

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Juneteenth: An Embodiment of Cultural Identity*

Ralph Ellison, in his posthumously published novel, *Juneteenth* articulates the identity of “that vanished tribe into which I was Born” (Ellison, I) by evoking the blues, the jazz, sermons, Black vernacular and all the African American cultural artefacts. Marking the historical date June 19 or Juneteenth, the anniversary of the day in 1865 when Texas slaves finally learned of the Emancipation Proclamation, which had taken effect two and a half years later, Ellison brings out existential truths of the African American experience along with their evasion and discovery of identity. Through this novel, Ellison seeks to show how American identity is deeply affected and shaped by the African identity.

The predominant theme in the works of Ellison is the quest for the cultural identity. *Invisible Man* (1952) and *Juneteenth* (1999) are packed full of folktales and tellers, trinkets, toasts, songs, sermons, jazz, jive and jokes. Actually, these novels present themselves as epic statement of the need for Black self-definition. The protagonist of these novels characterized as a representative black man on an identity quest, find them defined within white masters’ structure and finally adopt black folk tradition. The protagonist uses their culture as a weapon to interrogate the white-man’s strata. Most of Ellison’s spiritual, multifaceted works express all the pleasures of the world and of music experienced by African American. In spite of brutality blacks had endured as depicted in the works of most American writers, Ellison as a black writer evokes his unique black culture in order to gain dignified space for it. However, Ellison bridges the gap between the uniqueness and the universality of

black experience by the use of black folklore. In his essays and interviews, Ellison has repeatedly singled out black folklore as the source of genuine black self definition:

In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is. We back away from the chaos of experience and from ourselves and depict the humour as well as the horror of our living .We project Negro life in a metaphysical perspective and we have seen it with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing. (Blake 49-51)

At the same time, however, Ellison insists as implied through *Shadow and Act* (1964), American experience is an integrated experience of black and white experience. His literary works are bound up with nationhood. That is why when Ellison uses black folklore in his fiction, he consciously adapts it to the myths of the larger American and Western culture (obviously white culture). Similarly, his works urge the American sentiment to co-exist as an integrated one rather than separated and secluded. He is of the view that black-white identity constitutes American identity as a whole. He acclaims, “America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain...Our fate is to become one, and yet many—This is not prophecy, but description” (Ellison). He is , however, unhappy that the whites have not realized the material reality rather are trying to escape such truth by taking sanctuary in racial chauvinism or the advantage of superior social status. Appealing them to grasp the reality, Ellison in his seminal essay, *What America Would be Like Without Blacks* states that without the presence of Negro American style, their jokes, folktales, even their jazzed-shaped sports, the whites would never have realized that there is vastly rich world ever unexplored.

He further declares that whatever else one is whether black or white, the true American is also somehow black; the true American will have absorbed and

embraced his or her cultural blackness. Correspondingly, he talks about black folks being in some sense white thereby partaking in the mysterious complexities of all of American culture. Thus, the sentiment of connectedness within each American individual is the ground reality, as Ellison envisages. Ellison actually goes to the level of gaining the cultural identity of his race delivering the message that Blacks are also the stakeholder of national identity. For him, blacks derive their identity through whites and whites gain their identity through blacks so what needs is cooperation, equality and justice. In this regard, he rightly declares:

[O]ur cultural wholeness.... offers no easily recognizable points of rest, no facile certainties as to who, what or where (culturally or historically) we are. Instead, the whole is always in cacophonic motion. Constantly changing its mode, it appears as a vortex of discordant ways of living and tastes, values and traditions, a whirlpool of odds and ends in which the past courses in uneasy juxtaposition with those bright, futuristic principles and promises to which, we, as a nation, are politically committed. (265-268)

Thus, Ellison makes an effort to ritualize the black folk experience in literature in order to put it at the service of a myth larger or other than itself. For the tendency of universalizing the black experiencing he is accused of having forgotten the reality that he is the representative of blacks. Thus, some critics like W.E.B. Du Bois enjoys defining this tendency as African American double consciousness. Du Bois in his seminal work *The souls of Black Folk* defines double consciousness as:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the

revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness, - and American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (45)

