reverse this trend of Black removal.

Chicago offered a good example of underlying racial and class conflict shrouded by a controversy about the control and utilization of land and urban spaces. A few years ago, a group of white home owners in that city introduced a, “Home Equity” proposal for the purpose of maintaining “racial integration” in some of the cities’ neighborhoods. But in fact, as pointed out by John H. Stroger, a Cook country commissioner, “The very notion of the city’s home equity ordinance goes against the fundamentals of property ownership rights and is prescribed to control the movement of Blacks and Hispanics” (101). Several Black aldermen criticized this program as nothing more than away to keep Blacks from moving into certain white areas of Chicago.

In the late sixties and seventies, the discourse on the female body was of a "Socially shaped and historically colonized" territory, not a site of individual self-determination (Bordo 251). Now feminisms has inverted and converted the old metaphor of the body politic, found in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Machiavelli, Hobbs and others, to a new metaphor: 'the politics of the body'. In the old metaphor of the body politic, the state or society was imagined as a human body. Now, as feminine body is imagined as itself a politically inscribed entity, the Black body is treated in the same way. Its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices

of containment and control over the Black body through slavery as women are treated from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battery, to compulsorily hetero-sexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy and explicit commodification of female body. In this regard here, Bordo quotes B. Omolade who has described how Africans-American woman is exploited and tortured:

> Her mead and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and virgin. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labour where she was forced to worth with men and work like men. Her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man and his family as domestic servant whether she was technically enslaved or legally free. Her vagina, used for his sexual pleasure, was the gateway to the womb, which was his place of capital investment – the capital investment being the sex act and the resulting child the accumulated surplus, worth money on the slave market. (251)

It is objectionable that the body's actual bondage in slavery cannot be compared to the metaphorical bondage of privileged nineteenth century women to the corset, much less to then fifth century women's 'bondage' to the obsession with slenderness and youth. However, it is has held women responsible for whatever “enslavement they suffer from the whims and bodily tyrannies of fashion” because women have fetish for beauty (Bordo 251). The patriarchy itself creates this ideology and holds the women responsible, that is what new feminist model protests. According to this ideology, men's desire have no responsibility to bear, nor does the culture which subordinates

women's desire to those of men, sexualizes and commodifies Black's and women's bodies, and offers them limited opportunity for social or personal power. And feminine nature and subjugated Blacks is easily drawn towards such trivialities, and to be willing to endure whatever physical in convenience is required, because women become ready to give pair and torture to their own bodies for male satisfactory. In this sense according to Susan Bordo women always become “done to” and never “doers” (252). Women’s obedience to the dictates of fashion to entertain male desire is a bondage rather than choice. This has now become a crucial historical moment in the developing articulations of a new understanding of the politics of the body. In the same way, the Black bodies have been subjugated and rendered powrless.

In contrast to the western notion of the body politic, the links between bodies and the nation are made in quite different ways in some colonial and postcolonial discourses where it is the feminine form that is at stake. Price and Shildrick look at the authorized discourses of western missionaries to theories how the mapping of both the bodies of Black women, and of the state, worked symbiotically to establish the grounds for the instigation and extension of colonial rule. This shows how the mechanism were directed at a local level against the bodies of Black both male and female women, and raises the questions about the role of a Black and female bodies in what has traditionally been seen as a process dependent upon the conquest of one group of male bodies by another. The colonizers created a discourse in which women were cast as victims of social evils and needed rescue.

The novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* on which the present research is based explores Black people’s struggle for possession of land to assert their

power for their dignity and pride in southern America – ‘The South’, after the American Civil War – when racism was still common-place and many were persecuted for the colour of their skin. Throughout this novel we learn about the importance of land and the effects of racism, at the same time as the narrator, Cassie Logan learns 'the way things are'. The following chapter analyzes the text from the perspective of racism.

III. Land and its Politics in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Narrated by ten years old girl Cassie Logan, the story of Mildred D. Taylor's novel *Roll of Thunder* presents the events of African American people's desire to get hold of the land to achieve power in the white-dominated society, where racism prevails. Cassie's family faces a real challenge: to hold on to land in the South during the Depression. Her father David Logan is proud of being owner of land and works away from home while his wife works and runs the family farm. As the story is set during Depression Period in rural Mississippi, it unravels the difficulties of African American people in facing the brutal racial attacks and poverty they are living with. Their plight becomes heartrending when they do not get justice even from the state as the police show the blind eye towards them. In the face of such a scenario, the protagonist's attempt to possess land reflects the land and body politics.

