

I. The Emergence and Development of African American Literature: From William Brown to Edward P. Jones

African American literature concerns the pathetic state of the ex-slaves who left the South in the post-bellum period in the hope of gaining sheer freedom, and faced a dangerous threat in the North. Even the North was not the Promised Land for the blacks. Racial and cultural prejudices were greater in the free states of the North than the slave states of the South. Though they were free from the yoke of slavery, they were isolated from almost every institution like education, religion, and judiciary. The blacks encountered segregation and discrimination everywhere in the North. They were barred from most public places; they were denied the right to vote as in the South. The revolutionary economic growth expanded employment opportunities for thousands of workers in the cities but they were not for the blacks yet. The blacks benefited little from the new demand for labor because the white workers often demanded the exclusion of the blacks from the job market. The social, political, economic, racial, and cultural oppression black people experienced in the American States shaped the repression of black; the pattern of discrimination, segregation and mass violence degraded and reduced the blacks to the deplorable condition of illiteracy, hopelessness, and poverty. The sum total of white cultural supremacy over the blacks was psychological disintegration, worthlessness of black self, and split of the black soul.

During the days of slavery, the Afro-Americans expected to see in one single divine event the end of all doubts and disappointments. They thought that slavery was indeed the prime cause of all mistreatments and villainies and the cause of all sorrows and hoped that Emancipation would confer on them the Promised Land, where they could live with freedom and dignity. But the Promised Land for the blacks always

became the slipping of the signifier over the continuum of the signified; they could never grasp it in their hand. In their songs, tears, and exhortations, the blacks implored divine power to bestow freedom on them. But even after the centuries of liberty, the blacks have not yet felt freedom in actuality.

However, their quest for freedom is still far away from their goal and resting place, though it has at least enabled them to have some leisure for reflection and self-examination of practices and values. When we throw a glance at American literature, black writers are seen to have made abundance use of their myths, songs, music, legends, folktales, and other African oral narratives to create their literary works. In the beginning, the literary production of black Americans was basically based on their folk tales, songs, legends, myths, etc. The methods of slave narratives and their materials also helped to begin the tradition of the Afro-American fiction. As outsiders and marginal people of American society and culture, many black American novelists began to explore the literary possibilities of their residual oral Afro- American folk forms and Western literary tradition. Talking about the origin of the Afro-American novel, Christen Bell argues, "The Afro-American novel is the hybrid narrative whose distinctive literary tradition and vitality are derived basically from the sedimented indigenous roots of black American folklore and literary genres of the Western world" (xii).

The first generation of the Afro-American novelists did not only rely on black folklore for their literary creation and form but also drew heavily on abolitionist literature, in particular, slave narratives, the Bible, and popular fiction. Whatever the literary sources might be in the production of their fiction, all of them read with the pain that they underwent in race-prejudiced American society. Their union is reflected in numerous ways in the quest for dignity as the free people of African ancestry and

the fulfillment of individual potential by merging a divided, alienated self into a truer and better unified self. Therefore, from the very beginning, the Afro-American novelists are concerned with the need to unearth the historical reality about their ancestors. Shedding light on the theme and structure of the Afro-American novel, Bell contends, "Thematically and structurally, the tradition of the Afro-American novel is dominated by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppressions and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one's complex bicultural identity as an Afro-American" (341).

The first black American novel *Clotel* by William Wells Brown was published before the Civil War. This novel is abolitionist in theme and tone. Brown, in the Preface of the novel exposes the instructional entrenchment of slavery in the United States. In the first section of the novel, he exposes how the black family is destructed. Most of the chapters of the novel begin with an epigraph in which the novelist shows that chattel slavery in America undermines the entire social condition of man. Bell holds that "the structure of the novel is episodic, the style elevated, and the subject matter rooted in the legends, myths, music, and the concrete eye-witness accounts of the fugitive slaves themselves" (40).

Another novelist of ante-bellum period, Frank J. Webb, does not directly attack slavery like Brown in his novel *The Garies and Their Friends*. His novel demonstrates the problems of growing up as a free black in Brotherly Love city and also the tragedy that overcomes an inter-racial couple who moves North. The fortune of two transplanted Southern families--the dark-skinned, lower middle class Ellises and their three children--are contrasted with the inter-racial Garies, a wealthy white Georgian, his mulatto wife and their two children. By the end of the novel, the Ellis family is crippled, whereas the Garies, except for young Emily, are completely

destroyed. "To enhance the credibility of his characters and the theme of northern hypocrisy," Bell argues, "Webb carefully manipulates the moral and temporal distance between the characters themselves and between the reader and white characters" (45).

Harriet E. Wilson, the third black novelist of the ante-bellum period published her novel *Our Nig* (1859), which was based on her life as an indentured servant. After the death of her black father, the mulatto protagonist Frado is deserted by her white mother and indentured to a nineteenth century white Massachusetts family that abuses her life as a slave for several years. Bell opines that "this novel is an intriguing synthesis of the sentimental novel and the slave narratives, of fact and fiction, of romance and autobiography" (47). The same critic further says, "The point of view, narrative structure and style also reveal the double vision characteristic of the American experience and the Afro-American novel" (48). Henry Louis Gates comments the novel in question saying that "even though *Our Nig* shares many of the elements of the plot of nineteenth-century women's fiction, it significantly inverts the plot structure of the 'white women's novel' to create the black women's novel" (qtd. in Bell 48). Wilson's novel is considered to be important to the tradition of the Afro-American novel and feminist literature and the illuminating power of her double vision.

Martin Robinson Delany's novel *Blake* is in part the fictionalized adventure of the author who was a political activist. In characterization and theme, this novel is the most radical black novel of the nineteenth century. The novel is abolitionist in theme and it is intended for black rather than white audiences. The male protagonist is a young black Cuban revolutionary who is scornful of organized religion and preaches war against the tyranny of white rule. He puts his trust in black-reliance and advocates

immigration to Cuba. Bell puts, "*Blake* is the story of . . . the daring 'pure Negro' organizer of an underground revolutionary force who plans to liberate blacks in the United States" (51).

By the end of the Civil War, the tradition of the Afro-American novel revealed a preoccupation with the struggle of black Americans for freedom from color and racial discrimination. The black American fiction writers affirmed their humanity in the process of defining and developing themselves as an ethnic community and individuals: "This search was symbolically expressed in their fiction in a mixed narrative form in which romantic elements often dominated social realism" (Bell 55). But the post-bellum Afro-American fiction was a move toward social realism. During this period, the black American fiction writers felt that their task, while writing fiction, was to clear the ground of the lore of white racism and sow the seeds for the more faithful portrayal of the complexities of black characters and culture.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a black novelist of the post-bellum period, published her novel *Iola Leroy*, which is based on "the melodramatic study of the color line" (Bell 58). This novel stresses the moral duty of mulattoes: to repress the sexual urge and to inspire others by their selfless dedication to social reform and service to their race. Bell argues that the novel "combining the sentimentality and the rhetoric of romance with the psychological and sociological truth of mimesis, it is the first Afro-American novel to treat the heroism of blacks during and after the Civil War" (58). The major characters in the novel reflect the novelist's deep involvement in the abolitionist temperament, and women's rights movement. *Iola Leroy*, as a transitional novel, depicts the role of blacks during the Civil War and the struggles for personal and group mobility during the Reconstruction era. It provides a panoramic view of the courage and commitment of mulattoes for freedom and justice especially

motherhood. This novel is in the tradition of abolitionist novel and the narrative centers on the breakup of slave families.

One of the most controversial novelists of the Post-bellum period Sutton Elbert Griggs's *Imperium in Imperior* is, thematically, the most radical Afro-American novel of the period. This novel announced to the world that blacks would no longer tolerate the denial of their rightful voice in the government. This novel glorifies black characters and attacks the myth of white supremacy. "This novel is an ambitious step toward social realism," says Bell, "and it extends the limits of black romance and melodrama" (63).

Charles Waddell Chesnutt who is generally considered to be the first major Afro-American fiction writer, published short stories and three novels and turned in his fiction to the theme of color and caste. His novel *The Marrow of Tradition* is a realistic illustration of the blood and cultural ties that bind black and white Americans together. Bell contends, "Its moral purpose of unmasking white terrorism and lore, its ironic, more persuasive treatment of the complex influence of color and class on black characters enriches the tradition of the black American novel and moves it further on the road towards social realism" (69).