Through these lines, we can find that Negroes have double souls or thoughts. Negroes feel that they are from different culture and identities so their own selfhood is preserved within. Even then, being African, they want to become Americans. They consider that they have also rich culture, however. Du Bois clarifies that the history of the American Negro is the history of these strife- this longing to attain self-consciousness along with the older self and the yearning to merge into a so called better and truer self.. The Negroes would not Africanize America, for American has too much to teach the world and Africa. These Negroes want to bring out the vague things which stay in themselves. Du Bois further states that:

I would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for I know that Negro blood has message for the man and the world to be both a Negro blood. I wish 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. In Negroes mind, thus, they have a kind of awareness being black and feel a Negro but American. It is uphill task to separate these views to black. They do not want any chemical to cover his black skin but they prove how the blood is. (166-168)

Talking about Ellison's case is quite different. Ellison embraces the multicultural richness of his heritage, and we can see in all his work the artistic potential in the double consciousness. In both *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the Territory* (1986), Ellison relishes African American rhetorical device. William Lyne further assesses Ellison's double consciousness as:

... a sword that cuts two ways. His complex and subtle response to the American experience has brought Ellison tremendous praise and tremendous blame, both often rooted in his dexterity with more than one tradition. His insistence on the variety and autonomy of African American life and his trafficking in the motifs and artistic techniques of the Euro-American literary tradition have attracted continual and vociferous criticism from the radical Left. (56-59)

In *Juneenth*, characters like Bliss or Sunraider has double consciousness. Having white skin but black sentiment, Bliss tries to evade his true identity by disguising himself as a racist senator. Blending the identities, values and lifestyles of Sunraider with blacks, Ellison portrays the fact that most American whites are culturally part of Negro American without even realizing it. This novel interrogates how white Americans have suffered from a deep inner uncertainty as to who they really are.

There is a trend of dealing African American literature as sociological document charging it as mere record of society, people and their experience .As defence to African American, Ralph Ellison produces very high modernist prose which equally confirms his space in mainstream. However, he is highly criticized by the fellow black writers of the revolutionary impetus of the Black Art movement for his adaption of white man's style. In this case, he clarifies his inclination towards

elegant technique as his attempt to reflect the aesthetics of the world of blacks. He dwells on the merits of highly crafted art mainly on Euro-American literary ancestors such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Ellison's uses of James, James, Eliot, and Dostoesvsky are his rematerializing and re- socializing their modernist forms. Ellison practises modernist symbolism and abstraction by juxtaposing them with representation of material and social oppression of African American. In doing so, William Lyne asserts, "he wrenches modernist fluidity and craft from the culture of privilege and dominance, where art has the leisure to chase its formal tail in a place far removed from lived experience" (Lyne, 278). Signifying on modernism allows Ellison to push his writing beyond any theory of mere correspondence and simultaneously to dramatize the enormous gulf between imagining oneself a bug and being treated like one.

Ralph Waldo Ellison, named for Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on March 1, 1913, in Oklahoma City, to Lewis Alfred and Ida Millsap Ellison, who moved from the South to Oklahoma in order to provide better opportunities for their sons. Educated in segregated schools, Ellison graduated from high school in 1931 and attended Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where he continued his conservatory training and study of music theory from 1933-1936. Of his musical influence he later said:

The great emphasis in my school was upon classical music, but such great jazz musicians as Hot Lips Page, and Lester Young were living in Oklahoma City..... As it turned out, the perfection, the artistic dedication which helped me as a writer, was not so much in the classical emphasis as the jazz itself. (Ellison, 54)

Ellison became interested in modern literature at Tuskegee, and before he could complete his undergraduate degree, he left the school for New York City,

where he participated in the Federal Writers' Project and met such notable as Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke. Ellison lectured on African American folklore and music and taught at many universities, including Columbia, Princeton, and New York University, where he taught for many years and was named the Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities. Ellison published collections of essays and stories, including *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the Territory*, as well as one novel, *Invisible Man* for which he won the National Book Award in 1953. Unlike the majority of his Negro contemporaries, he was not limited in his interests to the race problem rather he "spoke always of the style, the intrigues, the ideas, the lamentations and the desires that bewitchingly reached across race, religion, class and sex to make us all Americans"(Crouch,144). Saul Bellow considers him as a great artist. Bellow, Remembering Ralph Ellison and his attitude on wholeness of American identity and racial solidarity, states Ellison's words as follows:

