

I. Old Negro Vs New Negro

Old Negro: More of Myth than a Man

Negro signifies a member of a race of people with dark skin who originally came from Africa. Specially the word "Negro" was adopted from Spanish and Portuguese and first recorded from the mid sixteenth century. It remained the standard term throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Some prominent black American campaigners such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Alain Locke used this term for racial pried in the early twentieth century. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines the Negro as:

A member of the black race of mankind as opposed by classification according to physical features (as skin color, hair form, or body or skeletal characteristics) but without regard to language or culture to members of the Caucasian, Mongoloid, or other races of mankind; esp. a member of a people belonging to the African branch of the black race and marked typically by dark pigmentation and woolly hair and everted lips and broad flat noses and prognathism. (1514)

The concept of Negro permeates African as well as American literature from the time of Phillis Wheatley, a black slave poet in late eighteenth century. Generally, the Negro is seen to be categorized into two-the Old and the New. The Old Negro is the Negro defined by white. This sort of concept of Negro had been a practice for restricting the black people by the whites by not giving them the opportunities and facilities in the main stream of the country in America. The Old Negro, who faced injury, death, or the violent destruction, was the victim of racial discrimination. Alain Locke mentions that the Old Negro was not treated as a human being. He States:

The Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. He has been stock figure perpetuated as a historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism partly in deliberate reactionism. (961)

Mythically the black color of Africans is related to the Biblical tale of Cain. Some religious Christian followers interpreted the "mark" of Cain as blackness. J. Lee Greene believes that the Old Negro was identified with the slave and black mark. He writes:

The main stream society sees him as the embodiment of the curse and mark of Cain much as it sees its own fictional heroes as the New World Adam. In Genesis, God cursed Cain for killing his brother Abel by decreeing that henceforth Cain could be a vagabond and a wanderer. But to protect Cain from those who would do him harm as a result of the curse, God placed a mark on Cain so that all those who came into contact should not slay him. (287)

During eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the term "Old Negro" had close affinity with the slavery which was often associated with exogamous groups, captives or members of other groups outside the community. Thus, the Old Negro was considered as an outsider in America. He was oppressed by the whites in the society. The whites exploited the Old Negro, whether literary character or a real man, by creating certain hierarchy. Writers like bell hooks claim that the history of the Old Negro can be traced back to slavery. She says, "As far back as slavery, white people established a social hierarchy based on race that ranked white men first, white women second though sometimes equal to black men who ranked third" (56).

This sort of racial stereotype, which was a social construct, weakened the psychology of the Negro. He was the character of condemnation and social burden. He was characterized as worried, harassed or patronized social bogey. So, the Old Negro was supposed to be more mythical fearsome character than a real human being.

The white used to treat Negro as an animal. The excessive exploitation of white upon the Negro was gradually opposed by the black writers who dared to depict the real pictures of the black characters. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury say that for black writers, "it had more complex and longer lasting impact, as its motifs and themes, versions of black speech and black character, above all its image of pious black humility, shaped future, fiction, popular culture, even the movies" (184). Some writers contributed through "slave narratives." Douglass wrote his own account of escape from slavery in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) and William Wells Brown dealt with sexual exploitation, miscegenation and the humiliations of the slave auction in his novel *Clotel, or, The President's Daughter* (1853). But whether it was Douglass or *Clotel*, all were the Old Negro representatives who suffered a lot because they were alienated and oppressed by the whites.

New Negro: A Self Conscious and Self-Respected Man

The New Negro is an individual African-American with a respectable position in American literature. The New Negro Movement that took place in the United States during the 1920s renewed self-respect, self-conscious and self-dependence to the life of Negro community. Alain Locke takes the New Negro as an altered character with certain responsibilities in the country. He says, "The New Negro is keenly responsive as an augury of a new democracy in American culture. He is contributing his share to the new social understanding" (965).

The New Negro is just like other people; he has the same hates and loves and fears, the same tragedies and triumphs and deaths, as people of any race or religion or nationality. He has equal share of opportunities with whites in the country. He is an unalienable part of the society. In the absence of him, the American history becomes incomplete. He carries the message of racial integration and teaches the whole world to carry out the sense of fraternity and brotherhood. "Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" is the motto of the New Negro, W. E. B. Du Bois remarks that the New Negro keeps on:

Longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the Older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize American, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (365)

While the New Negro was celebrating his self discovery, there was a strong desire for black literature. The impact of this serious literature is perhaps more than the rhetoric of the New Negro Movement. Many African American writers like Claude Mckey, Jean Toomer, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Gwindolyn Brooks articulated the New Negro spirit through their writings. J. Lee Greene finds the protagonists of *Cane* and *Invisible Man* as the New Negros. He comments, "At the end of *Cane* and *Invisible Man* there is some indication that the protagonists will be able to accept their black heritage, will be able to reconcile

conflicting forces of their being and will be able to achieve a possible identity" (287). The New Negro is in search of harmony and spiritual balance which is necessary to develop the country and make the people happy. Paul Lauter says that the New Negro is "in search of a philosophy that would permit him a sense of internal unity" (1997).

Thus, the New Negro is completely different from Old Negro. The New Negro hopes of a happy home to rest his soul. He expects to free himself and other blacks from racial discrimination and wishes of the world where both blacks and whites live together and sing the songs of Negro spiritual as Martin Luther king, Jr. expects in his essay "I Have a Dream":

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and ever hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the Old Negro spiritual, "free at last! Free at last! God almighty, we are free at last!" (77)

In this way, the New Negro celebrates the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual coming of age. He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a selfish beneficiary nature and becomes active participant in the development of American civilization.

Jean Toomer: A New Negro Writer

Jean Toomer (1894-1967), born in his grandfather's house in Washington, D.C. to Nathan and Nina Pinchback Toomer, was a child of marriage that had dissolved even before his birth when his father abandoned his mother to return to his Georgia home. His maternal grandfather, P.B.S. Pinchback, who was a black, had built a political career in Reconstruction Louisiana. Thus, with small amount of black

blood in his family background, Toomer writes about black experiences absorbing the atmosphere of rural Georgia, especially to end the racial disquiet, which is roaming around the country, through the themes of racial integration in his writings. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay write: “Jean Toomer was conspicuously a seeker, a man who viewed life as a search for the attainment of spiritual balance; Toomer apparently was interested in issues of race only insofar as they contribute to his achievement of inner peace” (1087).

As a young man, Jean Toomer took a long time choosing a profession. He attended six separate institutions of higher education, but never graduated. However, even as a child, he enjoyed literature and made up his mind to pursue a literary career in 1919. Literary contacts such as Waldo Frank, Hart Crane impressed him to be a reputed writer. Similarly, Toomer's encounter with rural African-American folk culture also inspired him to be a famous African-American writer. His book *Cane* (1923) was called the herald of a New Renaissance Movement in African-American literature, and Toomer the most promising of the upcoming new writers. Paul Lauter comments "*Cane* unifies the northern and southern African-American experiences through its circular movement" (1997). This novel has helped to put the racial dispute into rest.

In search of internal unity and peace, from 1924 to 1932, Toomer turned away from literature and became a follower of mystic George Gurdjieff, an American spiritualist who incorporated mysticism, Freudian psychoanalysis, yoga and element of dance into a system known as Unitism. Toomer formally broke with Gurdjieff and converted to Quakerism in 1940. In 1936, he wrote a long poem entitled *Blue Meridian* which is about the fusion of black-white, red-skinned into a new entity, the blue man. Regarding *Blue Meridian*, Darwin T. Turner says that “*Blue Meridian*,

Toomer's longest poem, presents his social philosophy that the intermingling of various races on his continent has produced a new trace tribute to individual races and to the new world which their fusion will create” (210).

Critical Review of Literature

Right from its first publication from 1923, Jean Toomer's *Cane* has been drawing the attention of various critics. They viewed this novel from different perspectives. Peter B. High in *An Outline of American Literature* reflects the experience of black people in American society and beauty of them:

Cane (1923) by Jean Toomer, is the most famous work of the movement. *Cane* combines poetry with short stories. The first part is about black women in the South. Toomer sees a natural beauty in them. He describes girls doing hair in the morning: As they kneel there, heavy-eyed and dusky . . . they are two princesses in Africa going through the early morning ablutions of their Pagan prayers.

(331)

Richard Ruland and Molcolm Bradbury in *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* believe that *Cane* is the initiation of black writing of the movement: “Jean Toomer's *Cane* signaled the beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance of black writing” (276) and “the radical voice sounded clearly, too, in the prose as well as the poetry of Jean Toomer's *Cane*” (332).

Susan Blake specializes in American, African American, postcolonial, and travel narrative literature. As Susan Blake argues in his *The Spectatorial Artist and the Structure of Cane*, “The men who try to buy Karintha with money and define her as a prostitute get only half of what should be an indivisible unity of sexuality and soul” (197-198).