W. E. B. Du Bois, an American cultural critic, published five novels: *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, *Dark Princess*, *The Ordeal of Mansart*, *Mansart Builds a School*, and *Worlds of Color*. Critiquing on his novels, Bell argues that "his novels reflect his critical view of American society and the stylistic flexibility of the beginning of naturalism in the Afro-American novel" (82). His novels follow the sociological tendencies of naturalism and indicate the ideological tensions and melodramatic endings.

Another novelist of this period, James Weldon Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, follows the psychological tendency of naturalism. The novel emphasizes the prototypical significance of Du Bois's trope of double-consciousness. The Harlem Renaissance, which spanned during the 1920s, was the period of large-scale developments in the field of black literary production. During this period, many literary talents like Claudius McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Bill Robinson, Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong appeared in the field of black literature. It was, indeed, the heyday of Afro-American culture that highlighted black music, dance, and literature. The Afro-American writers of this period turned to African and Afro-American folklore for durable past. The nineteenth century image of Africa as a primitive land which was taken as a source of shame and hatred for many black Americans was changed into a symbol of pride. These writers, writing out of the debts of their group and personal experience, spoke with a particular representation. The Harlem Renaissance novelists reconstructed the experience of blacks in America and highlighted those elements of the racial and national past that define their personal identity and social vision.

Toomer's *Cane*, a poetic novel is about "the quest of a modern black artist for socio-psychological wholeness and creative authority" (Bell 97). On the surface, this novel is a pastoral work contrasting the values of uninhibited, unlettered black folk with those of the educated black bourgeoisie. Drawing on the Afro-American tradition of music as a major structural device, Toomer in this novel presents the story of a metaphysical quest, a search for the truth about man, God, and America that takes its nameless poet-narrator on a journey of self-discovery. Bell argues, "The artistic fusion in *Cane* is of Christian myth and elements of the African and Afro-American experience, especially the tradition of black music" (101).

Arna Wendell Bontemps, a novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, makes use of history and black lore in a more traditional manner than Toomer. In his three novels, *God Sends Sunday*, *Black Thunder* and *Drums at Dusk*, "there is a shift from urban folklore to revolutionary history" (Bell 102). His latter two novels are the stories of revolution and the will to freedom. His second novel *Black Thunder* turns to the slave narratives and court records for the legendary efforts of blacks to liberate themselves and focuses on the pent-up will of oppressed people to be free. His last novel *Drums at Dusk* relies heavily on historical documents.

Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen, two women novelists of the period, reject the romantic extremes of nationalism and assimilation in favor of cultural dualism. They see the substance of middle-class American values as the goal of black women and plead for the necessity of racial pride, family background, and formal education.

In Claudius McKay's novel *There is Confusion* and Zora Neal Hurston's *Home to Harlem*, the quest is not only for the resolution of the psychological and social dilemma of the modern black American but also for an affirmation of the human spirit over the forces that threatened its integrity and development. The literary reaction of Hurston and other novelists of that time was a more intense personal search for modern forms of ancestralism and the continuity of the folk tradition. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the best romance which has beautifully used Southern folk material and emphasized on the complex relation between black men and women. This novel and her anthropological work *Mules and Men* provide the platform and the framework for black feminist writing in the 1980s. The work of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and other young writers like Amiri Baraka are prefigured in them. Charles Johnson points out, "Hurston treated the popular subject thoroughly by using the most interesting Harlem Renaissance ideas- the importance of the common

folk to explore the 'New Negro' female on subtler levels than her contemporaries did" (12).

The novels of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen focus on the everyday life of ordinary Church-going black folk. Bell highlights:

Their characters are less idealized their settings less exotic, and their plot less melodramatic. Their novels strive for the truth of a particular environment and the social rituals of common folk rather than for the truth of the world at large and the life style of street people and migrants. (128)

During the decline of the Harlem Renaissance, satiric realism emerged in the scene of the Afro-American novel. Several black American writers of this period turned to comedy and satire for models to depict the ordinary experience of black people. Focusing on these genres of the period, Bell asserts, "Whereas comedy, as in Hughes's *Tambourines to Glory*, is basically a humorous representation of the everyday life of low-brow characters for its own sake, satire, as in Cullen's *One Way to heaven*, has a clear moral aim" (137).

In the wake of the depression we can see a creative school of black young writers— Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Frank Yerby and Willard Motley— rising in the Afro-American fiction. Wright's novel *Native Son* left a large artistic impression on black literature. Christen Bone says,

Urban nihilism is the real subject of *Native Son*. Wright confronts us with a segment of the nation that believes in nothing. His hero . . . can affirm no values other than his own acts of violence . . . his nihilism threatens not only the tranquility but the very foundations of the republic. This trend employs the black American as the metaphor of

America and the modern human condition. This modern odyssey of a nameless black American is the legacy to the tradition of the Afro-American novel. (482)

This novel, which is taken as one of the two or three best known novels by black American writers, influenced many other writers and produced imitators such as James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and John A. Williams. The Afro-American novel in the decade of the forties from Wright's *Native Son* to William Gardner Smith's *Anger at Innocence* reveals both continuity and change in the tradition of the Afro-American fiction. The theme of color and class conflict remains dominant in the decade. The change that was introduced in the Afro-American novel of the forties, as Bell puts, "was Wright's creation of Bigger Thomas as the prototypical urban black American, obsessed by a fear and hatred of white people and driven to violence in rebellion against and in affirmation of his dehumanization" (186).

The most dramatic break with naturalism occurred in the re-discovery of myth, legend, and ritual in the novels of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* are the best examples of the continuity of traditional narrative forms in an appropriate modern black context. In Bell's words, "Both novelists reveal their own socialized ambivalence and double vision in their themes, plots, characterization, and point of view" (234).

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which traces a nameless black youth's journey, is a monumental book of extraordinary intensity and richness. Bell opines that "this novel portrays the historical quest of the black Americans for identity in a society whose traditions simultaneously inspires and inhibit their impulse toward freedom and self-realization" (203). Focusing on this novel, O' Mellay argues:

The novel is built not only upon the foundation of black lore but also of black literature. It is a benchmark black novel that seems aware of the entire tradition of Afro-American letters. In it one overhears the black and white tricksters of slave narrative locked in combat. (243)

James Baldwin, in his novels, focuses on a single dimension of black culture. His emphasis is not political but spiritual and sexual, and the terrifying possibilities of love. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is Baldwin's first and best novel, and tells the story of a Harlem youth called John Grimes who undergoes a religious experience on his fourteenth birthday. Kinnamon argues that "this novel is a carefully constructed novel about the black Church that has penetrating characterization, and intensely poetic style and fully realized psychological and social themes. It gives religion its due, but finally implies religious skepticism" (543).

The development of the Black Arts movement in the contemporary Afro-American fiction is the result of the concept of Black Power that expresses the determination of black people to redefine and liberate themselves. This concept depends on the fundamental principle "that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society" (Bell 236). Both the concepts of the black arts and black power relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood: "One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; and other with the art of politics" (Bell 239).

The Afro-American novel from 1962 to 1983 has been characterized by continuity and change. During this period, black novelists sought structures and styles appropriate to the imaginative reconstruction of their sense of the double-consciousness of black people. The black American fiction writers like John O.

Killens, John A. William, and Alice Walker tried to displace personal ambivalence continuing the tradition of realism, whereas Toni Morrison explored poetic realism. The novels of the former group of writers took the mode of critical realism or social realism.

Killens is the contemporary force of critical realism. His *Youngblood* and *The Cotillion* are the best examples of critical realism. His other novels, *And Then We Heard the Thunder* and *Sippi* reveal an increasing use of the black oral tradition and focus on the themes of black awareness and unity. John A. William's novels, in the tradition of the new realism, reveal a growing radical consciousness and preoccupation with form. Bell argues, "Using the conventional techniques, Killens is less concerned in his novels with the forces breaking up our society than with those leading toward a new nation, a new social order" (252).