I came to know Ralph's view...."We did not develop as a people in isolation. We developed within a context of white people. Yes, we have special awareness, because our experience has in certain ways been different from that of white people, but it was not absolutely different. I tell white kids instead of talking about black men in a white world or black men in a white society, they should ask themselves how black they are, because black men have been influencing the values of the society and the art forms of the society... (48-50)

Though Ellison started multi-faced career in New York, he came summated success in the field of fiction with his debut novel, *Invisible Man* (1952). It is a richly-textured novel about the moral and the psychological growth of the main character replete with allusions to African American folklore, history, and culture. Visiting a

friend in Vermont after World War II, he typed out -I am an invisible man and thus began his great novel. This novel delivered Ellison National Book Award in 1953. As a result; he emerges as a canonical writer. It explores the theme of a man's search for his identity and place in society, as seen from the unnamed black protagonist. The nameless protagonist initially rejects black folklore manifesting a Sambo mentality and finally learns to accept that it is basic to his true identity. The book with its famous last line, "Who knows but that, on lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison), transcends the black experience as a meditation on identity, alienation and self-definition influenced as much by Dostoyevsky as by black authors like Richard Wright. The novel chronicles three stages in the protagonist's life –education, employment, and political activity. Each stage in the protagonist's personal history corresponds to an era in the social history of black Americans. Ellison's sojourn in a southern black college modeled on Tuskegee Institute corresponds to Reconstruction; he has entered it on scholarship presented in a parody of Emancipation, and he leaves it under compulsion, in the company of a disillusioned World War I veteran in a manner representative of Great Migration. In a nutshell, his debut novel presents itself as an epic statement of the need for black self-definition. The protagonist of the novel is characterized as a representative black man on an identity quest. Actually, he is criticized by the black intellectuals, particularly the black militants for his insistence on an individual identity apart from a group identity as Dostoevsky envisions.

Writing essays about both the black experiences and his love for jazz music, Ellison continued to receive major awards for his works. In 1969, he received the medal for Freedom; the following year, he was awarded the coveted Chevalier de L'Orde de Arts Et Letters by France and became permanent member of the faculty at New York University as the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities, acting from 1970-1980.



In 1975, he was selected to the American Academy for the Arts and Letters and his hometown of Oklahoma City honoured him with all the dedication of Ralph Waldo Ellison Library. He published many essays and in 1948 received the New York City College's Langston Hughes Medallion.

Ellison was supposed to be close to finishing his second long-awaited novel in 1967, but a fire at his summer home in the Berkshires destroyed a summer's worth of revision and he spent the rest of his life refashioning the work. On this event, Ellison made a serious comment, "there was, of course, a traumatic event involved the book (*Juneteenth*). We lost a summer house and, with it, a good part the novel. It wasn't the entire manuscript, but it was over three hundred and sixty pages. There was no copy." (65)

Indeed, as late as March 14, 1994, shortly after Ellison celebrated his eightieth birthday and just before he succumbed to pancreatic cancer, his optimism about finishing the novel was washed away. Unfortunately, he did not complete the novel before he died but he did leave behind more than two thousand pages of notes and manuscripts of the forty-year work-in-progress. After Ellison's death in 1984, his widow, Fanny Ellison, asked John F. Callahan, his friend and literary executor, to assemble the works in the estate.

It took three years for Callahan to carve out what he felt was the most cohesive story in the manuscript. The book centers on the figures of Adam Sunraider, a United States senator who hides his mixed-race background with racist views and policies, and the black musician and preacher who adopted him as a boy and raised him. Callahan did not write any new material for the book, but he was forced to completely eliminate important characters and narratives when paring *Juneteenth* down to the final 350-page work. Callahan titled the book *Juneteenth* after the annual

African American freedom celebration of the same name. The June 19 festival commemorates the day in 1865 on which federal troops notified Texas slaves of their freedom, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed. Ellison's book was officially released on June 19, 1999. The book has received mixed reviews, with some critics questioning Callahan's selections and others finding the stitched-together narrative awkward. Still others said the limited scope of the work was far from Ellison's goals for the project. But Callahan's defenders were happy that at least some of the work had finally found an audience after so many years. Callahan has said that a more complete scholar's edition of the work will be published at a later date.