W.E.B. Du Bois is one of the most prominent intellectual leader and political activist on behalf of African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Du Bois, who spent far more time in Georgia than Toomer, wrote congenitally in *The Younger Literary Movement*: "Toomer does not impress me as one who knows his Georgia but he does know human beings . . . he paints things that are true, not with Dutch exactness, but rather with an impressionist's sweep of color" (171).

Toomer's friend Waldo Frank well understood Toomer's spiritual motivation, stating in his Foreword to *Cane* "the Southland is not a problem to be solved; it is a field of loveliness to be sung: the Georgia Negro is not a downtrodden soul to be uplifted; he is material for a gorgeous painting" (139).

Reborn Brown comments *Cane* as a portal of Southern beauty, pain and black heritage:

Toomer confronts the black man with the pain and the beauty of his Southern heritage. That pain and power to transform into beauty in what the younger generation means by soul. It is Jean Toomer's genius to discover and celebrate the qualities of soul, and thereby inaugurate the Negro Renaissance. (1436)

J. Lee Greene has clearly expressed the essence of the part in the book *The American South: Portrait of Culture* as:

Toomer's "Song of Son," the poem in *Cane* which best capsulizes the major theme in this largely autobiographical book, is a song of the "song-lit race of slaves," black American in general; the poem embodies the thematic approach the author takes to his material in order to produce a work which in essence is a spiritual and historical biography of black Americans. (284)

James D. Hart opines *Cane* as "a miscellany of stories, verse and a drama concerned with the emotional life of black people" (134). Unlike Greene and Hart, John Oliver Killens illustrates *Cane* as "a great work of experimental modernist literature to emerge during the Harlem Renaissance" (40).

Nathan Irving Huggins studied the history of African-Americans as an integral part of the history of the United States. His research interests included the history of slavery, the experience of slavery and its impact on American society and culture. He states *Cane* as:

The essential of Negro identity rather than the circumstances of Negro life. He worked in symbols that served on the metaphors to allow a reader, whether white or black, to enter into the crux of those tensions that tugged at the Negro self. *Cane* stands apart because it was a self-conscious artistic achievement; the same cannot be said about any of the other novels associated with the Harlem Renaissance. (238)

In the *New Republic*, Robert Littell wrote: "*Cane* does not remotely resemble any of the familiar, superficial views of the South on which we have been brought up. On the contrary, Mr. Toomer's view is unfamiliar and bafflingly subterranean, the vision of a poet far more than the account of things seen by a novelist" (169).

William Dow shows the recognition of multiple authentic voices of African Americans, as expressed in "*Always Your Heart*": *The "Great Design" of Toomer's Cane*: "*Cane* is a productive of rewriting of race allowing for the recognition of multiple authentic African American voices, identifications complicated by class, gender and geography, and greatly enriched by the significant modulations in narrative address that Toomer undertakes" (60).

Many critics have tried their best to unfold the various aspects of the text. Some of the critics have shown the experience of black people in life and beauty; a great work of experimental modernist literature and recognition of multiple authentic voices of African Americans. But the prime concern of this research is different from the earlier research. It tries to prove the text as a representative one in the line of Harlem Renaissance. It analyses the African American cultural forms to talk about how the text as the representative of the ethos of Harlem Renaissance cultural movement.

II. Harlem Renaissance and African American Culture

Culture is the values, beliefs, behaviors, and material objects that together form a people's way of life. Culture is the sum total of human creations-intellectual, technical, artistic, physical, and moral. Culture refers to the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of a society; it is a way of life, modes of thinking, acting and feeling, Our culture provides our social heritage and tells us which behaviors are appropriate and which are not. Culture interprets our surroundings for us and gives them meaning and allows us to express ourselves. Ferdous Azim views "The cultural area is ideological not only in the sense that it reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, but acquires greater significance as the carrier of social values and system" (234).

African American culture which emerged from slavery is not solely based on African tradition. African American culture was evolved through creolization. African American culture succeeds to retain its tradition and change its past culture by the

means of creolization in which more than two people interact, with them taking the characteristics of other culture. Elements of African tradition are interacted with religion and language of the Euro-American culture where they maintained and built up their culture through music, dance, art, literature, language, hairstyle, cuisine and so on. Mixing up of the elements of African tradition with the Euro-American culture is known as African American culture. For black people in the United States, this cultural creolization has involved two complex and dynamic aspects.

First, among African people themselves, a creolization process developed as Africans were captured from different places and from different cultural backgrounds and forced to live together under the system of slave trade and slavery. It was a process of mutual cultural exchange where synthesis took place. Secondly, almost simultaneously this dynamic mixture of African culture was interacting and exchanging with Euro-American cultures, which were varied because of the different national identities and cultural patterns of the oppressive slave traders and plantations owners.

However, African Americans have hardly managed to preserve the tradition of their own since they are squeezed in between white cultural supremacy and political domination. White American settlers- who migrated from Europe with their set of religion and culture- considered themselves superior and that others should follow them to be civilized. It was only after cultural studies worked in American Academics that African American history and culture was considered to be addressed.

Such accomplishments as the tremendous outpouring of creative enterprises—including, for example, music, dance, art, literature, language, hairstyle, cuisine and political debate-associated with Harlem during the 1920s and known as the Harlem Renaissance, were not given the attention they deserved. Similarly, Anglo-American

literary heritage had borrowed their own version of literature and criticism which functioned to put African American literature at the back.

Music

African American music is rooted in the typically polyrhythmic music of the [ethnic groups](#) of Africa, specifically those in the [Western](#), [Sahelean](#), and [Sub-Saharan](#) regions. African oral traditions, nurtured in slavery, encouraged the use of music to pass on history, teach lessons, ease suffering, and relay messages.

The African history of African American music is evident in some common elements: [call and response](#), [syncopation](#), percussion, [improvisation](#), [swung notes](#), [blue notes](#), the use of [falsetto](#), [melisma](#), and complex multi-part harmony. "During slavery, Africans in America blended traditional European [hymns](#) with African elements to create [spirituals](#)" (Stewart 5).

Many African Americans sing "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" in addition to the American [national anthem](#), "[The Star-Spangled Banner](#)", or in lieu of it. Written by [James Weldon Johnson](#) and John Rosamond Johnson in 1900 to be performed for the birthday of [Abraham Lincoln](#), the song was, and continues to be, a popular way for African Americans to recall past struggles and express ethnic solidarity, faith, and hope for the future. The song was adopted as the "Negro National Anthem" by the NAACP in 1919. African American children are taught the song at school, church or by their families. "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" traditionally is sung immediately following, or instead of, "The Star-Spangled Banner" at events hosted by African American churches, schools, and other organizations.

In the 1800s, as the result of the [blackface minstrel show](#), African American music entered mainstream American society. By the early twentieth century, several musical forms with origins in the African American community had transformed

American popular music. Aided by the technological innovations of radio and phonograph records, jazz, ragtime, [blues](#), and [swing](#) also became popular overseas, and the 1920s became known as the [Jazz Age](#). Jazz is characterized by improvisation and a rhythmic approach called swing. Jazz is also known for the importance of each musician playing a unique sound that can be identified while many musicians are playing at once. New Orleans is where jazz music first emerged. It evolved from show bands, an earlier form of music. Jazz musicians have played leading roles in challenging racial discrimination. The words, or lyrics, of blues songs talk about many different subjects. Most blues songs are about love and sadness. The blues is a music genre that reflects the history and culture of African Americans. Most blues musicians taught themselves how to play their instruments. The blues influenced many later music genres including rhythm & blues and rock 'n' roll. The early twentieth century also saw the creation of the first African American Broadway shows, [films](#) such as [King Vidor's *Hallelujah!*](#), and operas such as [George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*](#). [Rock and roll](#), doo wop and [soul](#) developed in the mid twentieth century. These genres became very popular in white audiences and were influences for other genres such as [surf](#).

Dance

African American dance, like other aspects of African American culture, finds its earliest roots in the dances of the hundreds of African ethnic groups that made up African slaves in America as well as influences from European sources in the United States. Dance in the African tradition, and thus in the tradition of slaves, was a part of both every day life and special occasions. Many of these traditions such as [get down](#), [ring shouts](#), and other elements of African body language survive as elements of modern dance. “Black dancing continued strong preferences of other African

characteristics such as angularity and asymmetry of body positions, multiple body rhythms or polyrhythms, and a low center of gravity” (Ballroom and Shymmy Sham 23).