Resisting Racism

In America, race is a crucial element in defining the powerful and powerless within specific geographical and temporal boundaries. Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* depicts the life under racism from the narration of a native child Cassie Logan who experiences and begins to understand racial discrimination in rural Mississippi during 1933. The novel is about the limits of friendship when the forces of racism weaken and corrupt all human ties. Robert Con Davis-Undiano comments that the book shows "the extent to which friendship with whites in America is a treacherous undertaking for African Americans" (12). Although Cassie's depiction is not one of an average girl, the innocence of her gaze at the world establishes a universality that allows readers to see the meaning beyond her experiences. Cassie's

pretentious and precocious character acts as a medium for lessons she must learn in order to survive in a system of American apartheid. Cassie's interpretation of the racial discrimination she and her family encounters, as it is in straightforwardness evokes an explanation for an illogical and irrational elements of racism. In other words, the innocence of Cassie's gaze allows for an intuitive and mature understanding of the many non-sequitur aspects of racism experienced in the narrative.

Earlier, Little Man and Cassie are unexpected victims of racism while nestled within their own school. Despite the school's segregated nature, institutionalized racism prevails when Little Man receives a worn textbook on the first day of class. He is taken aback by the textbook's ragged appearance and asks for one in better condition. On discovering that all of the ‘‘new’’ books are soiled, he is further frustrated after reading the inside cover which chronicles the number of years White students owned the books before him. Once Cassie identifies this information in her own textbook, she is just as upset as Little Man. Miss Crocker's inability to sympathize with Little Man's and Cassie's disdain for the condition of the books and the racial categorization of ‘‘nigra’’ written along side ‘‘Very Poor’’ on the inside cover of the textbook suggests a very clear delineation between the militant and relatively well educated Logan family and a dangerously frightened black Southern population.

> ‘S-see what they called us,’ I said, afraid she had not seen.
>
> ‘That's what you are,’ she said coldly.
>
> ‘Now go sit down.’

> I shook my head, realizing now that Miss Crocker did not even know what I was talking about. She had looked at the page and had understood nothing. (26-27)

On the contrary, what Miss Crocker understood very clearly were the repercussions that would undoubtedly take place if she were to reject the books and attempt to question the white male power structure in control of the segregated school systems of the South. In protest, both Cassie and Little Man forfeit their textbooks and accept their punishment with a switch. This protest marks the first time the obstacles and contradictions involved with notions of separate but equal are opposed by the Logan children.

On the very same day, Cassie and her siblings experience another blatant act of racism while walking to and from Great Faith Elementary. The bus transporting White students to a nearby school purposely and routinely splashes the children with mud as it races by. Following the incident, a defeated Little Man asks his mother for an explanation and Cassie narrates: No one was more angered by this humiliation than Little Man. Although he had asked Mama after the first day of school why Jefferson Davis had two buses and Great Faith had none, he had never been totally satisfied by her answer. She had explained to him, as she had explained to Christopher-John the year before and to me two years before that, that the county did not provide buses for its black students. (44)

In these two incidents, Little Man and Cassie experience degradation and what it is like to be socialized in the tradition of institutionalized racism as African-Americans, even in the confines of a segregated community.

Similarly, on her first trip into a nearby town, Strawberry, Cassie becomes a victim of her own racial ignorance while shopping in Strawberry, she speaks out against an action she perceives as unfair to T.J., who has not been waited on by the White storeowner. Cassie, although patient at first, becomes infuriated:

> After waiting several minutes for Mr. Barnett's return, Stacey said, ''Come on, Cassie, let's go.'' He started toward the door and I followed. But as we passed one of the counters, I spied Mr. Barnett wrapping an order of porkchops for a white girl. Adults were one thing; I could almost understand that. They ruled things and there was nothing that could be done about them. But some kid who was no bigger than me was something else again. Certainly Mr. Barnett had simply forgotten about T. J.'s order. I decided to remind him (110)

To this reminder, Mr. Barnett chastises Cassie for her boldness: "Whose little nigger is this!'' Bellowed Mr. Barnett. Everyone in the store turned and stared at me. ''I ain't nobody's little nigger! I screamed, angry and humiliated. And you ought not to be waiting on everybody 'fore you wait on us" (111). This incident moves Cassie closer to the truth of how racism threatens her life, but the final chapter reveals her new understanding, and the naive Cassie Logan begins understanding the danger surrounding her simply because of the color of her skin.