The book in our hand, *Juneteenth* is worth noting for its inclination towards technical experimentation. Ellison adapts cubist practice as stylistic strategies in this fictional work in cohering the literary and political work as a whole. *Juneteenth*'s innovative visual renderings of time, space, and memory are the some instances of cubist practice. In this novel, the narrative combines flashbacks and dream sequences with present events in the lives of protagonists.

Beginning as the men reunited in their present, about the 1950s, the majority of the narrative moves backward through their past to the birth of Bliss in the post-Reconstruction Era South. In weaving flashbacks of Hickman and Sunraider, the narrative reveals events in the lives of both characters. Ellison's modernist aesthetics, as Berndt Ostendorf views is jazz, "the true musical idiom of modernism" (97). Critics see Ellison's way of linking the formal experimentation with his literary aspirations as packed with political ideals. By adapting cubism's visual strategies as well as jazz syncopation and gospel call-and-response techniques, he reconfigures

traditional literary forms to reveal discomfoting effects of pluralism in American language and culture.

In *Juneteenth*, he seeks to show how America denies the moral complexities of its past and the democratic potential of its future by clinging to a false claim of racial, cultural, and economic homogeneity. In this novel, he creates complex histories and unsettled presents for his main characters in order to explore twentieth-century race relations and socio-political nature of the United States. He establishes the relationship by stitching together elements of the black experiences and elements of American popular culture into a patchwork myth of American identity. Susan L. Blake defines Ellison's writing trend as that of patch-work artist who amalgam different colors in a tapestry. Blake in this regard rightly claims:

Like a quilter making two-color patterns, Ellison matches black folk characters to white racist serotypes, the folklore of race relations to the conventions of southwest humour, and ultimately the emancipation of black folks from slavery to the emancipation of whites from racism. The patterns are set against a background of allusion to stories- historical and literary- that have already become myths of American identity. (69-71)

*Juneteenth* draws from many uniquely African American (and American) tributaries: sermons, folktales, the blues, the dozens, the swings and velocity of jazz. It borrows its form from the antiphonal call-and-response pattern of the Black church and the riffs and bass lines of jazz. Along with the presentation of hybrid subjectivity and identity of Rev. Bliss between the two cultures i.e. black culture and white culture, Ellison, in *Juneteenth*, unfolds the historical sketch of black and white relation in terms of culture and society. It raises the issues of culture, history and

other sociological facets under the domain of fictional representation creating the characters from the imagination which ultimately journeys towards the presentation of facts, events and the happening from the past up to the present.

The novel has received much acclaimed critical response since its publication. It has been reviewed by many scholars in journals and newspapers after its second publication in 2000. As many critics have poured their critical sensibilities on it, the criticisms on the text also vary owing to different perspectives.

John L. Brown considers that Ellison, in *Juneteenth* passionately defends equality and understanding, social justice. In this regard Brown declares:

*Juneteenth*, a mystic saga of race and entity, is made up of a selection of texts from vast, unfinished novel. Ellison himself writes in his notes “Hickman thinks of Negroes as the embodiment of American democratic promise, the last two who are fated to become the first the down trodden who shall be exalted. (157)

Brown is referring to Ellison that Negroes are the embodiment of American democratic promises. We see that Hickman attempts to give a moral centre to the myth of American democracy. The presence of black people in the senator’s office to warn the racist politician, Bliss about the upcoming danger in his life ,as shown in chapter first, depicts the reality of an incompletely free group of people who are the ‘possibilities of American democracy but suffering to emancipate white humanity. The Negroes are really a solution to the problems invited by the whites.

Nicholas Hoffman rebuts Ellison’s portrayal of Black characters as an American solution as well as a religious possibility and takes his (Ellison’s) reference of American national identity to cultural blackness as a positive effort. Hoffman acclaims “the society is not likely to become free of racism. Thus, it is necessary for

Negroes to free themselves by becoming their idea what a free people should be (46).

In Hoffman's view, Ellison is not a racial factionist rather he encourages all the Negroes to come up themselves as free people do.