In the 1800s, African American dance began to appear in [minstrel shows](#). These shows often presented African Americans as caricatures for ridicule to large audiences. The first African American dance to become popular with [white](#) dancers was the [cakewalk](#) in 1891. Later dances to follow in this tradition include the [Charleston](#), the [Lindy Hop](#), the [Jitterbug](#) and the swing. During the Harlem Renaissance, African American Broadway shows such as [Shuffle Along](#) helped to establish and legitimize African American dancers. African American dance forms such as [tap](#), a combination of African and European influences, gained widespread popularity thanks to dancers such as [Bill Robinson](#) and were used by leading white choreographers who often hired African American dancers.

Contemporary African American dance is descended from these earlier forms and also draws influence from African and Caribbean dance forms. Groups such as the [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#) have continued to contribute to the growth of this form. Modern popular dance in America is also greatly influenced by African American dance. American popular dance has also drawn many influences from African American dance most notably in the hip hop genre.

Art

From its early origins in slave communities, through the end of the twentieth century, African American art has made a vital contribution to the art of the United States. During the period between the 1600s and the early 1800s, art took the form of small drums, quilts, wrought-iron figures, and ceramic vessels in the southern United States. These artifacts have similarities with comparable crafts in West and Central

Africa. In contrast, African American artisans like the New England–based engraver [Scipio Moorhead](#) and the Baltimore portrait painter [Joshua Johnson](#) created art that was conceived in a thoroughly western European fashion.

During the 1800s, [Harriet Powers](#) made quilts in rural [Georgia, United States](#) that are now considered among the finest examples of nineteenth-century Southern quilting. Later in the 20th century, [the women of Gee's Bend](#) developed a distinctive, bold, and sophisticated quilting style based on traditional African American quilts with a geometric simplicity that developed separately but was like that of Amish quilts and [modern art](#).

After the [American Civil War](#), museums and galleries began more frequently to display the work of African American artists. Cultural expression in mainstream venues was still limited by the dominant European aesthetic and by racial prejudice. W. E. B. Du Bois pronounced in "Criteria of Negro Art," that "African-American artists had a duty to create propaganda for the race, to demonstrate the Truth and Beauty of African-Americans' lives" (296). To increase the visibility of their work, many African American artists traveled to Europe where they had greater freedom. It was not until the [Harlem Renaissance](#) that more European Americans began to pay attention to [African American art](#) in America.

During the 1920s, artists such as Raymond Barthé, [Aaron Douglas](#), [Augusta Savage](#), and photographer [James Van Der Zee](#) became well-known for their work. During the [Great Depression](#), new opportunities arose for these and other African American artists under the [WPA](#). In later years, other programs and institutions, such as the New York City-based [Harmon Foundation](#), helped to foster African American artistic talent. [Augusta Savage](#), [Elizabeth Catlett](#), [Lois Mailou Jones](#), [Romare](#)

[Bearden](#), [Jacob Lawrence](#), and others exhibited in museums and juried art shows, and built reputations and followings for themselves.

Literature

African American literature has its roots in the oral traditions of African slaves in America. The slaves used stories and [fables](#) in much the same way as they used music. These stories influenced the earliest African American writers and poets in the 18th century such as [Phillis Wheatley](#) and [Olaudah Equiano](#). These authors reached early high points by telling slave narratives.

During the early twentieth century [Harlem Renaissance](#), numerous authors and poets, such as [Langston Hughes](#), [W. E. B. Du Bois](#), and [Booker T. Washington](#), grappled with how to respond to discrimination in America. Authors during the Civil Rights era, such as [Richard Wright](#), [James Baldwin](#), and [Gwendolyn Brooks](#) wrote about issues of [racial segregation](#), oppression, and other aspects of African American life. “This tradition continues today with authors who have been accepted as an integral part of [American literature](#), with works such as [Roots: The Saga of an American Family](#) by [Alex Haley](#), [The Color Purple](#) by [Alice Walker](#), and [Beloved](#) by Nobel Prize-winning [Toni Morrison](#), and series by Octavia Butler and [Walter Mosley](#) that have achieved both best-selling and/or award-winning status” (Ward 146).

Language

Generations of hardships imposed on the African American community created distinctive language patterns. Language is also a mark of identity. Slave owners often intentionally mixed people who spoke different African languages to discourage communication in any language other than English. This, combined with prohibitions against education, led to the development of [pidgins](#), simplified mixtures of two or more languages that speakers of different languages could use to

communicate. Examples of pidgins that became fully developed languages include [Creole](#), common to [Louisiana](#), and [Gullah](#), common to the [Sea Islands](#) off the coast of [South Carolina](#) and [Georgia](#).

[African American Vernacular English](#) (AAVE) is a [variety](#) ([dialect](#), [ethnolect](#), and [sociolect](#)) of the [American English language](#) closely associated with the speech of, but not exclusive to, African Americans. While AAVE is academically considered a legitimate dialect because of its logical structure, some of both whites and African Americans consider it [slang](#) or the result of a poor command of Standard American English. AAVE could also be used interchangeably with simply speaking with a southern accent as southern dialect was greatly influenced by Africans. Many African Americans who were born outside the American South still speak with hints of AAVE or southern dialect. Inner city African American children who are isolated by speaking only AAVE sometimes have more difficulty with standardized testing and, after school, moving to the mainstream world for work. “It is common for many speakers of AAVE to [code switch](#) between AAVE and Standard American English depending on the setting” (Coulmas 177).

Hairstyle

Hair styling in African American culture is greatly varied. African American hair is typically composed of tightly coiled curls. “The predominant styles for women involve the straightening of the hair through the application of heat or chemical processes” (Byrd and Tharps 162). These treatments form the base for the most commonly socially acceptable hairstyles in the United States. Alternatively, the predominant and most socially acceptable practice for men is to leave one's hair natural. Often, as men age and begin to lose their hair, the hair is either closely cropped, or the head is shaved completely free of hair. Maintaining facial hair is more

prevalent among African American men than in other male populations in the U.S. In fact, the [soul patch](#) is so named because African American men, particularly jazz musicians, popularized the style. The preference for facial hair among African American men is due partly to personal taste, but because they are more prone than other ethnic groups to develop a condition known as [pseudofolliculitis barbae](#), commonly referred to as *razor bumps*, many prefer not to shave.

Life Events

For most African Americans, the observance of life events follows the pattern of mainstream American culture. While African Americans and whites often lived to themselves for much of American history, both groups generally had the same perspective on American culture. There are some traditions which are unique to African Americans. Some African Americans have created new rites of passage that are linked to African traditions. Pre-teen and teenage boys and girls take classes to prepare them for adulthood. They are typically taught spirituality, responsibility, and leadership. “Most of these programs are modeled after traditional African ceremonies, with the focus largely on embracing African ideologies rather than specific rituals” (Grimes 145-146).

To this day, some African American couples choose to "[jump the broom](#)" as a part of their wedding ceremony. Although the practice, which can be traced back to [Ghana](#), fell out of favor in the African American community after the end of slavery, it has experienced a slight resurgence in recent years as some couples seek to reaffirm their African heritage.

[Funeral](#) traditions tend to vary based on a number of factors, including religion and location, but there are a number of commonalities. Probably the most important part of death and dying in the African American culture is the gathering of family and

friends. Either in the last days before death or shortly after death, typically any friends and family members that can be reached are notified. This gathering helps to provide spiritual and emotional support, as well as assistance in making decisions and accomplishing everyday tasks.

The spirituality of death is very important in African American culture. A member of the clergy or members of the religious community, or both, are typically present with the family through the entire process. Death is often viewed as transitory rather than final. Many services are called home goings, instead of funerals, based on the belief that the person is going home to the afterlife. The entire end of life process is generally treated as a celebration of life rather than a mourning of loss. This is most notably demonstrated in the New Orleans Jazz Funeral tradition where upbeat music, dancing, and food encourage those gathered to be happy and celebrate the home going of a beloved friend.

Cuisine

The cultivation and use of many agricultural products in the United States, such as [yams](#), [peanuts](#), [rice](#), [okra](#), [sorghum](#), [grits](#), [watermelon](#), [indigo dyes](#), and [cotton](#), can be traced to African influences. African American foods reflect creative responses to racial and economic oppression and poverty. “Under slavery, African Americans were not allowed to eat better cuts of meat, and after emancipation many often were too poor to afford them” (Holloway 48). [Soul food](#), a hearty cuisine commonly associated with African Americans in the South (but also common to African Americans nationwide), makes creative use of inexpensive products procured through farming and subsistence hunting and fishing. Pig intestines are boiled and sometimes battered and fried to make [chitterlings](#), also known as "chitlins." [Ham hocks](#) and neck bones provide seasoning to soups, [beans](#) and boiled greens (turnip

greens, [collard greens](#), and mustard greens). Other common foods, such as [fried chicken](#) and [fish](#), [macaroni and cheese](#), [cornbread](#), and [hoppin' john](#) ([black-eyed peas](#) and rice) are prepared simply. When the African American population was considerably more rural than it generally is today, [rabbit](#), [possum](#), [squirrel](#), and [waterfowl](#) were important additions to the diet. Many of these food traditions are especially predominant in many parts of the rural South.