Cassie's awareness is manifested through the suffering of T.J Avery, Stacey's best and worst friend in the novel. T.J. is written as a narcissistic adolescent desperate for attention and affection, but too lazy and foolish to

obtain it from the appropriate sources. T.J. is a trickster character who is very similar to Elegba or Brer' Rabbit from African and African-American folklore. T. J.'s primary function in the narrative is to act as the catalyst for trouble. When T.J. is in danger of being lynched for his involvement in robbing a store and allegedly assaulting the two White storeowners, the Logan family must come to his rescue. Cassie's father tells his wife, ''this thing's been coming a long time, baby, and T.J. just happened to be the one foolish enough to trigger it'' (256).

T. J. escapes the lynching because Cassie's father ignites a fire that distracts the group of White men from killing T.J. The fire saves T.J. and prevents Cassie's father from having to shoot the men, which would have undoubtedly resulted in Mr. Logan losing his life and the lives of his family. The fire takes a fourth of the Logan's cotton crop, which will probably preclude them from making a much-needed payment on their land. Despite T. J.'s behavior, the Logan family unites together to protect him from an unmentionable fate. After all, although T.J. is misguided, he is innocent of physically harming the storekeepers and certainly not deserving of a lynching Likewise, she has another fateful encounter with racism, bumping into Mary Jean Simms on the street. The girl orders her to apologize and then get down off of the sidewalk into the street. Cassie attempts escape, but is pushed into the road by Mr. Simms, who orders her to apologize again and addresses his daughter, who is Cassie's age as 'Miss'.

In the last chapter, Cassie undergoes a transition and her innocence about racial discrimination is taken from her. She is scared and realizes that, although she does not understand racism, it is presently and will begin the

future a significant part of her life. The book concludes with Cassie's adult-like reflection:

> I had never liked T.J., but he had always been there, a part of me, a part of my life, just like the mud and the rain, and I had thought that he always would be. Yet the mud and the rain and the dust would all pass. I knew and understood that. What had happened to T.J. in the night I did not understand, but I knew that it would not pass. And I cried for those things which had happened in the night and would not pass. I cried for T.J. For T.J. and the land. (276)

Cassie's awareness is evident in this last passage of the novel as demonstrated by her tears. Cassie understands that T.J. is doomed not because of his involvement in the robbery, but because of the color of his skin. Although he did not die that night, T. J.'s death is imminent. Cassie also understands that the land lost to the fire represents the possible loss of the Logan family's land -- the decline of Black power. Nevertheless, the Logans unite themselves and their community to fight the ongoing racism. Taylor does not depict this family as a people without some degree of agency and resources. For example, after hearing about Cassie and Little Man's refusal to use the torn books provided to the school, their mother pastes over the inside covers. Although a small gesture, this act illustrates her willingness to challenge the inequities between the Great Faith and Jefferson Davis Elementary Schools. Second, the Logan siblings respond to the White children's school bus antics with careful planning and teamwork. Cassie's older brother, Stacey, devises a plan to disable the bus in the very mud that it

so routinely splashes on them. As a result, the White students walk home through the mud that has been splashed on the Logan children. Kelly McDowell proposes that the novel contrasts classic works of children's fiction by following a trajectory of child agency, which is enabled through the novel's racial specificity. The adults in the novel 'teach' the children, but they do so in a way that encourages autonomous action. "Subversive child agency is enabled in the novel through the demystification of history and the unveiling of power structures. In the process, the child characters become agents of resistance" (213). So, the child becomes the agency of achieving Black liberation and power.

The Logans even unable to call the police even after the attack of David by Wallaces, for they have known that instead of providing justice they themselves might be charged with attacking white men:

> Since the Wallaces had attacked Papa and Mr. Morrison, the simplest thing would be to tell the sheriff and have them put in jail, but mama said things did not work that way. If we did so Mr Morrison could be charged with attacking white men, which could possibly be end in his being sentence to the chain gang or worse. (228)

In another show of agency, the Logans organize a boycott of a nearby store owned by the family responsible for lynching their neighbor. Because of these actions, the Logan family is threatened physically as well as economically, but they do not acquiesce. A final courageous encounter occurs when Mary Logan loses her job for refusing to teach the material found in the history books. According to her, the texts depict a distorted history of African Americans.