Alice Walker, an important black woman novelist of the modern time, has published four novels. Explaining the thematic concerns in her novels, Walker in an interview says,

I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world. Next to them, I place the old people— male and female — who persist in their beauty in spite of everything. (Bell 259)

Similarly, Bell comments, "In her fiction as in her life she has an openness to mystery, animism, which she believes is both the one thing that is deeper than any politics, race, or geographical locations" (260). Her themes are generally revolutionary and confront the contemporary experience of black Americans, particularly those of black American women, focusing on their cultural, social, and

political history. Her early novel *Meridian*, as Janet Gray argues, "chronicles, in episodic form, the life of Meridian, a young black woman from the South who rejects the simple options available to black women, such as marriage, children, and religion in favor of, at first, the civil rights movement and education in the north" (917).

Toni Morrison also seems to be working in line with Alice Walker, but with a difference. Morrison is considered to be one of the truly outstanding and influential black writers of the age. Samantha Luks and Laurel Elms emphasize:

In theme and style Toni Morrison's novels are a fine example of vintage wine in new bottles. Her exploration of the impact of sexism and racism on the lives of black women in her Gothic fables provides a more complex and, perhaps, controversial vision of the personalities and bonding of fiercely alive modern black women. (716)

Morrison's novels deal with the painful past of the black ancestors with a distinct mode of presentation and imagination. Morrison, in her novels, is seen to have beautifully synthesized the multi-faceted aspects of racism, sexism, and cultural marginalization in a distinctly different way.

Edward P. Jones, the author in this research question, was born and raised in Washington, and educated at both the College of the Holy Cross and the University of Virginia. His first book, *Lost in the City*, is a collection of short stories about the African-American working class in the Twentieth Century Washington, D.C. "In the early stories are some who are like first-generation immigrants, as they have come to the city as part of the Great Migration from the rural South," (576) say Jennifer V. Jackson and Mary E. Cothran.

His second book, *The Known World*, is a richly imagined novel set before the Civil War in Virginia. It examines issues regarding free blacks's ownership of black

slaves, as well as slavery under whites. This is a book with many point of views: “*The Known World* paints an enormous canvas thick with personalities and situations that show how slavery destroys but can also be transcended” (qtd. in Traore 348). The book won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the 2005 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Jones's third book, *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, was published in 2006. Like *Lost in the City*, it is a collection of short stories that deal with African Americans, mostly in Washington, D.C. Several of the stories had been previously published in *The New Yorker* magazine. The stories in the book take up the lives of ancillary characters in *Lost in the City*.

The plot of Jones’s works is connected. As Wyatt Mason contends:

The stories of Jones revisit not merely the city of Washington but the all-african american experiences. Each new story—and many of them, in their completeness, feel like fully realized little novels—is connected in the same sequence, as if umbilical, to the corresponding story. Literature is, of course, littered with sequels—its Rabbits and Bechs; its Zuckermans and Kepeshes—but this is not, in the main, Jones’s idea of a reprise. Each revalidation provides a different kind of interplay between the two collections. (12)

Similarly, Neely Tucker writes:

It's gone almost completely unnoticed, but his collections are a matched set: there are fourteen stories in "Lost," ordered from the youngest to the oldest character, and there are fourteen stories in "Hagar's," also ordered from youngest to oldest character. The first story in the first book is connected to the first story in the second book, and so on. To get the full history of the characters, one must read the

first story in each book, then go to the second story in each, and so on.

(117)

Jones spent years creating nearly all of his Pulitzer-winning, antebellum-era novel, *The Known World*, in his head, until he finally set it all down on paper in a three-month rush in 2001 after being laid off from his job at a tax publication. Trucker writes after *The Known World* that Jones was “in the first rank of American letters” and “one of the most important writers of his own generation” (117). Dave Eggers further says, “*The Known World* was widely considered to be one of the best American novels of the past twenty years, as its sweep, its humanity, the unvarnished perfection of its prose made it seem not so much written as engraved in stone” (54). He notes that this novel merely had the ability to “stun on every page; there are too many breathtaking lines to count” (55).

In an interview with Lawrence P. Jackson, Jones was asked how he would have defined his style in terms of technique and literary genre. In response Jones says,

I think it's just a sense when you approach it that something has to be in the third person. I can't remember all that went into the decision to tell. I just knew that the way it was working it had to be first-person narration, and that I didn't want to give the guy a name. I was thinking of all the ways you use the camera because he has an apron with his name on it and I was explaining the ways the camera had to look at him without showing the name. I wanted that kind of limited viewpoint with him, and the only way I could do that was in the first person. But there are other stories where I knew I just had to step back and see the whole thing, where I wanted to create the entire world that was

Washington, their Washington, and the best way to do that was a third person that the main character may or may not know. (95)

Jones primary handling of his characters is based on his life experience. But he has further dwelt on the times that he has not lived himself. Rather he has fictionalized the lives that he has heard of or from the pages of history. Those characters often come from the turbulences of African American community; they are not merely the sufferers at the hands of white settlers but instead are perennially victimized by the people from their own race. Blacks in America regained their freedom at the cost of their own people.

This research ventures through the poignant suffering that the black community has undergone at the hands of the black themselves rather to the historical apartheid bestowed upon them from whites. *The Known World* is the poignant tale of how the legacy of taming and keeping slaves has percolated in the history. This practice has been the legacy of well to do freed slaves inherited from their white masters. The point of departure in this research is that it is now ubiquitous from world literature that the African people were exploited in the cruel hands of white European colonizers, but they were equally exploited from the middle men—that is, colored people from their own community—in terms of their freedom. What was usual in the beginning in the twentieth century became unusual at the later period of century in that the same people are being enslaved by their own people. This research works through the central concern of how enslavement continued despite its prohibiting from the constitution, and how the henchmen from the black community of European settlers and white Americans prevailed in American society to continue the malpractice of slavery. The primary source book is Edward P. Jones's novel *The*

Known World, which deals upon the plight of African American community at the hands of black masters themselves.

The succeeding chapter is the theorization of African American criticism mostly buying ideas on double dealing African American masters whose primary purpose has been to remain masters of their own community. The chapter after that will analyze how the instances that Edward P. Jones has produced in this novel *The Known World* match those theorizations. In other words, this chapter is to deal on the textual evidences formulated in the earlier theoretical proposition. Lastly, this research concludes with the findings and observations on how Jones's novel has been appropriate subject of study on the crucial aspects of slavery, that is, how the malpractice continued despite the fact that the whites were reluctant to fight over, or, in other words given up hopes of their political supremacy over African American community in America.

II. Treatment of Slavery in *The Known World*

Hundreds of articles and books have been published about African American families. Nevertheless, the understanding of these families continues to be limited. There is a tendency to gloss over important within-group differences; thus, monolithic and stereotypical portrayals of Black family life are common. This chapter sets aside debates of Black family pathology or viability, focusing instead on these families' disintegration of essential character and separation of class in terms of economic prosperity within black race as exhibited in Edward P. Jones's novel *The Known World*. Jones seeks to understand Black families on their own terms, locating them in relevant social, historical, political and cultural contexts. Key empirical patterns and trends reveal dramatic changes in Black family geographic location, headship, quality of life and socioeconomic status after abolition of slavery in America. A complex picture is revealed in Jones's novel: there has been gradual but steady overall improvement alongside persistent, extreme racial disparities and pronounced class disparities among Black families.