For many years, African American culture developed separately from mainstream American culture because of the persistence of racial discrimination in America, as well as African American slave descendants' desire to maintain their own traditions. Today, African American culture has become a significant part of American culture and yet, at the same time, remains a distinct cultural body.

Race and Racism

Race is the matter of culture and cultural history. It is a notion that divides human being into biologically and genetically distinct groups on the basis of skin color. The idea of race divides humanity into unchanging natural types on the basis of physical feature; more the practice of racial category brings forth the concept of superiority and inferiority. It is the human creation to rule over the weaker group of people. The motif of exploitation and domination is hidden behind the creation of race.

The twentieth century has brought remarkable transformations in the theories of race. It is a concept rooted in a particular culture and particular period of history. It changes and develops. Virginia Cyrus believes that race is fluid and quite subjective. She further says, “race is less a scientific actually than it is a social construct-classification based on social values” (11). The concept of race varies from place to place over the course of time and historical development. The racial concept doesn't

help to develop the condition of black people. The 1911 Universal Races Congress Organized in London put forward the liberal thoughts and focused on monogenism – the notion that there is only one species of man on earth. Similarly, Appiah believes that “such classification as Negro, Caucasian and Mongoloid are of no importance for biological purpose” (277). In Civil War, racial ideas in south rooted deeply because white people afforded hard to restore supremacy during and after the reconstruction period which caused racial violence and lynching. Race ideology was materialized through legislation, literature, movies and advertising.

Blacks in the United States have been affected by racial oppression throughout history, and it still influences their daily lives. It has become part and parcel of the daily routine of living. Whenever we talk racism and its practices in the United States of America, both the Southern and Northern region appear as dominant playground of racial discrimination. With the arrival of the European settlers in America, they brought with them some menial labourers from the west coast of Africa and later this little population increased very swiftly. As a result, the whole Northern and Southern parts of America became full of black population. From this period onward the relationship between whites and blacks developed as that of master and slave respectively.

The life of blacks during the slavery is characterized by extreme pain and misery sexual exploitation. The separation of father and mother slaves on the one hand and their separation with their children on the other was a common phenomenon. The slave holder held the total power as a result the victim was helpless. Physical torture and mental agony was day to day experience in the lives of black slaves. Masters used to take pleasure by whipping a slave. In the North, the average black population suffered not only from the hands of whites but even blacks were

ready to exploit the poor blacks. As a result, they had to bear the double oppression. Entrance into the public place, voting rights, equal level of wages was not available to the blacks. Discrimination was everywhere in social, political and economic levels of the society. As a result blacks were forced to lead a miserable life. They spent their lives in the ghettos and poverty became their common lot.

Race Relations

The term "race relation" refers to those forms of behaviour that arise from the contacts of different racial groups. The concept employs all relationships that determined the relative status of racial groups in the community. Differences in physical and genetic characteristics are important in contributing to the economic, social and political relationships. These relationships form the subject matter of race relations. The association of people belonging to one racial origin also involves the association of groups with other racial origin. Robert Park in his essay "The Nature of Race Relations" mentions that race relation "includes all the relations that ordinarily exist between members of different ethnic and genetic groups" (332). In other words, race relations are the relations existing between peoples distinguished by marks of racial descent. According to Cornel West, now black people are interrelated and included in the mainstream society. Moreover, he says that the experiences, cultures and predicament of black people have also been the part of black life. He means to say that black folklore, heritage and culture should also be respected and honored by white people. West writes:

For liberals, black people are to be 'included' and 'integrated' into our society and culture, while for conservatives they are to be 'well-behaved' and 'worthy of acceptance' by 'our' way of life. Both fail to see that the presence and predicament of black people are neither

additions to nor defecations from American life, but rather constitutive elements of that life. (6)

In race relation, there is no superior or inferior hierarchy as such. The black Americans valorize their folklore, culture, music, heritage, experiences. Race relation intensifies race consciousness and increases individual's visibility. Similarly, the white also accept the presence of black culture. In racial relationship, whether black or white, everyone recognizes and valorizes the diverse social experiences and cultural identities which compose the everyday experiences of ethnic and racial groupings in contemporary societies. Both black and white American can serve as bridge to mutual understanding. Both of them have to determine to deniggrize the earth. So long as there lasts the sense of racism, there lies the discrimination and segregation in the country. So, by minimizing and neutralizing racism, the problems and contradictions can be resolved. Every decision should be based on qualification, not on skin color.

A distinction should be established between the usage of the term “race relations” and other related usages. The term is variously used to cover the forms of intergroup, interethnic and majority-minority relationships. In the later usages, race may or may not be a significant form in the behaviour. These concepts incorporate other forms of behaviour as well.

The New Negro Renaissance and Its Spirit

On the evening of March 21, 1924, one hundred ten Harlem luminaries gathered on Manhattan civic club to celebrate the publication of *There is Confusion* written by Jessie Harris Fauset. But the event was soon transformed into a golden period which sparkled with passion and creativity. The black writers explored the black life and culture. The sounds of black American jazz swept the United States and

jazz musicians and composers like Duke Ellington became very famous across the United States and overseas. Many blue singers presented sensual lyrics with emotion. Black spirituals became widely appreciated as uniquely beautiful religious music. Black American dance, art, music and drama flourished. This type of art was also much admired by whites. This vigorous period is called no more than the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance. This movement offered radical change in Negro lives. Moreover, it brought cultural legacy. There came a bright, happy time of great promise of enriching the American culture. Nathan A. Scott Jr. states: "New York City's Harlem was for this generation of Negro intellectuals a kind of Mecca toward which they gravitated in spirit if not as actual residents, the movement has long been spoken of as the Harlem Renaissance" (288).

This movement brought many changes. According to Paul Lauter, "Among the most crucial was the extent to which African-Americans gained access, even if limited to certain engines of public opinion and evaluation" (1985). With the renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community was bound to enter a new dynamic phase. The day of "aunties", "uncles" and "mammies" was equally gone. The blacks thought that the racial discrimination was ended and they became very glad. The writers like Jean Toomer envisioned an American identity that would transcend race. They believed on single race which is a human race. About New Negro Movement, Alain Locke says, "race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentiment and experience. So what began in terms of segregation becomes more and more, as its elements mix and react, the laboratory of a great race-welding" (963). Thus Alain Locke envisioned a race welding world where both black and white would live happily together with the sense of fraternity and brotherhood. This is the true spirit of Harlem or New Negro Renaissance.

To sum up, African American culture was in highlight in the period of Harlem Renaissance. Music, dance, art, literature, language, hairstyle, life events and cuisine etc. are focused in the African American culture. For many years African American culture developed separately from mainstream American culture because of the persistence of racial discrimination in America. Today, African American culture has become a significant part of American culture. Jean Toomer envisioned a world where both blacks and whites live happily together maintaining a sense of fraternity and brotherhood.

III. Representation of African American Culture in *Cane*

African American culture in the United States refers to the cultural contributions of Americans of African descent to the culture of the United States, either as part of or distinct from American culture. The first major public recognition of African American culture occurred during the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1920s, African American music, dance, art, literature, language, hairstyle, life events and cuisine gained wide notice. Jazz, Swing, Blues and other musical forms entered American popular music. African American artists created unique works of art emphasizing African Americans' culture. The Harlem Renaissance was also a time of increased political involvement of African Americans.

Jean Toomer, the author of *Cane*, is the African American writer of Harlem Renaissance period. *Cane* is generally considered as a principal literary masterpiece of this period. It is composed of poetry, short stories, drama and prose that cover African American culture in the rural south and urban north. *Cane* is divided into three sections. The first section takes place in rural Georgia, and concerns itself with the lives of poor blacks, specially focusing on women who live in this environment. *Cane's* second section is set in urban Chicago and Washington, DC. The black people

of this section, descendants and survivors of the black southern culture, seek a new life and hope in the urban north. The third and the longest section entitled "Kabnis" brings the themes of both sections one and two together. It is a portrait of an educated confused black that travels to the south to teach in a school in Georgia. Karantha, Carma, Louisa, Dorris, Kabnis, Hanby, Layman etc are the main black characters in the novel. These all characters try to uplift African American culture.