Although the White community members react to the incidents just described with various levels of retaliation, the Logan family remains steadfast and united, mainly because of strong love and support for one another. Because the family is assailed with ongoing racial attacks, it is evident that the author carefully crafts their story as one of overcoming or, at a minimum, challenging racism. For this too was an aspect of socialization for an African American during the 1930s.

Unveiling the Politics of Slavery

Taylor's novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* unveils the history of slavery which has been deliberately demystified in the school curriculum regarding it as one of the institution of the society in past. History, for the Logan children is not what they read in books at school because, of course, the African- American history found in the books is fabricated by the dominant culture. The Logan children get their knowledge of history from their family, mostly through the oral tradition. As a result, the children are very connected to their history. It becomes a vital force in their lives. Because it is passed on to them by their elders, history has special significance and becomes an intimate and *lived experience*. Narrator Cassie makes numerous references to the family's history.

For the Logan children, history is represented through specific events that directly intersect with factors of race and class. It becomes transformative; knowing their history allows the Logan children greater freedom and agency. We see this effect when grandmother, Big Ma, tells Cassie the story of her grandfather, Paul. She explains that Paul, born into slavery, managed to work to save the money to buy their land. The scene displays the enabling power of

history. Hearing about her grandfather's strength and self-reliance gives Cassie a sense of pride and allows her to realize that, although she is oppressed, she is not devoid of agency. If her grandfather, born a slave, could overcome his situation to own his own land, perhaps Cassie, too, could be an agent in her own future.

The history of slavery is demystified for the children when Papa allows them to hear Mr. Morrison's tales of his family. He explains that his parents came from "breeded stock." When Cassie asks what this means, he answers her, in honest, uncoded terms:

> 'Well, Cassie, during slavery there was some farms that mated folks like animals to produce more slaves. Breeding slaves brought a lot of money for them slave owners, 'especially after the government said they couldn't bring no more slaves from Africa, and they produced all kinds of slaves to sell on the block. And folks with enough money . . . could buy exactly what they wanted. My folks was bred for strength like they folks they grandfolks 'fore 'em. Didn't matter none what they thought 'bout the idea. Didn't nobody care.' (149)

"But my mama and daddy they loved each other and they loved us children, and that Christmas they fought them demons out of hell like avenging angels of the Lord." He turned his back toward the fire and grew very quiet; then he raised his head and looked at us. "They died that night. Them night men kilt 'em. Some folks tell me I can't remember what happened that Christmas—I was hardly six years old—but I remembers all right. I makes myself remember.' (150)

Mr. Morrison displays the intimacy of his connection to history. Because of the immediate and enormous affect on his life, he remembers his past vividly. In fact, it is crucial for him to remain connected to it. He makes himself remember. One of the ways to do this is to share his story with the Logan children. I do know about racism's past in order to understand the origins of the unfair treatment that they experience in their own lives. This is why David Logan says to Mary: "These are things they need to hear, baby. It's their history" (148).

Although Mary is concerned with protecting her children, she, herself, often engages in the effort to demystify history for the children. One of the most important ways that she does this is by teaching the history of slavery in her classroom. Through a valiant and subversive act, she teaches her students the brutal reality of history. The act eventually costs her her job when members of the school board are alerted to the content of her classes. While sitting in on her class, board member Harlan Granger says, pointing to a text book: "I don't see all them things you're teaching in here" (184). Mary responds by saying: "That's because they're not in there" (184). When he warns her not deviate from the textbook, she resolutely states: "all that's in that book isn't true" (184). She is willing to risk losing her job to teach her students a history that is realistic and uncoded. She interrupts and opposes the clean, unproblematic history found in White textbooks. By teaching the specific effects of slavery, she reveals its horrors— despite racist efforts to maintain silence. Through its specific manifestation in their lives, history is demystified, unlike the mystified history found in their textbooks. It becomes a

radical history, one that exposes the inconsistencies and ruptures of a culturally unequal society.