Systematic examination of significant trends and patterns of criticism in Black American family life offer useful lessons for evaluating significant research in the area. Walter R. Allen writes, "The history of Black Americans, like that of any people, is marked by change [. . .] Black Americans have experienced four major transitions over their history, and each left legacies that influence contemporary Black family life" (569). The first and most obvious transition involves, according to Allen, bringing captured Africans to America as slaves. For enslaved Africans, this transition involved "both gross (that is, the loss of personal freedom) and subtle (that is, exposure to African American family life and plantation agriculture) redefinitions" (572). Out of these redefinitions was created a new people, African Americans, who

represented cultural, social, and biological hybrids. “The second major transition in African American history involved emancipation: Blacks were freed from slavery,” (572) writes Allen. This status change is accompanied, however, by the equally demeaning and restrictive redefinition of Blacks as an “untouchable-like caste group in American society” (572). It is worth noting that, while over time the terms of reference (that is, Negro, Colored, Black, African American, Afrikan) have changed, the degraded cast status of Black people has been an immutable constant. Allen further notes the intermingling of cultures and its repercussion in African American identity:

On the heels of this evolution of Blacks from slavery to cast status came the geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural transitions of Black America from a Southern, rural, agrarian folk society to a Northern, Western, and Midwestern, industrial society. In four generations, or roughly three hundred years, African Americans had moved from agrarian slavery into the industrial and urban heartlands of this country. They had become hybrids, combining the heritages of their African and American experiences. (573)

The fourth major transition for African Americans involves, according to Allen, “the de-segregation of U.S. society” (573). A major impetus for the desegregation of American society were the activities and actors associated with the civil rights movement. However, efforts to desegregate U.S. institutional and community life at all levels have so far proven to be only partially successful: “vestiges of past disadvantages and persistent discrimination in the present continue to restrict Black equality and participation in this society” (573).

Freedom and the Loopholes

The impact of transition in African American people that Allen has outlined is persistently visible in Jones's characters. Augustus has discovered his mission as a member of freed slaves and a skillful carpenter. Unlike his wife, he has come to reject not only the values and attitudes of the black middle class but also the life of the black working and lower classes as well, symbolized by the Southside where "one lived knowing that at any time, anybody might do anything [. . .] not wilderness where there was system, or the logic of lions, trees, toads, and birds, but wild wilderness where there was none" (*The Known World* 13).

His organization is "logical" and reasonable, in sharp contrast to the "wilderness" so much a part of "ghetto life." Members of the freed slaves have even transcended ego and the need for glory or martyrdom:

It's not about other people knowing. We don't even tell the victims. We just whisper to him, "Your Day has come." The beauty of what we do is its secrecy, its smallness.... We don't discuss it among ourselves, the details. We just get an assignment. If the Negro was killed on a Wednesday, the Wednesday man takes it; if he was killed on Monday, the Monday man takes that one. (159)

The central message conveyed by Jones's *The Known World* via the Augustus-Mildred dialogue is that if more than just a handful of courageous, righteous, and sacrificial black men and women had been willing to "love" enough to avenge the murders of their people, virtually giving up their lives, then the overt and covert oppression of black folk might have ended long ago. "Love" in Jones's *The Known World* is like the love of one soldier for a countryman who has died in combat. It forces the reader to consider black people as if they have been engaged in a protracted

struggle against superior and unpredictable adversaries: "No Love? No Love? Didn't you hear me? What I'm doing ain't about hating white people. It's about loving us. About loving you. My whole life is love' " (160). Ultimately, the challenge Augustus extends to his fellows is that he and his comrades are no longer willing to wait for justice for black people or for the quality of life to improve for the race.

The members of the group have rejected all racial uplift strategies that have preceded them and do not see evolutionary progress as meaningful: "It's not about you living longer. It's about how you live and why. It's about whether your children can make other children. It's about trying to make a world where one day white people will think before they lynch" (16).

It becomes clear to Williams that Augustus, as a representative for the free slaves, will no longer regard his childhood friend in the same manner. Their differences are political and classical and automatically make them frightened antagonists: "Williams rubbed the ankle of his short leg. 'I'm scared for you, man.'" Augustus responds, "That's funny. I'm scared for you too" (16).

Jones's intuitive and experiential understanding of the urban, Northern black community is strengthened and enhanced by his consciousness of Afro-American history and culture and the internal and external forces which have swirled within and without its citizenry. His character Augustus, for instance, is representative of the Booker T. Washington school of racial progress through land ownership but updated and made believable by his tangible material success and the practical legacy he tries to give to his son.

Augustus's individual power is contrasted with the collective strength and heart of the freed slaves, whose members are his antithesis; Henry and Augustus are also at opposite ends of the class/race spectrum. Augustus belongs to the wider black

community, and as his movements throughout the community (from Feather's pool room to Tommy's barbershop to Mary's bar) illustrate, he has accumulated his knowledge of the world and self through conscious thought and worldly experiences. Henry is street; Augustus is house. Augustus, moreover, has learned about the tragedy of black life in America from the personal tragedy of his mother's death and from those men who stand in opposition to what Henry's father, Augustus, represents. In short, Augustus joins the freed slaves because of his experiences and his life, as if Jones were suggesting that it takes just such experiences and tragedies for black men to embrace a revolutionary praxis. Henry, on the other hand, ends up rejecting his background and the world his father has created for him by setting out to discover his future--a noble quest but one which is only individually rewarding. Those who form the freed slaves assume a racial position and outlook on their lives as opposed to Henry's material view. They understand their history and know that not even money will prevent their people from being heartbroken:

You not going to have a governor's mansion, or eight thousand acres of timber to sell. And you not going to have no ship under your command to sail on, no train to run, and you can. . . shoot down a thousand German planes all by yourself and land in Hitler's backyard and whip him with your own hands, but you never going to have four stars on your shirt front, or even three.... Well now. That's something you will have-a broken heart." Railroad Tommy's eyes softened, but the merriment in them died suddenly. "And folly. A whole lot of folly. You can count on it." (60)

Railroad Tommy and the others in the camp of freed slaves have realized they will never be millionaires nor will most of their people. They have, in essence, rejected the

"integration of the individual" as a beneficial approach to success for the black masses and instead adopted a more radical and extreme collective posture. Yet, they have an empathy and passion for black people that can be discerned in Jones's deft recreation of the impact of murder on the group as they are gathered in the barbershop:

In a few seconds it was over, since the announcer had only a few speculations and even fewer facts. The minute he went on to another topic of news, the barbershop broke into loud conversation. Railroad Tommy, the one who had tried to maintain silence, was completely silent now. He moved to his razor strop while Hospital Tommy tried to keep his customer in the chair. Porter, Guitar, Freddie the janitor, and three or four other men were exploding, shouting angry epithets all over the room. Apart from Milkman, only Railroad Tommy and Empire State were quiet. (80)

Jones, cognizant of how the murder outraged the national black community, uses this historical event to show the racial solidarity of the freed slaves. He also demonstrates that their actions, though violent, are no more extreme or bizarre than the actions of the two men who killed the adolescent Till for saying "Bye, baby" to a white female. The members of the group are political murderers who kill, like most zealots, for the love and quest of a greater good for their people. Porter, a member of the group who "cracks up," is described by Augustus as having gotten so depressed and despondent as a result of his mission that he went temporarily berserk: "It was getting him down. They thought somebody would have to take over his day. He just needed a rest and he's okay now" (59-60).

Despite his bizarre behavior, Porter, in the same desperate but compassionate way Augustus talks to Henry, professes his love for his people:

'I love ya! I love ya all. Don't act like that. You women. Stop it. Don't act like that. Don't you see I love ya? I'd die for ya, kill for ya. I'm saying I love ya. I'm telling ya. Oh, God have mercy. What I'm gonna do? What in this fuckin world am I gonna dooooo?'" (26).

Jones's unique, omniscient sense of the black community of the urban North is conveyed in his precise and exact rendering of the male figures in the story. Unlike the black fiction writers who preceded him, Jones, in *The Known World*, has not chosen to depict an estranged, disconnected, solitary "native son" who murders or an "invisible man" who runs from the South and goes to the white world to plead his case but ends up in contemporary ambiguity in a basement with lights. Instead, he has focused his vision on the community and its men-separate, distinct individuals who come together as a collective entity yet remain complex, whole characters.

Jones's global understanding of the black world makes him much like his great predecessors in terms of his grasp of "the people," but he has widened the Afro-American literary tradition by creating a larger-than-life work which embraces black culture, history, and folklore, while simultaneously making the experience of reading her work insightful and inspirational.

In an interview with Jackson on Jones's depiction of variety of black folk sayings from down-home, Jones remarks:

I think almost all of it comes from my mother. If she told me to sweep the floor and I went in and did it for ten seconds, she'd say, "You didn't work on that as long as Pat stayed in the Army." When I needed a haircut she'd say, "Your head looks like a sheep's behind," and things like that. I remember black people's poetic language. "One monkey don't stop no show." "Every good-bye ain't gone." "Come day go day."