The novel portrays the images of the South, its pain and beauty, black heritage and culture, which have remained the subject and inspiration for the literary artists. *Cane* unifies the Northern and Southern African American experiences. In this regard, Paul Lauter remarks:

Although composed of three separate parts; *Cane* unifies the northern and southern African-American experience through its circular movement. In the first section, six vignettes of southern women and twelve poems, in lyrical, vivid, duality of black southern life in their portrayal of conflicts, pressures, and racial and economic oppression. The second section is a kaleidoscope of impressions of the death of black spirituality in a wasteland of urban materialism and technology. In the final section, a drama, a black northern searches for and discovers his identity, in the south of his ancestors. The most enduring aspect of *Cane* is its revelation of an intrinsic strength and beauty in black American culture even in the face of white oppression. (1997)

Toomer's *Cane* has given a more concentrated focus on the beauty of living as black. The novel highlights the culture and heritage of black people who are living in the rural south and the urban north. The Southern settings and characters, beauty of black life, Southern images, its both pain and beauty, have remained significant

subject matters in *Cane*. Reborn Brown views *Cane* as a portrayal of southern beauty, pain and black heritage:

Toomer confronts the black man with the pain and the beauty of his southern heritage. That pain and power to transform it into beauty in what the younger generation means by soul. It is Jean Toomer's genius to discover and celebrate the qualities of soul, and there by inaugurate the Negro Renaissance. (1436)

Georgia is very beautiful place. In the forest, there are "pine-needles" which are smooth and sweet. They are elastic to the feet of rabbits. The narrator goes on describing "Homes in Georgia are most often built on the two-room plan. In one, you cook and eat, in the other you sleep, and there love goes on" (3-4). One can listen to folk –songs at dusk in Georgia. Even the night winds sing songs. Chill wind blows in autumn. The pine forest is so beautiful and graceful that "the pines whisper to Jesus" (7). Strange things are always hanging in the mouth of people: "People have them in Georgia more often than you would suppose, a black woman once saw the mother of Christ and drew her in charcoal on the courthouse wall" (19). Such rumors and beliefs are the part of black lives. They believe in super-natural power and feel content. They are proud of being black. Nina Baym says that *Cane* "has a general thematic unity in its representation of an alienated, questing black man who tries to find himself through connection with the black folk heritage" (1490).

Karintha shows the beauty of black women in rural Georgia. Beautiful black girls remain the center of attraction for the boys. The girls carry beauty and perfection. Their rays of the eyes shoot the heart of the boys. Karintha, whose skin is like dusk, attracts not only the young fellows but also the old men. The old men start praying secretly to the God begging to grant them youth so that they could begin to

love her. Similarly, the young boys count the time to pass before she would be old enough. While singing, her voice is high-pitched and shrill that puts one's ears to itching. But no one ever thought to make her stop because of the beauty. She is the dream girl: "Men had always wanted her, this Karintha, even as a child, Karintha carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. Old men rode her hobby-horse upon their knees. Young men danced with her at frolics when they should have been dancing with their grown-up girls," (3).

Once, the preacher caught Karintha at mischief and he told himself that "she was as innocently lovely as a November cotton flower" (3). Her ravishing and surpassing beauty is immortalized in *Cane*. When the wind is in the cane, cane leaves sway and dance. The canefield where the love goes on is charming. Anything may happen unexpectedly there. There is no hard and fast rule. The narrator comments, "Time and space have no meaning in a canefield" (13).

Dusk is an integral feature of Karintha's appearance and is used throughout the rural scenes of Georgia to describe the mystery and depth of experience with which Toomer infuses *Cane*. The initial passage and the opening and the closing poems associate Karintha with dusk. Toomer says, "Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon" (3). The reference to dusk most obviously describes the color of her skin, but the duskiness also relates to the entire dark beauty that stills the experience of the "dusky cane-lipped throng" (15).

Although Karintha is dark, her beauty is irresistible. Though she has been married many times and "men will bring their money" to her, she is not a prostitute. Toomer says, "Karintha is a woman. She who carries beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down" (4).

The poem entitled “November Cotton Flower” in *Cane* describes cotton field in November. Like the November Cotton Flower, Karintha blooms fearlessly in her own season, according to her own rhythms. The arrival of crop destroying beetles and cold wind have made cotton-stalks looks rusty and old. Dead birds are found in wells a hundred feet below the ground. Although there is drought and cotton vanishing, the poem mentions that there are beautiful flowers blooming in the field:

Such was the season when the flower bloomed.
 Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
 Significance. Superstition saw
 Something it had never seen before:
 Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
 Beauty so sudden for that time of year. (6)

Similarly “Reapers”, another poem projects the image of black reapers into the form of art. They are sharpening their sickles on stones and the sound of steel appears to the ears. They are continuously reaping weeds:

Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
 And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds.
 His belly close to ground. I see the blade,
 Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade. (5)

The poem represents a major change in the life of rural area, the change from manpower to machines, which changes everything else as well. The line describing the death of the field rat embodies this change in meaning and in sound. Instead of working slowly and rhythmically, the mower moves on ineluctably, even killing the living things before it, which make a sound that is the very antithesis of the soft silent swinging of the scythes. This is the culture of the black folks. Toomer’s *Cane* gives

the identity of a Negro who becomes the subject of interest for both the black and white readers. Therefore, Nathan Irving Huggins comments as:

The essentials of Negro identity rather than the circumstances of Negro life. He worked in symbols that served as the metaphors to allow a reader, whether white or-black to enter into the crux of those tensions that tugged at, Negro self. *Cane* stands apart because it was a self a conscious artistic achievement, the same can't be said about any of the novel associated with the Harlem Renaissance. (238)

The novelist shows a possibility that whites may have the relation with blacks to enhance the black people. Becky, a white woman, has the relationship with a Negro. She has given birth to two Negro sons. "Becky was the white woman who had two Negro sons" (7). Although she has faced many problems in her life due to her relation with black, she is in favour of black people.

Embodiment in songs seems to be the fate for the individual subjected to interpretation. We see Toomer playing with this idea in "Cotton Song" that calls for slaves to assume an active role in freeing themselves from shackles. "Cant blame God if we don't roll, /Come, brother, roll, roll!" (11).

Carma's tale, "which is the crudest melodrama" (13), hinges not so much on marital infidelity as on a childish deception. Accused by her husband of having other men she becomes hysterical, and running into a canebrake, pretends to shoot herself. "Twice deceived, and the one deception proved the other" (13). Her husband feels being fooled, frustrated and slashes the nearest man with a knife. He ends up in prison. Then Carma becomes free in her life. This shows the freedom of black women in Georgia. The tone of the episode is set by the ironic contrast between Carma's apparent strength and her childish behaviour. Carma is followed by the poems "Song

of the Son” and “Georgia Dusk”. “Song of the Son” is a poem that presents the sun and the earth, with Negro slaves, who sang, identified with nature. This is particularly true of the slaves and their songs:

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
 Squeezes, and bursting in the pine-wood air,
 Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
 One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes. (14)

For Toomer the spirituals were the “one seed” of the past that enabled the slaves to transcend the grim hardships of bondage. And since these songs embody the spirit of the many thousands gone, they-like the mythical Tree of Life-possess the power to awaken the eternal soul of man. The impulse for art and religion, in short, has a common root.

“Georgia Dusk” contrasts the previous poem by focusing on the people and machinery that have taken over the land in the decades since slavery. The lyrical expression of regenerating experience is found in “Georgia Dusk,” another salute to the South and the tradition of African American music. Toomer’s vision of the primeval unity of life is communicated in his symbolic association of a Southern barbecue with a bacchanalian feast.

A feast of moon and men and barking hounds,
 An orgy for some genius of the South
 With blood-shot eyes and cane-lipped scented mouth,
 Surprised in marking folk-songs from soul sounds. (15)

The word that stands out in these stanzas is “genius.” Stirred by the organic forces of this ceremonial feast, the first Black genius of the South fused the sights and sounds of his African past with his bitter-sweet salve experience into soulful music.

“Fern” is the story of potentially redemptive women figures. Fern is also racially mixed, her features described as “Semitic” (16) and the curves of her profile compared to a Jewish cantor’s song. The Jewish cantor’s song is a possible alternative to the African American spirituals of the South, approaching God in a different way. Within Fern, the Madonna/Prostitute dichotomy is also prevalent: “Men saw her eyes and fooled themselves. Fern’s eyes said to them that she was easy... Men were everlastingly bringing her their bodies,” (16). These men don’t understand, because they are only interested in sex. But Fern has vision, and as a possible prophet she is a potential savior figure. “Fern” is arguably a strong metaphor because she represents the redemptive essence of the South:

Like her face, the whole countryside seemed to flow into her eyes.
 Flowed into them with the soft listless cadence of Georgia’s South...
 picture if you can, this cream-colored solitary girl sitting at a tenement
 window looking down on the indifferent throngs of Harlem. Better that
 she listen to folk-songs at dusk in Georgia, you would say, and so
 would I. (17)

The metaphor of music is used here to represent Fern’s relationship with black culture: folk songs in the South rather than Jazz in the North. The Southern African American folk songs have a religious meaning inherent in them, while the “indifferent throngs of Harlem” is secular, new Jazz music that does not have any connection to God, spirituality or the legacy of the South. Within this scene of the folk-song, a hope of redemption through the coming together of races is manifested. In addition, some interpreted this music as evidence of a power that will some day be applied to the higher forms [of art]. In the ‘spirituals,’ or slave songs, the Negro has given American not only its only folk songs, but a mass of noble music. As such, this music clearly

had powers to not only create a new “race” of the American, but to raise the art forms of African American culture to a higher cultural plane, equal to that of White America.