The effort to teach the history of slavery demonstrates Mary's concern for unveiling racist power structures. She continually attempts to teach her own children the ways in which power works against them. She feels that her children will be empowered through this knowledge and will be able to act more intelligently with a greater awareness of their environment. We see this when she takes the children to see Mr. Berry, who has been burned nearly to death by the "night men." The burning has left the man horrifically deformed. Cassie tells the reader: "The face had no nose, and the head no hair; the skin was scarred, burned, and the lips were wizened black, like charcoal" (97). Mr. Berry is unable to speak, unable to stand light on his damaged eyes, or even the feel of clothes against his charred skin. The Logan children stand by silently as their mother talks to the debilitated man. On the way home, she explains her reason for bringing the children to see him. In a resolute tone, she says:

> The Wallaces did that, children. They poured kerosene over Mr. Berry and his nephews and lit them afire. One of the nephews died, the other one is just like Mr. Berry. . . . Everyone knows they did it, and the Wallaces even laugh about it, but nothing was ever done. They're bad people, the Wallaces. That's why I don't want you to ever go to their store again—for any reason. You understand? (98)

The children nod, "unable to speak" as they think of the disfigured man they have just seen. Stripping power of any coding, Mary explains to the children

what can happen to them if they are not careful. There is no effort here to shield them from any unpleasantness, no accommodation for their youth. For Mary, it is more important that they understand the possible repercussions of incautious action than it is to shelter them from unpleasantness. She unveils the power structure for her children, showing them exactly what power is capable of, who wields it, and who is victimized by it.

Asserting Power through the Possession of Land

The person who owns land lives his life independently with full of pride, as people in Mississippi consider a person powerful accordingly. In a culture where the memory of slavery is still strong, land is a symbol of independence and autonomy. The setting of the land plays a major role in the novel; the title alone indicates that land is of great importance in Georgia, East Texas, and Mississippi. There are two particularly significant settings in the land: the father's plantation and the land Paul-Edward purchases in Mississippi. In the Deep South, Mississippi during 1930s, where the novel takes place, people live in tense segregated society. That’s why people must have their own power which they assert by owning the land. The Logans, one of the black families, have their own land which they do not want to lose in any cost. Next, the children acquire the knowledge of caring for each other. Last, they become able to stand up for what they believe in. An example when the Logans teach their children strong work ethnic occurs when Papa explains the importance of owning their land. Cassie considers her father's words as she thinks:

> For it he would work a long, hot summer pounding steel; Mama would teach and run the farm; Big Ma, in her sixties, would work

> like a woman of twenty in the fields and keep the house; and the boys and I would wear threadbare clothing washed to dishwasher color; but always, the taxes and mortgage would be paid. (4)

In fact the story moves around the hundred acres of Logan land that is on the verge of loss if tax is not paid in time. Big Ma holds the deed to the Logan land, which was bought by her late husband, Paul Edward. Similarly, her son David Logan works on the railroad in order to pay for his land even by leaving his family till Christmas and he feels happy, for his children will not live being landless:

> I asked him once why he had to go away, why the land was so important. He took my hand and said in his quiet way: 'Look out there, Cassie girl. All that belongs to you. You ain't never had to live on nobody's place but your own and as long as I live and the family survives, you'll never have to. That's important. You may not understand that now, but one day you will. Then you will see. (7)

Logans realizes the freedom in owning land and thinks accordingly in the context of their children. The Avery family, since they share cropped on Granger land they do not have freedom in comparison to the Logan family. The burning of John Henry Berry by white men is a kind of lynching, in which white men take the life of a black man and are not punished for it. On leaving Mr. Berry, Mary begins to organize her boycott of the Wallaces' store. She talks to the neighbors, sharecropping families who live on the land belonging to Harlan Granger. She tells the neighbors that the Wallaces are allowing the children to drink and smoke at their store while they accrue charges for which

their families will be held responsible. Mary’s boycott is a subversive act, much like her act of covering the issuance charts on the inside of the textbooks of her students. But the Avery family could do nothing even at the time of the burning of a black by White. It is all because they were compelled to share crop on Granger Land.

Granger owns a ten-square-mile plantation which is worked by sharecropping families. The Logans' land had belonged to the Granger family before it was sold to a Northerner during Reconstruction, and Mr. Granger's desire to get it back from the Logans leads him to threaten Big Ma and to use his authority in town to pressure the bank to call in the note on the mortgage. He, Kaleb Wallace, and a third man, representing the school board, fire Mama for teaching history that isn't in the books and for defacing the school's books. When the boycott on the Wallace store begins, he recognizes the possibility of financial loss to himself because he owns the land that the store is located on. He decides to take sixty rather than fifty percent of his sharecroppers' cotton and threatens to kick out those who continue the boycott. On the night of the attack on the Averys, Granger lets Jamison tell the crowd that he doesn't want a hanging on his land but does little to stop the mob until the fire threatens to engulf the forest and his crops. Only then does he force the mob to fight the fire rather than to hang T.J.