Similarly in his critical commentary, Ralph Ellison's *Elusive Novel: Juneteenth*, Peter Applebome has talked about the liberation and complexities throughout it. Applebome considers the novel as "celebration of freedom as the title 'Juneteenth' refers to the day of liberation, and this book is very much about liberation and the complexities of liberation" (12). Applebome analyzes the significance of the title as the celebration of Emancipation. If we see the etymological meaning of the term, we find that it was coined by slaves. It has historical relevance; news of the proclamation officially reached Texas on June 19, 1865, when a Union general backed by nearly 2,000 troops arrived in the city of Galveston. The general, Gordon Granger, publicly announced that slavery in the United States had ended. Reactions among newly freed slaves ranged from shock and disbelief to jubilant celebration. That day has been known ever since as Juneteenth, a name derived from the slang combination of the words *June* and *nineteenth*. However, the complexities of liberation lie on the understanding of the relationship between black folk's liberation and "our common American liberation" (Applebome, 18).

Focusing upon the issue of identity crisis in relation to the protagonist of the novel who swings and chases the shadow in search of his mother, S. Krishnamurthy Aithan, in his critical commentary "*Juneteenth: A Novel For the New Millennium*" says:

Confused by the claim of a crazy white woman that he is her son and getting no help to discover his true identity Bliss chases shadows for a white. He believes for sometime a woman he sees on the screen as his

mother. He travels the length and the breadth of the country preaching, wooing and moviemaking, and finally becoming a politician. (115-117)

Bliss bears a black sentiment within him but developing the psychology of humiliation, he tries to evade the sentiment that is growing gradually. Thus, he flees with dual identity to chase the white shadow. Susan L. Blake explores the two-sidedness of the protagonist that Bliss- Sunraider portrays the duals sides of the white child, who is the child and the master, the son and the son-raider, kidnapper, castrator. The relationship between Senator Sunraider and his living past culminates when he is shot from the Senate visitors' gallery in a gesture that, ironically, recalls the assassination of Lincoln the Emancipator, of John and Robert Kennedy, of Malcolm X, and of Martin Luther King.

However, Ellison's project in this novel is to enlarge the context of the relationship between black people and American society. On doing so, Ellison uses the materials of black folklore and American popular culture to broaden the context of black experience. Susan L. Blake says, "As Hickman, in folk-preacher tradition, puts the experience of slavery into the context of Christian myth, Ellison puts it into the context of American myth" (66).

The aforementioned critical receptions of *Jeneteenth* make one realize that the novel has gathered immense response. Many of the researchers have explored the issue of black cultural identity and the double jeopardy caused by identity crisis. However, this present research ventures into the issue of how the black artists articulate their black identity by evoking their culture in the work of art.

This research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores a brief introduction of Ellison and his work, a short sketch of the novel in hand and the

critical responses it received. The second chapter constitutes the theoretical framework to be applied in this research. It involves an outline of the basic concept about race, racism and black aesthetics with many sub-chapters about the keywords. Locating the space of Ralph Ellison in the white world as well as among his folks, this chapter proves that Ellison as the pioneer in Black literature to amalgam the spirit of Black Aesthetics and demand of modernist style (maybe white's technique as blamed by his fellow blacks). The theoretical modality precedes the third chapter with a considerable length. Sorting out the relevant and major extracts from the texts as strong evidence, it tries to prove that Ellison articulates the unique black identity as an important stakeholder of American national identity by resisting the stereotypes. The theoretical framework based on the ideas of racism and black aesthetics will be used as parameter to analyze the text. Finally, the fourth chapter concludes the justifications and arguments heralded in the preceding chapters.

As this researcher also has got the bitter experience of being discriminated and marginalized as well as his ethnic identity distorted, the research is carried out with serious and extensive realization of marginalized people's longing for equality and of establishing a true identity. This researcher, during the research work enjoys his cultural richness and realizes that culture of one's own tribe is the healing factor to amend his forcefully damaged psyche. Thus, the researcher views that Ellison's strategy of amending the distorted identity of blacks and embracing jazz, blues, African American sermons and Black vernacular, is similar to that of the marginalized intellectuals of his (researcher's) community.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

### **Race, Racism and Back Aesthetics**

#### **Defining Race**

“Race” refers to the concept that signifies and symbolizes socio-political constructs that divides humankind in terms of distinctive characteristics. Generally, the categorization of race is understood with reference to biological basis. In this sense, hereditary transmission of physical characteristics defines race. Therefore, genetically a race may be defined as a group with gene frequencies differing from those of the other groups in the human species. Nevertheless, these hereditary differences turn out to be quite minimum if compared to a vast number of genes common to all human beings regardless of the race to which they belong. So, all human beings belong to the same species called *Homo sapiens*. Ashcroft delineates race as:

a term for the classification of the human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups. The notion of race assumes, firstly that humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that are transmitted ‘through the blood’ and permit distinctions to be made between ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ races. (198)

This division of human population into various factions is justified in terms of biological criteria. However, the criteria reaches up to mental characteristics such as intelligence, personality etc. Thus, such criterion is arbitrary.