Louisa, a black girl, represents the liberated soul of the south. She works in the “white folks’ kitchen”. She is beautiful and “lovely-in her way. Nigger way” (33). Bob Stone, younger son of the people she works for, loves her. Louisa is also loved by a Negro, Tom Burwell, who claims, “She’s my gal” (31). The black girl is seen as the dream of a white boy. Thus Louisa represents the freedom of black women in the south.

“Seventh Street” describes urban life of Washington where black people live, emphasizing fast pace and the old-fashioned belief in God. It moves at a different pace, incorporating the rhythms of Jazz into descriptions. The words used are more shrewd, faster and mixed. “Jazz songs” are surrounded by words like “bastard,” “prohibition,” “war,” “love” and “unconscious rhythms,” (41). The possibility of freedom is now inherent in the mixing of the unconscious and the conscious, the sacred and the profane: “Swirling like a blood-red smoke up where the buzzards fly in heaven? God would not dare to suck black red blood. A Nigger God! He would duck his head in shame and call for the Judgement Day,” (41). Jazz serves as the only substance to transcend this urban profanity by focusing the black people.

The poem entitled “Beehive” gives the message that the earth is like a beehive, where sweet honey is possible only with the effort of blacks and whites.

Within this black hive to-night
 There swarm a million bees;
 Bees passing in and out the moon,
 Bees escaping out the moon,

Bees returning through the moon,
 Silver bees intently buzzing,
 Silver honey dripping from the swarm of bees
 Earth is a waxen cell of the world comb. (50)

As the bees buzz with sweet music and collect nectar with collaborative venture, in the same manner black and white should work together. Then the country turns to be a heavenly beehive in which everyone will taste the sweet honey of peace, progress and prosperity is the message given by Toomer. Getting drunk with the honey, everyone will be able to fly towards perfection and happiness.

Dorris, a black girl, dances in the theater of Washington, D.C. to express her freedom. In the title called "Theatre", the narrator gives details of the different performances in the theater where both the whites and blacks are entertaining. They laugh, shout, sing jazz songs and dance. The manager of the theater is white and John is the manager's brother. Dorris, a black girl and John dance together happily. She is dressed in a loose black gown. John with colorful collar and tie walks towards Dorris and starts dancing: "Dorris Dances. The pianist crashes a bumper chord. The whole stage claps. Dorris, flushed, looks quick at John" (55).

Human life is a combination of joy and sorrow. The black life in Washington D.C. is not much different from the life in Georgia. Jazz songs echo in the theater of the city. Black life is easy even in the city. Life consists of both beauty and ugliness, believes, Dan Moore, one of the black characters in the city. He loves Muriel, a black girl. He convinces Muriel that life is not as luxurious and as beautiful as one expects. Pain is also the part of life. He says, "There is no such things as happiness. Life bends joy and pain, beauty and ugliness, in such a way that no one may isolate them. No one should want to. Perfect joy, or perfect pain, monotony of consciousness, would mean

death" (62). Here, Dan Moore becomes more pragmatic and realistic. Everyone is living in the vast chamber of uncertainties and doubts. The perfect joy as Dan Moore thinks may be death. When one is alive, he/she suffers a lot. So, life consists of both beauty and ugliness. Hunger and pain are easily accepted.

"Harvest Song," a poem that presents modern urban people as reapers of the harvest of the world's greatness. Blending fear and anger, aspirations, and a sense of lack of accomplishment, it gives the lie to what one might read into its title. The time of the day--sundown and dusk--and of the year--the end of the harvest season--is conducive to reflection; after a day's work, the "reaper," in an implicit analogy with Toomer's own harvesting during his traveling season in the South, looks back on what he has accomplished and onward to what the future has in store for him. The voice that is heard through the poem is different from the new black voices one would expect to hear at the onset of the renaissance. Although the word "hunger," used as a verb and substantive and in many variations as a sort of inner rhyme and burden in this poem, may express desire, expectation, and anticipation, it also means deprivation, dearth, exhaustion, and weariness. The reaper-poet is shown here as having partly lost the acuity of his senses ("blades are dulled"), on which so much of the perception of the living world depends. "Chilled," "fatigued," "dry," "dulled," "blind," and "deaf": all these words seem to spell his fate and seal it in dusk and caking dust. The season is over, and yet the harvest has not been up to the reaper's expectations; his longing for knowledge--the grain--and for companionship is unfulfilled. Unfulfilled too is the promise expressed in "Cotton Song." The song will not be the work song and the call-and-response that could help sustain energy during the harvest between distant reapers. This is an unfinished song, and, more

dramatically, the "singer" seems unable to respond to any call or offering from his fellow workers: "I fear I could not taste it" (71).

The positive and poetic quality of dusk, so strikingly present at certain moments in *Cane*, seems lost here, even if some sweetness or softness still endures. But this unborn song is nevertheless a song, a blues from a solitary reaper, and the chant of all the other harvesters who, unseen, unheard, brothers or strangers, all share his condition and predicament.

If the harvest-reaper motif could serve as a metaphor for what the New Negro movement hungered to be, this song certainly did not fit the mood that prevailed when parties were organized in New York to celebrate the new era. Toomer's reaper is a poor prototype for the New Negro. Although the hunger for knowledge is vividly expressed in the poem, the fear of that hunger and the fear of sterility are never so clearly expressed. Yet the blues-song-poem, with all its tensions and uncertainties, is not only Toomer's parting song--when his own harvest is perhaps left unfinished and he realizes that "you can't go home again"--it also epitomizes the situation of any poet, whose mission is never totally accomplished. While experimenting with that particular musical form, the work song, Toomer also pays tribute to that part of the rural and folk heritage that did not receive much attention from the poets of Harlem and to the workers of the soil who nurtured tradition and were only left with the stubble since, as the popular song goes, "the white folks get th boll; the niggers get th stalk" (89).

Ralph Kabnis, a Northern Negro, travels to the South in Georgia to teach in a school in the hope of discovering his black roots. He sees the painful life of black people in Georgia and thinks about the way of salvation for them from the ocean of misery. "Proposed in his bed, tries to read. To reads himself to sleep. An oil lamp on a

chair near his elbow burns unsteadily” (83). It's chill outside. The winds are blowing. It is believed that the night winds sing songs. "Night winds in Georgia are vagrant poets, whispering" (83). Even then night winds sing spiritual songs. Kabnis hears their song:

White-man's land.
Niggers, sing.
Burn, bear black children
Till poor rivers bring
Rest, and sweet glory
In Camp Ground. (83)

Literally Camp Ground is a place where soldiers camp to rest during a march; here it symbolizes a resting place of people-probably in heaven. Kabnis is surprised after hearing this song, he tries to feel and internalize this song. He slowly realizes that it is his responsibility to bind black and white together by spiritual ties. He says, “if I could feel that I came to the South to face it” (83). But it is not an easy task. He feels, “How my lips would sing for it, my songs being the lips of its soul” (84).

Even the black can be source of love and nourishment for white. Here, a black mother is nursing a white child. It clarifies the good aspect of black women. Kabnis gets disturbed at night. He cannot sleep. A cat runs across the thin board of the ceiling. A hen begins to walk. He catches it, whirls by its neck and throws the head away. He opens the door and steps out into the severe loveliness of Georgian autumn moonlight. White winds again sing sleep-song: “Rock a-by baby/Black mother sways, holding a white child on her bosom” (84).

Kabnis believes that the reappearance of Father John helps to raise the black people from the color vision world. Kabnis is haunted by the figure of the same old

man, the Father John. Lewis, a Northern Negro, who has come to South, says that the old man is, “A mute John the Baptist of a new religion-or a tongue-tied shadow of an old” (106). The old Father John and the old religion discriminated the people on the basis of color. But the reappearance of Father John and possibility of new religion will uplift the black people because the new religion will not discriminate the people on the basis of color and gives chance to achieve progress for the black people. Father John says that “Th sin whats fixed upon the white folks” (116) has badly affected the people. Kabnis understands that it was the sin of race. It has separated the people within the country. Kabnis says, “Suppose youre talkin about that bastard race thats roamin round th country. It looks like sin, if thats what y mean. Give us something new an up t date.” (116)

In the novel, the main protagonist has mixed heritage. Toomer’s character, Kabnis shares his Southern black heritage with the Northern white heritage. Kabnis is of mixed race: his father is white and mother is black. J. Lee Greene comments: “Kabnis speaks of all black Americans, in that African Americans as a group are historically the offspring’s of white American fathers and black American mothers, and, therefore, being neither completely white nor completely black, are indeed members of a ‘bastard race’” (285).