Unlike Mr. Granger who sees the land as a symbol of his family's "rightful" domination over blacks, for the Logans, the land is intrinsically linked to family. Grangers do not even hesitate to make the physical violence in order to dominate the people who are living by taking his land. They have not given land simply because they need money from it instead they have

always politics behind providing the land in mortgage. It is through the land, they hegemonies over the people who are landless. They want to hegemonies even Logans by turning them into landless. Its therefore they have been attempting to return back the land sold to Logons long ago.

Understanding the above politics behind their attempt, the Logons are working hard in order to save the land from losing it. They even do not bother the numerous threaten from the Granger Family. Mama is fired from her job in the name of teaching from out of curriculum, David is attacked mercilessly but they are determined to save their land. Cassie recalls how Papa reached out and softly touched her face in the dark: “If you remember nothing else in your whole life, Cassie girl, remember this: We ain’t never gonna lose this land. You believe that?” he says. To help make sure the land stays in the family, Big Ma gives the land to her sons, Papa and Hammer. Cassie says that it doesn’t matter which family members own the land because it will always be “Logan land.” Cassie loves the land. But no matter how much the family loves the land and the freedom it brings, people always come first. Papa sets his cotton fields on fire to save T. J.’s life. This is Cassie’s most important lesson. Cassie realizes this when she says: “Papa had found a way, as Mama had asked, to make Mr. Granger stop the hanging: He had started the fire” When Cassie realizes the seriousness of the threats to her family and their land, she cries: “What had happened to T. J. in the night I did not understand but I knew that it would not pass. And I cried for those things which had happened in the night and would not pass. I cried for T.J. For T.J. and the land” (276). Now that she is becoming more mature, Cassie is starting to understand the hard choices that adults must often make.

It is only the land which has made the Logans capable of living independently even in the society where racism has taken a strong root. Because they own land, the Logans can afford to shop in Vicksburg and are not beholden to the whims of landlords as sharecroppers are. The way Grangers assert the power with the land they have, Logans also have their way to live independently even by challenging the brutality of racism they are living with.

IV. Black Empowerment through Land

Mildred Taylor's novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, explores the beliefs and assertions of Black family through the Logan family as they attempt to possess land in an attempt of empowering themselves. Throughout this novel we learn about the importance of land and the effects of racism – the land politics. In the face of racial and economic adversities, Mama and Papa Logan provide their children with the important lessons they need to be successful in life in the white dominated society. First, the Logan children especially the narrator Cassie grows to be persistent and determined. She becomes aware as she acquires the knowledge of caring for her family and community. Ultimately, she becomes able to stand up for what they believe in for the assertion the power – Black power. An example when the Logans teach their children strong work ethnic occurs when Papa explains the importance of owning their land. Cassie considers her father's words as she knows her parents take care and manage their farm and how the taxes and mortgage would be paid.

Papa's explanation to the family about working hard makes Cassie think about the sacrifices the family will have to make to keep the land. These sacrifices might be hard to make but it will be necessary to keep the land and pay taxes. Another quality is that the Logans care for each other when Stacey stands up for Little Man when Miss Crocker hands out old, dirty, and torn books. Cassie exclaims, "Yes'm, he been reading since he was four. He can't read all those big words, but he can read the columns. See what's in the last row. Please look, Miz Crocker." (18) Cassie's courage to stand up for her little brother is phenomenal. She does so even though she knows she might get

whipped. Her bravery shows that she supports the fact that blacks are treated inferior to whites. Miss Crocker at first refuses to look and then she say, "well that's what you are." Miss Crocker is in a state of denial in trying to convince herself that there is no problem with the school. Last, the Logans instruct their kids to stand up for what they believe in. This occurs when the Logans think that the Wallaces treat their black customers unfairly and they try to put them out of business. Mama says: Everybody from Smellings Creek to Strawberry knows it was them but what do we do about it? We line our pockets with our few pennies and send our children up to their store to learn things they've got no business learning. The older children are drinking regularly there now, even though they don't have money to pay, and the Wallaces simply add charges to the family bill.

Mary Logan is getting as many tenant farmers as she can to shop at Vicksburg, thus drawing them away from the Wallace store. The Logans are the only ones that can actively protest the burning of the Berry brothers because they can't be driven off their land for crossing whites. In conclusion, Mildred Taylor's thrilling and compelling book, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, teaches an important lesson about working hard, standing up for your rights and beliefs, and helping out your family members. Overall, the Logans do a great job in teaching their children to be successful in life.

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