If you were talk- ing about somebody who really didn't care or paid too much attention to the way he or she went through life every day the same-you would say, "Come day go day." Over years and years you absorb all of this stuff. I had a white friend at UVa whose mother had died. I shared this phrase with her and she eventually wrote a story, but she got the phrase wrong because it wasn't of her life. The phrase is "The wellest day you ever had, you're sick enough to die." You're in perfect health and you walk out into the street and you get hit by a bus and you're sick enough to die. I grew up with this wonderful way of talking. One of the things I remember about reading Zora Neale Hurston was that in certain nov- els you hear it too much. If you have lines like that in every paragraph, it's too rich. (95-96)

Jones's observation is based on a survey examining the relationships among continental African, African American, and African Caribbean persons. Relationships are explored in terms of contact and friendship, travel to countries of the diaspora, cross-cultural communications, thoughts and stereotypes, and education involving knowledge of the diaspora. The out-come of his survey points to the need for more Afro-centric allusions in literature as a means of reeducating people to have a better perspective of the African diaspora and to dispel myths and negative stereotypes about African people.

As people of the African diaspora, African Americans and persons from the Caribbean region (called West Indians) share a common heritage with Africans. Frantz Fanon stresses the importance of having some common understanding of what constitutes a diaspora, and sensitivity to fundamental differences in the historical trajectory of seemingly similar peoples. He also indicates that the very term, "African

diaspora" must be used with great caution, underscoring the point that until recent times, those people who resided on the African continent defined themselves solely in accordance with their ethnic group. He writes, "furthermore, it is we who homogenize these people by characterizing them as Africans" (qtd. in Gandhi 57). Fanon contends that "modern diasporic streams have been almost always the product of racial oppression and attendant systematic evils, and of resistance to them" (qtd. in Gandhi 58). He also emphasizes "that diasporic community formed by peoples of African descent share an emotional bond with their dispersed kin, and a history of racial oppression and struggle against it" (58).

This common bond among the African diaspora should serve as the basis for their relationship. Similarly, Leela Gandhi argues that "while there are many differences among indigenous and diaspora Africans, the cultural and political dismembering of African communities on either side of the Atlantic by Europeans constitutes a bond that transgresses geographic and temporal boundaries" (3). Despite a common history of slavery that led to people of African descent being separated from one another by distance and space, they are still joined by a common goal.

According to E. P. Skinner, "The result is that African peoples are still involved in a concerted struggle to gain total freedom and equality for themselves and the continent with which they are associated" (4). There are those of the African diaspora who feel that repatriation (return to Africa) is the only way to achieve this goal. For example, in a discussion with Skinner, a repatriate said, "to me, I see that Black people have a common history and a common experience, and think it's very valuable to recognize it" (19). The common experience shared by the people of African diaspora who are the focus of study is that of slavery. L. Bennett argued that European penetration and the slave trade debased much that was vital in African

culture. Garvey, in a speech given in New York City, characterizes slavery as a barbarous and brutal institution under which African descendants have suffered in this country, meaning the United States. Waters contends that although the slaves were of African origin, there were some differences within the slavery system that continue to "shape current ideas about race, the relations between socially defined races, and the degree to which issues of slavery and race permeate day-to-day interactions in the United States and the Carribean" (25).

In the aftermath of slavery, African peoples are found in different countries, away from their ancestral past and cultural roots. Jones novel sheds some light on how this has affected the relationship between the African diaspora from different geographic locations. From a historical perspective, the work of Jones provides information on the effects of slavery on slaves brought to the New World from West Africa. African Americans are descendants of Africans who were brought to the United States primarily to work on cotton plantations, as a result of the slave trade, starting about 1502.

The historical importance of slavery lies in its role as a major determinant of America's race relations and in the transformation of African cultural events and the creation of a unique Black culture in the Americas, especially evident in music and dance. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s led to major improvements in conditions of Black Americans and an upsurge of Black nationalism, the belief that Black people share a common culture and worldview, have a common destiny, and have had a common experience of slavery, oppression, colonialism, and exploitation. The term used to identify African people in the United States came under review after slavery was abolished, and Negro was replaced by Black, followed by African

American. These terms are being used interchangeably, depending on the historical context.

Among the African diaspora are people who are called West Indians. This is considered a misnomer and is thought to have been based on Columbus's mistaken notion that he had landed in India, having found indigenous people resembling Indians when he stumbled on the so-called New World. Jones states that historically, as a part of survival for emancipated people, migration became a way of life in the America. Jones notes that a mixture of conflict and consensus characterizes relationships among African Americans. At the heart of the conflict lay the fears of many African-Americans that the under privileged would take away jobs: "These fears were exacerbated by the tendency to view themselves as being set apart from African-Americans" (Gandhi 85). The fears and misconceptions have been perpetuated and continue to carry on the idea that although African people have the same beginnings, they are so different culturally, socially, and intellectually that they should be considered completely separate people. Thus, there is a continued rivalry for economic and social advantages among African Americans.

This is often seen as animosity among these groups, and this is literally established in Jones work. Therefore, how these groups relate to one another is of Jones's. Referring to African Africans, the narrator expresses the view that "while black foreigners have held successful family positions, and have exercised significant influence in White life in this country [meaning the USA], their cultural impact has generally been ignored in the larger spheres of American life" (Jones 31). This lack of recognition may have further exacerbated the animosity that is said to exist among Black people in the United States. There is much to be learned about the interaction and communication among people of the African diaspora. In a relationship study of

Black Africans and Black Americans on a college campus, Becker contends that "there is a basic incompatibility between Africans and Black Americans that leads to mutual rejection" (177). This sense of incompatibility is not only the case between Africans and Black Americans, but across the African diaspora.

This division has made slaves disappointed by freed slaves' ignorance, apathy toward them, and attitudes perceived as rejection and hatred of Africans. This may be due to the Eurocentric educational system inherited from the British, which distorted the image of Africans. African people related to one another has not received as much attention as the relationship between Black and White people in works by writers and critics. As noted by Vickerman, the centrality of slavery and its aftermath in U.S. history has always meant that race relations in the United States tends to be conceived of in terms of Blacks and Whites. The dichotomization of people into Black and White does not allow for the idea that Black people are themselves a diverse group with differences to warrant examination-not issues of race relations but of getting along with one another. An article in the *Washington Post* (2002) lends credence to this as the title itself-"A Diverse-and Divided-Black Community"-hints at the relationship among African people in the United States. Therefore, Jones's narrative examines the relationships among African American people in terms of historical, cultural, social, and psychological forces that may affect the interaction and communication among the groups.

Skin and Hair Color Fetish

The last declaration, uttered by a feverish, distraught, dangerously mentally ill Caldonia to her mentor comes midway through one of the most heart-wrenching scenes in Jones's *The Known World*. In the passage, they discuss whether Henry, the novel's central character, "likes" Caldonia's hair. By the time the scene has ended, it

doesn't matter that Delphine has offered credible reasons why Henry couldn't not love Caldonia's hair-" 'How can he love himself and hate your hair?' " Delphine asks- Caldonia is certain that Henry is only attracted to women with distinctly European features and insists, with deadly finality: "'He's never going to like my hair.'" "Ultimately, all Pilate can say in reply is, " 'Hush. Hush. Hush, girl, hush'" (315-16). African-Americans, with their traditionally African features, have always had an uneasy coexistence with the European (white) ideal of beauty.

According to Angela M. Neal and Midge L. Wilson, "Compared to Black males, Black females have been more profoundly affected by the prejudicial fallout surrounding issues of skin color, facial features, and hair . . . such impact can be attributed in large part to the importance of physical attractiveness for all women" (328). For black women, the most easily controlled feature is hair.

While contemporary black women sometimes opt for cosmetic surgery or colored contact lenses, hair alteration (that is, hair-straightening "permanents," hair weaves, braid extensions, Jheri curls, etc.) remains the most popular way to approximate a white female standard of beauty. Neal and Wilson contend that much of the black female's "obsession about skin color and features" has to do with the black woman's attempting to attain a "high desirability stem[ming] from her physical similarity to the white standard of beauty" (328). But just whom do African-American women hope to attract by attaining this "high desirability"? While there is some debate as to whether the choice of one's hair style automatically signifies one's alliance with, or opposition to, white supremacy, anecdotal evidence clearly points to the straightening of black hair as a way to fit, however unconsciously, into an overall white standard of beauty.