The novel reflects the characteristics and behaviour of African American people. Whites can marry the blacks and blacks can marry the whites. Consequently mulattoes are born. For example, Cora in the novel is a “mulatto woman”. Likewise, in the parlor of Fred Halsey, there is a portrait of an “English gentleman”. He is no more than Halsey’s great grandfather. The nature and physical traits of Halsey are similar to his great-grandfather: “His nature and features, modified by marriage and circumstances, have been transmitted to his great-grandson, Fred” (87). To the left

side of this picture, there is another portrait of his great- grandmother who has without doubt a ‘Negro strain’. These two figures show that Fred Halsey himself is also the African American. So he has indulged to uplift the condition of black people. He helped Kabnis, a Negro, by giving him work as well as lodging and fooding facilities. Moreover, Carrie K. gives her moral support to eradicate the sin of racial discrimination that had victimized the black people in the United States.

Different institutions established in the United States also play vital role to raise the condition of black people by giving them quality education. A school is founded in Georgia, Kabnis has come from North to teach there. Hanby, a “black-skinned Negro” is the principal of the school. Hanby believes that the school has helped to better the conditions of the black people. He says:

This institution, of which I am the humble president, was founded, and has been maintained at a cost of great labor and untold sacrifice. It’s purpose is to teach our youth to live better, cleaner, more noble lives. To prove to the world that the Negro race can be just like any other race. (95)

Everyone has realized that black people are also the main characters to improve the conditions of community or the whole nation. Even in the business sector, co-operation and each other’s help is necessary. Esther’s father, who is the richest “colored man” in the town, is against the racial discrimination. He says to Esther, “Good business comes from remembering that the white folks dont divide the niggers” (24). Collaboration or team work is the spirit which promotes and enhances material as well as spiritual prosperity. In this way, Esther’s father takes the black people as an important part for the development of business sector in the country.

Black characters have typical views on beauty. Kabnis prefers night, black and ugliness. He finds them beautiful. He wants to be close with them. That's why, he comes out at night and enjoys moonlight. For him the half-moon is like a white child that sleeps upon the tree-tops of the forest. He looks up into the sky and night's beauty strikes him a lot. For him God is "ugly". Hence, he believes that what comes from God is ugly. His final logic is that what others call black and ugly is beautiful for him. Kabnis shows affinity with black songs and heritage. He writes and says:

God Almighty, dear God, dear Jesus, do not torture me with beauty. Take it away. Give me an ugly world. Ha, ugly. Stinking like unwashed niggers. Dear Jesus, do not chain me to myself and set these hills and valleys, heaving with folk-songs, so close to me that I can not reach them. There is a radiant beauty in the night that touches and... tortures me. (85)

The pregnant Negress is the sign of production, progress, happiness and regeneration. The Nature welcomes the new baby as well. The womb-song soothes the pain of the mother and pacifies the baby. Thus, happiness resides in the heart of the black people. Night wind blows in canefield and produces sweet music. It croons womb-song everywhere. Even the forests and hills resound with melody. The narrator observes:

Night, soft belly of a pregnant Negress, throbs evenly against the torso of the South. Night throbs a womb-song to the South. Cane-and Cotton-fields, pine forests, cypress swamps, saw meals, and factories are fecund at her touch. Night's womb-song sets them singing. Night winds are the breathing of the unborn child whose calm throbbing in the belly of a Negress sets them somnolently singing. (105)

Kabnis as a New Negro hopes of new world where the condition of black people is raised and where there is individual's self-respect and self-dependence. He is no more emotional figure, but a realist facing of facts. He believes that the racial problems are an integral part of the large industrial and social problems of the country. So, issues of racial discrimination should be wiped out from the world. Finally, he establishes himself as a transformed Negro. Kabnis is a professional man, himself migrating from North to South to recapture his constituency and to raise the black people in the South. Being a teacher, he wants to teach all the people to end the racial discrimination for the development of the black people. His inner objective is to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective. He realizes his responsibilities of social contribution. So, Kabnis is a New Negro shaping a new American attitude.

Kabnis, a Northern Negro, is the promoter of the black people. After coming from North, Kabnis lives with Halsey. Kabnis and Layman work in Halsey's shop. Professor Layman, Georgian Negro, by turns teacher and preacher, knows more than any black man knows about whites. By hearing past practices of racial discrimination in the South from Layman's mouth, Kabnis determines to end racial discrimination to promote the black people. Kabnis had also heard Northern exaggeration about the South. Halsey reminds him that he has come to the South which is different from the North: "Mr. Kabnis, kindly remember you're in th land of cotton-hell of a land. Th white folks get th boll; th niggers get th stalk. An dont you dare touch th boll, or even look at it. They'll swing y sho" (89).

Layman believes that people should be divided on the basis of their behaviour and says, "An only two dividins: good an bad. An even they aint permanent categories" (89). People who have good behaviour should be included in the good

category either they are black or white. Layman believes that Georgia is a good town and a good country but injustice has spread fear everywhere. Things were worse in past than nowadays. In the past, black prisoners were led to work without pay for white landowners. Layman remembers the past bitter experiences and reports that the white folks had knocked two black men, brained them with an axe and caught Sam Raymn by a stream. Sam wanted to die in his own way. That's why he jumped into the stream and died there. This horrible image of white's suppression upon blacks tortures Kabnis a lot and he wants to abolish it. So, he is in search of promoting the black people. He says, "Cant something be done?" (90).

Kabnis believes that even in the Church, there is bias and injustice. When Halsey asks Kabnis to go to church, he doesn't want to go because he can't stand in the church. For him, the activities done in the church are superfluous. He wants to be practical and erase line boundary. There is bias and injustice in the church, thinks Kabnis, "the preacher's hands are in the white man's pockets" (90). He is in search of new religion which will focus the people. He imagines such a world where there will be equality.

The horrible story distresses Kabnis but he tries to do his best for the African American people. Layman tells him horrible story of Mame Lamkins, a black woman. When the white people were chasing her husband to kill, she tried to hide him. Then the whites mercilessly killed her. When the baby came out of her belly, it was living but they also killed it, as Layman says:

She was in th family-way, Mame Lamkins was. They killed her in th street, an some whitte man seein th risin in her stomach as she lay there soppo in her blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an th kid fell out. It was living; but a nigger baby aint supposed t live. So

he jabbed his knife in it and stuck it to a tree. And then they all went away.

(92)

In this intolerable situation Kabnis shouts, "Christ no!" and a shriek pierces the room. All of a sudden, a stone, wrapped round with paper crashes through the window. Halsey picks up the stone, takes off the wrapped and reads: "you northern nigger, its time for y t leave. Git along now" (92). Kabnis thinks that the command is for him. He is very much upset. Fear flows inside him. He swells with fear. He feels violent external pressure. The stone, the crumpled paper are huge things that terrify the blacks. Kabnis is mentally tortured. He is terror-stricken but determines to transform his terror into power in raising black people so that everyone will feel secure and peaceful. The violent action couldn't improve the condition. The above incident faced by Kabnis himself shows the miserable lives of black people who are living in the South. So, he is motivated in favour of the black people to take out them from the sea of misery.

The figure of the Father John might be a holy spirit that has come to free and uplift the black soul. Due to exploitation and torture upon the blacks by whites, the black soul gets troubled which needs to be free and purified. Kabnis is on the odyssey of the same emancipation, which is only possible through the end of racial discrimination. But on the course of his journey, Kabnis is horrified and frightened unnecessarily. He thinks he is being trapped. When Halsey and Layman come, he trembles with fear. Halsey convinces him that the days of hounds, uncles, mammies have gone and that he shouldn't be afraid. This incident focuses Kabnis, a black man.

Kabnis heard all night long the old man mumbling Sin and Death. Perhaps he is talking about the sin of slavery and racism. When Carrie K. and Kabnis are together, the old man begins to shake his head slowly. They watch him anxiously. The head of

Father John nods up, and remarkably clear and with great conviction he says, “Sin” (116). He repeats this word several times. Surprised, indignant, Kabnis could not understand what he meant. He is shocked and recalls: “th only sin is whats done against th soul. Th whole world is a conspiracy t sin” (116). Father John further says, “Th sin whats fixed . . . upon th white folks” (116).