What is often overlooked; however, are specific black male expectations where black-female hairstyles are concerned. In much the same way that men gravitate toward certain styles, behaviors, and attitudes that are more likely to attract attention from women, male "likes" must rate, on some level, as at least a consideration when a female hair style is chosen. Of course, the reasoning a woman employs while choosing a hair style ranges much further than simply trying to attract some man. Above all, no doubt, women wear their hair in a style that pleases them. However, as Erica Hector Vital put it in a recent article about cutting off her dreads and retaining a short, natural style, certain Edward P. Jones's characters, such as Caldonia falls prey to dishonor and grief without the presence of the mothering voices to grant the essential reminders: "Don't let your slip show, don't sneak off with the neighborhood boys, don't forget to do your lesson, don't be a fool with your hair no man likes a bald-headed woman" (111).

While Vital did go on to cut her dreads-as she certainly should have, since that was her preference-one of the questions she asked herself in those final moments in the barber's chair was, ". . . what will the brothers think?" (12). This consideration of the black male's "likes" is not always on the surface, but, like the black male's regard for the black female's "likes," it is there, subterranean. Jones engages the black female's struggle between her own hairstyle preferences and the female hairstyle preferences of the black male. These instances offer compatible discussions of not only the black female's encounters with the white-female standard of beauty, but also the black female's difficulties negotiating her black-male partner's conception of that standard. Jones critiques the ideal by creating two characters who fall on opposing sides of the white-beauty construct. Caldonia, who wears her hair closely cropped, represents "Nature ... [as she] energetically work[s] against the allure of outward

appearances" (Guerrero 769). Caldonia's maid, on the other hand, "fantasizes a persona that she imagines will make her more desirable to her projected lover" (369). Celia's imagined "persona" is one that will include "silky copper-colored hair" (*The Known World* 127), because Jones primarily uses hair in the novel to draw Caldonia and Celia as opposites where the white standard of beauty is concerned.

Eventually, by revolving these opposites around Henry, the novel's central character, Jones devises his own African-American standard of beauty, an alternative to the white-beauty ideal. Jones also examines the black- female response to the white-beauty ideal, but in a markedly different manner. While both Caldonia and Celia have dark skin and "kinky" hair, Jones gives his character, Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods, all of the attributes of the white-female standard of beauty.

Janie's features conform to the black version of the white ideal, including those Neal and Wilson designate as the most important: "light skin and long hair" (325-26). Although Janie enjoys possessing these features, she refuses to allow her light skin and long hair to separate her from the Eatonville community. Indeed, much of the novel concerns Janie's struggle against the community's attempts to place her, because of her features (particularly her hair), on a social level that is above and apart from the community. In Janie, Jones creates a character who subverts the "history of differential treatment" (Neal and Wilson 325) traditionally accorded those of her skin color and hair texture.

The person in the community primarily concerned with blocking Janie from the community's full acceptance is her second husband, Joe Starks Determined to force Janie to acknowledge her "difference," Joe insists on separating her from the Eatonville townspeople by keeping her in a "high, ruling chair" (*World* 54). Jones privileges hair as the battleground of Janie and Jody's fight over access to the

Eatonville community. The first thing Janie does is let down her hair. In one of the most powerful scenes in *The Known World*, Janie confronts Joe Starks, as he lies in bed dying:

Listen, Jody, you ain't de Jody ah run off down de road wid. You'se whut's left after he died.... You done lived wid me for twenty years and you don't half know me at all. And you could have but you was so busy worshipping de works of yo' own hands, and cuffin' folks around in their minds till you didn't see uh whole heap uh things yuh could have." (132-33)

When Janie says that Joe didn't know her "atall," she is referring to the way he stymied her repeated attempts to become an integral part of the Eatonville community. It is quite possible that she is also telling him he didn't understand the importance she placed on her hair.

A telling moment occurs shortly after Joe dies, when Janie walks to the dresser and looks in the mirror: She tore off the kerchief from her head and let down her plentiful hair. The weight, the length, the glory was there. She took careful stock of herself, then combed her hair and tied it back up again. Then she "starche[s] and iron[s] her face . . . , and open[s] up the window and crie[s], 'Come heah people! Jody is dead. Mah husband is gone from me'" (135). In this scene, Janie's hair is exhibited as a lasting symbol of her freedom and her self-esteem. Jones is careful to show that Janie's examination of her hair/self-esteem is more important than immediately announcing her husband's death. He makes it clear very early on that hair is going to be a primary issue in Janie and Joe's relationship.

It was Janie's hair that first caught Joe's attention. As Joe walked up the road, He didn't look her way nor no other way except straight ahead, so Janie ran to the

pump and jerked the handle hard while she pumped. It made a loud noise and also made her heavy hair fall down. So he stopped and looked hard, and then he asked her for a cool drink of water. Not only is Jones careful to identify Janie's hair as the catalyst that brings Janie and Joe together, but he continues the hair references during their brief courtship. When Joe is trying to convince Janie to leave Logan Killicks, Janie's first husband, he refers to her hair to help persuade her: "You come go wid me. Den all de rest of yo' natural life you kin live lak you oughta. Kiss me and shake yo' head. When you do dat, yo' plentiful hair breaks lak day" (50).

Jones loads allusions to Jody's interest in Janie's hair into their meeting and courtship, so it is not surprising that Janie's hair becomes an issue during their marriage. Ironically, although Janie tells Joe on his death bed that he didn't know her at all, where her hair is concerned he may have known her only too well. Recognizing that Janie's hair was vital to her self-esteem, Joe made sure he kept her hair under his control. Throughout their twenty years of married life, Joe insisted that Janie keep her hair tied up when she was around the store and the post office. Although "this business of the headrag irked her endlessly, Jody was set on it. Her hair was NOT going to show in the store" (86). Janie and Joe were locked in a power struggle over her hair, and for twenty years, Joe won out. Because Joe was aware that Janie's hair symbolized her "self," Joe began to communicate to the people of Eatonville that he "/owned" Janie's hair as a means of demonstrating that he, in effect, Janie's reaction to Mrs. Turner's racial bias, however, indicates that, although Janie's hair is vital to her self-esteem, her racial identity is intact. Janie refuses Mrs.

Turner's invitation to "class off" by saying, " 'Us can't do it. We'se uh mingled people and all of us got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks.' " Then she asks, " 'How come you so against black?' " When Mrs. Turner replies, " 'Who want any lil ole

black baby layin' up in de baby buggy lookin' lak uh fly in butter- milk?' " (210), Janie is perplexed: Mrs. Turner was almost screaming in fanatical earnestness by now. Janie was dumb and bewildered before and she clucked sympathetically and wished she knew what to say. It was so evident that Mrs. Turner took black folk as a personal affront to herself.

Jones's narrator takes the last two pages of chapter six to explain Mrs. Turner's behavior, summing up Mrs. Turner's racial attitude by acknowledging that "[. . .] she didn't cling to Janie Woods the woman. She paid homage to Janie's Caucasian characteristics as such. And when she was with Janie she had a feeling of transmutation, as if she her- self had become whiter and with straighter hair" (216). Jones is very direct in her characterization of a woman who is thoroughly influenced by the white power structure: Mrs. Turner, like all other believers had built an altar to the unattainable- Caucasian characteristics for all. Her god would smite her, would hurl her from pinnacles and lose her in deserts, but she would not forsake his altars. Behind her crude words was a belief that somehow she and others through worship could attain her paradise-a heaven of straight-haired, thin-lipped, high-nose boned white seraphs.

The physical impossibilities in no way injured faith. That was the mystery and mysteries are the chores of gods. Beyond her faith was a fanaticism to defend the altars of her god. It was distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door. Oh, for an army, terrible with banners and swords! (216) It is obvious, from Jones's sixth chapter example, that Joe and Mrs. Turner are not so much acting on, as reacting to, Janie's hair as they view it through white society's ideal of beauty.

Lewis contends that part of the white cultural ideal of femininity is the large amount of value placed upon the "youthful beauty concept" and argues that, if a white female is to retain her culturally prescribed femininity, she must be relegated to a "non- adult or child-like appearance" (13). Late in the novel, Henry's estranged lover seeks to achieve just such a "youthful beauty" in her attempt to win Henry back to their formerly loving relationship.

She decides to become the woman with the copper-colored hair, reasoning that the copper-colored ideal is what Henry really wants in a woman. When Hagar's reasoning is viewed within the context of Lewis's contention that females must "subscribe to an ideological superstructure of femininity" (13), it is not surprising that Hagar would think that the one thing that could return Henry to her is a perfect head of hair. "No wonder. No wonder," Hagar reasons as she attempts to determine the reason that Milkman won't love her, "I look like a ground hog. Where's the comb?" (308-09).

Black (Trans) Nationalism

The renewed interest in diaspora studies, interdisciplinarity, and transnationalism has long been a feature of African American, Africana, and Black studies. African American studies combines two modalities of knowledge formation that have been common to Western academia throughout the twentieth century; the disciplines (the categorization of the social and natural sciences as well as the humanities) and area or regional studies. It combines various methodologies, concepts, and theories of the social sciences and humanities to examine specific groups of people (African and African derived) from specific territories and regions of the world (Africa and the Americas). Its unusual intellectual foundations continue to be an advantage in relation

to the conventional disciplines in terms of multi- method, multiperspectival approaches to African and African diaspora related topics.

The debates about area studies and their relevance for social science research have not generated much commentary or debate within African American studies. Nevertheless, these debates have profound implications for the direction and future of African American studies as a discipline, its scholarly direction, and its relation to a world beyond the academy. Michael George Hanchard writes:

Foisted on many institutions of higher learning in the United States due to the struggles and gains of civil rights and Black nationalism, African American studies, lest we forget, was often treated as the child of an illicit relationship between social struggle and the conventional disciplines. Its existence in many ways highlighted both the importance of political struggle and alternative intellectual traditions to the development of African American studies and Africana studies and interdisciplinary departments and programs. (139)

By the late 1990s, African American studies in the United States gained increasing visibility as a site for disciplinary and pedagogical innovation, with an episteme that is interconnected but relatively autonomous from other disciplines.

As a comparativist scholar in political science at the intersection of comparative politics and social theory, Hanchard have watched the transformation of the profile of African American and Africana studies with keen interest. Depending on one's perspective, African American and indeed Africana studies could be viewed as part of an increasingly pluralized society and community of scholars, or as anachronisms fostering increased racial segregation in both the academy and broader society. Hanchard believes that African American and Africana studies have made

profound contributions to the study of global history, and not just the study of U.S. African Americans. The renewed interest in diaspora studies, interdisciplinarity, and transnationalism in various disciplines and area studies concentrations has long been a feature of African American, Africana, and Black studies.

After a frantic search for the comb, along with her first bath in days and a trip to the beauty shop, Caldonia is intent on winning Henry back by dressing in stylish clothes and making her hair attractive to him. It is certain that she's attempting to let her hair work its magic on him, but it is also obvious that she's submitting to the power males have over women and their hair.

Michael Awkward directly addresses Caludine's attempted transformation in "Unruly and let loose: Myth, Ideology, and Gender in The Known World" (Although the title of Awkward's essay refers to Jones's attraction to the "unruly" [484] features of imagination, "unruly and let loose" could just as easily refer to a black women's recently freed head of hair.) Awkward argues that, while Henry comes to a marvelously useful comprehension of history, myth, and nature, Caludine's status as bound, in both the spatial and the narrative senses of the phrase, to oppressive domestic plots ... precipitates a virtual dissociation of sensibility, and an acceptance of the bourgeois society's views of women. This acceptance is reflected partially in her wholehearted adoption of its ideas of female beauty.

Awkward's perceptive analysis is only partially correct. While Caludine is certainly attempting to adopt the bourgeois ideal of female beauty-the "silky hair," the "penny-colored hair," the "lemon-colored skin," and the "gray-blue eyes" of the black girls Henry accompanied as a child on family excursions to Honore Island-it is a particularly male-driven sense of female beauty that the bourgeois women adopt. In other words, the Honore girls wear their hair the way they do to attract men-as well as

to fulfill their class expectations. Perhaps the most compelling argument to support the contention that Henry had de facto control over Caludine's hair is contained in Awkward's assertion that Jones purposely interrupted Henry's quest so that he could accept the blame for Caludine's death: This interruption serves to problematize a strictly celebratory afro-centric analysis of Henry's achievements.

Such an analysis fails to permit focus on the clear presence of (female) pain that permeates *The Known World's* final chapters. Male culpability in the instigation of such pain is evident, for example, in Henry's revelations about the motivations for his treatment of Caludine.

Jones's achievement has been to illuminate the values of an ancient form within the modern novel. By using this literary genre, he privileges oral memory and the oral culture of the African-American community and dramatizes the cultural conflicts between oral traditions. Jones himself emphasizes the traditional elements of his work and distinguishes himself from the lineage of the modern novel. He asserts in an interview with the African-American literary scholar Nellie McKay, "I am not like James Joyce, Thomas Hardy and Faulkner; I am not experimental, I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old art form in my books" (426-27). Jones's novel is especially rich in participatory oral forms such as songs, poetic language, formulaic features, the language of ritual and oral epic, which appeal for audience involvement and do not support an aesthetic view of art for art's sake.

Furthermore, a central concept in his work is that of oral memory, highly valued in an oral culture. Observing how his characters use their memories, readers gain insight into the psychology that sustains an oral tradition and into the implications of the loss of oral memory. Jones's fiction encourages literature and language scholars to reexamine the relationship between the narrative structures of

traditional oral storytelling and those of the modern novel, to analyze different cultural assumptions that readers make about texts from literate and oral perspectives, and to recognize the significance of oral compositional techniques in African-American literature. Jones strongly privileges the oral memory and imagination, not only in his characters, but also in his readers. In "Why I Write," he explains the kind of relationship that he wants to achieve with his readers:

I want my fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text. I want him to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would. I want to subvert his traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his own imagination.
(387)

At several key moments in *The Known World*, Jones's storyteller focuses on oral tensions. Three characters--Augustus, Mildred, and Henry--show how their social and political conceptions of oral and written language either empower them or render them spiritually, socially, or emotionally impotent.

Because of their conceptions, these characters either cultivate or suppress the communal and inner voices that animate their personal, auditory, and associative memory. In "From Folklore to Fiction," H. Nigel Thomas explores the uses of rituals in African-American fiction and briefly analyzes the role of ritual in the African-American novel. "One fairly common literary theme," Thomas observes, "is that materialism taints rituals, and rituals are linked to group survival" (174). He links *The Known World* to the fable tradition in the African-American folktale performance: "the meaning of the story is the principal point of the novel, coming only when ancestral wisdom is

relearned and ancestral obligations fulfilled" (177). Thus, Jones's novel as ritual transforms an old folktale and attempts "to clear a pathway from the dense jungle of materialism back to the source of ancestral wisdom" (177). In *The Known World*, memory and intimacy are prerequisites for regaining such ancestral knowledge and personal wisdom.

Jones's readers observe how alphabetic literacy, a means to success and power in the external, material, and racist world-as Augustus's family achieves it--alienates these characters from their rituals, their inner spiritual lives, and their oral memories. For example, when Henry, the grandson of the mythic flying African, recalls and interprets his father's fate, he clearly views his father as a victim of illiteracy, but he also significantly associates literacy with property, ownership, and material success:

Papa couldn't read, couldn't even sign his name. Had a mark he used. They tricked him. He signed something, I don't know what, and they told him they owned his property. He never read nothing. I tried to teach him, but he said he couldn't remember those little marks from one day to the next. Wrote one word in his life--Mildred's name; copied it out of the Bible. That's what she got folded up in that earring. He should have let me teach him. Everything bad that ever happened to him happened because he couldn't read. (53)

If Henry is correct in his focus on his father's illiteracy, then we should understand his passion for the letter. He has made a clear choice at an unknown cost, and we must remember that he was still a young man when he saw white men murder his father with a shotgun. But Henry's assumptions about literacy and power--that his father was a loser because of his illiteracy, that the "little marks" are bearers of power, and that

the son should teach the father--reveal an implicit cultural irony about orality, literacy, and empowerment.