According to Father John, the white folks made the Bible lie. The Bible divided the people on the basis of color and discriminated the black people. After saying that it was sin, Father John falls down on the floor and sinks back into stony silence. Kabnis supposed that the old man i.e. Father John was talking about “bastard race” that is roaming around the country. Actually it looks like sin. After Father John’s declaration, Kabnis realizes that the concept of race is a big lie and that it should be eradicated. Carrie K. also realizes the same thing. She embraces Kabnis. At the same time, Halsey from upper stair calls Kabnis to go up and work. Kabnis rises and goes towards the steps to the work-shop. Carrie after gazing him till he is gone, goes to the old man, kneels down, and murmurs “Jesus, come”. Immediately light streaks through the iron-barred cellar window. Outside the sun rises and sends a birth-song.

The birth-song is the symbol of regeneration, which will be free from racial discrimination. The sun is the symbol of new Savior which will focus the black people. The old Savior which is declared a lie by Father John brought racial discrimination in the country due to which many black people suffered. Now, the soul of Kabnis is uplifted. As a whole, black soul will not suffer. Carrie K. embraces Kabnis and prays to Jesus to come and end racial discrimination. Thus the blacks become happy only when they are morally upgraded. Finally, the journey of Kabnis rests on the enhancement of black people.

Kabnis believes that he is the earth's child. He says, "The earth my mother" (85). Actually he means to say that all the people, whether blacks or whites are the children of the same mother earth. The mother earth doesn't differentiate her offsprings. She smiles only when both the blacks and whites progress in their field. In this way, Kabnis gives high priority to uplift the black people.

Thus, Jean Toomer's *Cane* tries to reflect the African American culture in the Harlem renaissance period. *Cane* overwhelmingly depicts the experiences of rural as well as urban blacks, their language and culture. Beauty as well as ugliness of living as black is presented dramatically and amusingly in the novel to highlight the culture of Harlem Renaissance period.

IV. Conclusion

This research focuses on the Harlem Renaissance spirit in Jean Toomer's *Cane*. The Harlem Renaissance refers to the flowering of African American cultural and intellectual life during the 1920s. African American culture in the United States refers to the cultural contributions of Americans of African descent to the culture of the United States. During 1920s, African American music, dance, art, literature, language, hairstyle, life events and cuisine etc. gained wide notice. Jazz, Swing, Blues and other musical forms entered American popular music. African American artists created unique works of art featuring African Americans' culture. Jean Toomer, the author of *Cane* and African American writer of the Harlem Renaissance period, highlights the culture of this period.

Dusk is an integral feature of Karintha's appearance and is used throughout the rural scenes of Georgia to describe the mystery and depth of experience with which Toomer infuses *Cane*. The reference to dusk most obviously describes the color of her skin, but the duskiness also relates to the entire dark beauty of all black

women in Georgia. Like November Cotton Flower, Karintha blooms fearlessly in her own season, according to her own rhythms. Both blacks and whites bring money for her. So, she becomes the dream girl for them.

The poem “Reapers” projects the image of black reapers into the form of art. They are sharpening their sickles on stones and the sound of steel appears to the ears. This is the culture of the black folks. Toomer’s *Cane* gives the identity of a Negro who becomes the subject of interest for both the black and white readers.

Becky, a white woman, keeps the relation with a Negro to promote the black people. She has given birth to two Negro sons. Similarly, Dorris, a black girl and John, a white man, dance together happily in the theater of Washington D.C. Both the blacks and whites entertain in the theater. They laugh, shout, sing Jazz songs and dance. Her dance in the theater represents the freedom of all black women in America. Thus, the color does not do any difference for enjoyment.

The metaphor of music is used here to represent Fern’s relationship with black culture: folk songs in the South rather than Jazz in the North. The Southern African American folk songs have a religious meaning inherent in them, while the “indifferent throngs of Harlem” is secular, new Jazz music that does not have any connection to God, spirituality or the legacy of the South. Within this scene of the folk-song, a hope of redemption through the coming together of races is manifested. In addition, some interpreted this music as evidence of a power that will some day be applied to the higher forms [of art]. In the slave songs, the Negro has given American folk songs as well as a mass of noble music. This music clearly has powers to not only create a new race of the American but to raise the art forms of African American culture to a higher cultural plane, equal to that of White America.

Ralph Kabnis, the main protagonist of the novel, has mixed heritage. He has gone to Georgia to teach in a school in the hope of discovering his root. He wants to raise the black people who are suffered from whites. Thus, the search of ancestors shows the root consciousness of Kabnis. Similarly, cooperative feeling of black people is found in the novel. Halesy and his sister Carrie K. helps Kabnis by giving him work as well as lodging and fooding facilities.

A school is established in Georgia to raise the academic situation of black people by giving them quality education. Hanby, a Negro, is the principal of the school. The school helps to better the conditions of black people who are living below the poverty line in the rural Georgia. This is how black people are focused in the novel.

People are divided on the basis of their behaviour in the novel. There are only two types of men in this world: good and bad. People who have good behaviour should be included in the good category either they are black or white. Thus, the black people are included in good category if they have good manner.

Through *Cane*, Jean Toomer imagines a new world in which skin color makes no difference and all people have their own importance. They all co-operate for the development of the whole country. They are all responsible for the task of making spiritual as well as material headway and progress. The vital inner grip of prejudice that existed before has been broken now. Toomer's *Cane* successfully focuses on the black people and their culture. He imagines a world in which the storm of racism is ended and thunder of blossoms rumble all around. In this new world, the pine-needles whispering to "Jesus" disperse everywhere. "A spray of pine-needles/Dipped in western horizon gold" is singing and stretching the song of happiness so as to raise the African American culture.

Works Cited

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Race." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.
- Ballroom, Boogie and Shymmy Sham, Shake. *A Social and Popular Dance Reader*. Gulie Malnig. Edition: Illustrated. University of Illinois Press, 2008. 23.
- Bayn, Nina, ed. "Jean Toomer." *The Norton Anthology: American Literature*. 5th ed. Vol. 2 New York: Norton, 1998. 1490.
- Blake, Susan. "The Spectatorial Artist and the Structure of *Cane*." *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation*. Ed. Therman B. O'Daniel. Washington, DC: Howard UP, 1988. 197-198.
- Brown, Reborn. *Black South Voice: An Anthology of Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Non-Fiction and Critical Essays*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
- Byrd, Anana and Tharps, Lori. *Hair Stony: Untangling the Roots of Blacks Hair in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002. 162.

- Coulmas, Florian. *Sociolinguistic: The Study of Speakers' Choices*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. 177.
- Cyrus, Virginia. *Experiencing Race, Class and Gender in the United States*. 3rd ed. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1993.
- Dow, William. "Always Your Heart". *The "Great Design" of Toomer's Cane*. Melus: 27.4 (Winter 2002): 60.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "Criteria of Negro Art." *Crisis*, October, 1926. 296.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Library of America, 1986.
- Frank, Waldo. Foreword to *Cane*. *Cane*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. New York: Norton, 1988. 139.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. and McKay, Nellie Y., eds. "Jean Toomer." *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature*. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Greene, J. Lee. *The American South: Portrait of a Culture*. Washington, D.C.: United States of Information Agency, 1979.
- Grimes, Ronald L. *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. University of California Press, 2002. 145-146.
- Hart, James D. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*. New York: OUP, 1971. 134.
- High, Peter B. *An Outline of American Literature*. London: Longman, 1997. 331.
- Holloway, Joseph E. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005. 48.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: Southern End Point, 1981. 56.
- Huggins, Nathan Irving. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: OUP, 1971.

- King, Martin Luther Jr. "I Have a Dream." *The Heritage of Words*. Eds. Shreedhar Lohani, Rameshwar Adhikari and Abhi Subedi. Kathmandu: Ekata, 1998.
- Lauter, Paul, ed. "Jean Toomer." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Concise edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Littell, Robert. "Cane." *Cane*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. New York: Norton, 1988. 169.
- Locke, Alain. "The New Negro." *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997.
- "Negro." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. Ed. Philip Babcock Gove. Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc, 2002: 1514.
- Park, Robert. "The Nature of Race Relations." *Racism*. Eds. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos. New York: OUP, 1999. 332.
- Ruland, Richard and Bradbury, Malcolm. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. New York: Penguin, 1992.
- Scott, Nathan A. Jr. "Black Literature." *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. Ed. Daniel Hoffman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979. 288.
- Stewart, Earl L. *African American Music: An Introduction*. Prentice Hall International, 1998. 5.
- Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Turner, Darwin T., ed. "Jean Toomer." *Black American Literature*. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1970. 210.
- Ward, Jr. Jerry W. M. Graham. Ed. *To Shatter Innocence: Teaching African American Poetry*. Teaching African American Literature. Routledge, 1998. 146.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage, 1994.