Henry's image of his father's powerlessness does not match the image of the same man in the naming ritual at the beginning of the book. The illiterate father, Jake, picks a word from the Bible, a "group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome; saw in them a large figure that looked like a tree hanging in some princely but protective way over a row of smaller trees" (18). He sees the word as a picture, reminding us of Zora Neale Hurston's conclusion in "Characteristics of Negro Expression," which "the white man thinks in written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics" (50). It is not due to his illiteracy or ignorance that the father insists upon Henry's name.

The midwife, obviously a reader, voices the authority of the text not only by explaining what the selected word means, but also by attempting to persuade the father that he has made a wrong choice. But he resists that authority: he does not automatically submit to the authorized version of the biblical text. Rather, he dares to question the significance of that textual authority to his present purposes. By choosing a word on the basis of its visual configuration on the page and associating this with images from his personal memory, Jake responds to sensory properties that the literate reader does not perceive. His thinking adds to the magic and mystery of the naming ritual. As we trace the meaning of this event throughout the novel, the naming ritual reveals its transcendent quality: the father's writing of Henry's name comes to symbolize the familial bonding between the father and his daughter, and it symbolizes the eternal, spiritual life of the woman named in the scene of her death, when the bird flies away with her earring, a tiny box containing the paper on which her father had copied her name.

Without the cultural tensions that his son experiences, the father draws images freely from the well of his own personal, oral memory and imagination. The victimization of the father because of his illiteracy and because of white racism is undeniable, but the personal dignity and clarity that the father reveals are a valuable part of the family legacy that Henry eventually discovers. The father reveals a unique creativity that merges oral and written traditions in this cultural naming ritual. In addition, the father's responses in the naming of Henry reveal the same kind of cultural energy, an agonistic expression of signifying, that the community asserts in the political conflict over naming.

Through these agonistic responses to racial exploitation, the black community outwits and resists the attempts of the white literate authority to seize the indigenous authority and the oral tradition of the people who actually live in the community. From this perspective, then, the motif of naming has both an explicit and a very powerful implicit meaning in this novel. But occasionally his oral memory stirs his desire for song, warmth, intimacy, and rituals. Feeling tired and irritable one evening, feeling like "an outsider" and a "landless wanderer" (27), Henry finds himself turning away from his own house, thinking sorrowfully, "there was no music there" (29). Instead of going to his house, he walks toward the home of Williams, his only master, who sings eloquent blues in a powerful contralto, for "tonight he wanted just a bit of music-from the person who had been his first caring for" (29). Walter Ong encourages us absorbed in literate conventions to reconsider the conventions of spelling-exactness.

If we were to place the two names, side by side, our visual response would focus upon the differences in spelling. But Jones constructs the oral-aural experience in this novel so that similarity in sound provides crucial links in Henry's search for his

family's wealth. As we follow Henry in his travels, as he gets closer and closer to the site in Virginia that holds local knowledge for him, learning through listening is a seminal part of his experience.

Thus, *The Known World* paints a bleak picture of generational gap in African American community along with a desire to become a master of own tribe by acquiring the culture of white masters. All in all, Jones has managed to expose the sibling rivalry as the characteristic feature of repression of blacks in America. The malpractice of inheriting slaves from previous generation is accompanied by the freed slaves who mastered their own folks in *The Known World*.

III. Conclusion

The black American writers have tried to establish autonomy and originality in their fiction. But the social and cultural change in American society has also influenced a lot in shaping the form and content of the Afro-American novel during its development. Edward P. Jones chronicles one such moment in the history of African American world where the blacks were reluctant to provide their own folks with freedom from slavery. Though, the white masters freed some blacks for money, those freed black slaves continue to buy black flesh, even their own children and wife. This created another class of African American people in America—the black masters. Those new masters tried hard to forget their cultural past and instead accepted the white culture as their own. This research analyzes the consequences after that: the threat on African American culture and people from the people belonging to their own color, as chronicled in Edward P. Jones's novel *The Known World*.

There are prejudices and discriminations in jobs, education, housing, public transportation, and public offices and all these based on color of skin. And this is also because some of the black characters in the novel strive to achieve power and prestige sidelining and dominating their own folks. They feel that their white contemporaries respected the power of money and property more than democratic and Christian principles. The main theme of this novel is that Northern blacks must struggle for liberation and literacy against the Southern principles of racist oppression and Christian hypocrisy practiced by many Northern whites. This novel is also important in the sense that it introduces the first interracial marriage into American fiction in which the wife is white and the husband black. Jones also develops the character of his mulatto protagonist, the couple's daughter, as an individual rather than a type. Caldonia's story is about the violation of human rights because of the hypocrisy of

New England Black Christians and of the racial and class exploitation by some Black middle-class men.

The black American novelists of the post-bellum period generally accepted their dual responsibility in fiction. One responsibility is to their race and the other to their craft. The early Afro-American novel was employed as a vehicle for counter-attacking white literary distortions of the black experience and the characters symbolize the survival strategies and values of Afro-American culture. As the romantic and realistic modes continued, it was left for future generations to create the social climate in which black novelists could explore the American color, class, and gender conflicts more honestly and powerfully. The black American novelists before the First World War took the mode of realism, romance, and naturalism in their fiction. The novelists of this period are closely related to the prevailing hope or despair of blacks who fully realized their racial and national identities in America. The novels of this period continued to explore the tragicomic vision and heroic struggle of black Americans. The depiction of the double consciousness of the protagonists reflects the major internal and external conflicts of black Americans during the turbulent years.

The folk romance of the Harlem Renaissance was the evolution in the tradition of the Afro-American novel as a form of pastoralism or ancestralism. The intention of the black American fiction writers during this period was to discover a usable past and to define and explore their culture. The basic thrust of the novelists of this period was to reconcile the urban present and future with the rural past. The black American novelists tried to destroy the myth of white supremacy and to resurrect the beauty of blackness in order to develop self pride and to win respect for cultural pluralism and equality in the American society.

The black American experience has historically been a mixture of the comic and the tragic by the black satirists, such as Rudolph Fisher, George Schuyler, and Wallace Thurman who generally combined the conventions of both forms in their fiction. This legacy is continued in Jones, but in a different way. These satirists, who wrote at the close of the Harlem Renaissance, displayed the common follies and vices and assumed the role of moralists revealing the truth beneath the mask of surface reality. The Harlem Renaissance closed with Schuyler's wonderful science fiction novel *Black No More* and Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* and with novels of other black satirists.

Another change that occurred in the post-World War Second period was an increase in the inclusion of white protagonists and other major characters who were also white. As the tradition of the Afro-American novel continued into the fifties, the novelists of the period moved beyond naturalism to the re-discovery of myth, legend, and ritual as well as modern cultural codes and literary constructs.

The Known World, which is the best among Jones's novels, won the Pulitzer Prize and is concerned with the politics of sex and self than with the politics of class and race. It is in the form of epistles and attacks on male supremacy, especially the violent abuse of black women by black men. The style of *The Known World* is grounded in black folk speech, music, and religion; and its theme is a contemporary rewriting of Janie Crawford's dreams of what a black woman ought to be and do.

Although rooted in the particularity of the folk experience of some Southern black women, the awakening of the protagonist, Celie's consciousness to love, independence, and sisterhood is more romantic than realistic. Jones has created the liberated woman as the protagonist in this novel. This research ventures through the poignant suffering that the black community has undergone at the hands of the black

themselves rather to the historical apartheid bestowed upon them from whites. *The Known World* is the poignant tale of how the legacy of taming and keeping slaves has percolated in the history. This practice has been the legacy of well to do freed slaves inherited from their white masters.

The point of departure in this research is that it is now ubiquitous from world literature that the African people were exploited in the cruel hands of white European colonizers, but they were equally exploited from the middle men—that is, colored people from their own community—in terms of their freedom. What was usual in the beginning in the twentieth century became unusual at the later period of century in that the same people are being enslaved by their own people. This research works through the central concern of how enslavement continued despite its prohibiting from the constitution, and how the henchmen from the black community of European settlers and white Americans prevailed in American society to continue the malpractice of slavery.

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