### **Other Side of the Definition**

Although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics or the so called phenotype, selection of particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of 'race' and the categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves upon serious examination, to be imprecise. Although they refer to corporeal characteristics like skin color, hair texture, and eye shape, these categories acquired their significance from socio-historical reasons, not because they have any 'natural' importance. For this reason the boundaries of racially defined groups are both uncertain and subject to change. Thus, race is a socially constructed concept.

As race is a socio-cultural invention, that it bears no intrinsic relationship to actual human physical variations, but reflects social meanings imposed upon these variations. Thus, its meaning changes as historical/ social condition shifts.

### **Usage of the Term 'Race'**

Race is term historically used to describe a human population distinguishable from others based on shared biological traits. All living human beings belong to one species, *Homo sapiens*. The concept of race stems from the idea that the human species can be naturally subdivided into biologically distinct groups. In practice, however, scientists have found it impossible to separate humans into clearly defined races. Most scientists today reject the concept of biological race and instead see human biological variation as falling along a continuum. Nevertheless, race persists as a powerful social and cultural concept used to categorize people based on perceived differences in physical appearance and behavior.

Interest in defining races came from the recognition of easily visible differences among human groups. Around the world, human populations differ in their skin color, eye color and shape, hair color and texture, body shape, stature, limb proportions, and other physical characteristics. However, most anthropologists and biologists regard these differences between populations as largely superficial, resulting from adaptations to local climatic conditions during the most recent period of human evolution. Genetic analysis, which provides a deeper and more reliable measure of biological differences between people, reveals that overall, people are remarkably similar in their genetic makeup. Of the genetic differences that do exist, more variation occurs within so-called racial groups than between them. That is, two people from the same “race” are, on average, almost as biologically different from each other as any two people in the world chosen at random. This high degree of genetic diversity exists within populations because individuals from different populations have always intermingled and mated with each other. Given that populations have interbred for most of human history, most anthropologists reject the idea that “pure” races existed at some time in the distant past. Today, genetic analysis has replaced earlier methods of comparing color, shape, and size to establish degrees of relationship or common ancestry among human populations.

The term ‘race’ is often misunderstood and misused. It is often confused with ethnicity, an ambiguous term that refers mostly, though not exclusively, to cultural (non-biological) differences between groups. An ethnic group derives its identity from its distinctive customs, language, ancestry, place of origin, or style of dress. For example, the Hispanic ethnic group comprises people who trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking countries in the Western Hemisphere. Although some people assume Hispanics have a common genetic heritage, in reality they share only a

language. Members of an ethnic group with a common geographic origin often do share similar physical features. But people of the same ethnic group may also have very different physical appearances, and conversely, people of different ethnic groups may look quite similar. People may also mistakenly use the term *race* to refer to a religion, culture, or nationality—as in the Jewish race or the Italian race—whose members may or may not share a common ancestry. The term *race* is also sometimes used to refer to the entire human species, as in the ‘human race’. In everyday language, the distinction between race and ethnicity has become blurred, and many people use the terms to mean the same thing.

Many people believe, falsely, that differences in physical appearance have something to do with differences in the behavior, attitude, intelligence, or intrinsic worth of people. These beliefs promote *racism*, prejudice or animosity against people perceived to belong to other races. At its worst, racism has inspired the abuse and extermination of enormous numbers of people. Recent historical examples included the near-extirmination of Native Americans by European settlers of the Americas between the 16th and 20th centuries, the capture and export of Africans for use as slaves in the Americas from the early 17th to the mid-19th century, the extermination of Jews in Europe by German Nazis during World War II (1939-1945), and the system of apartheid perpetrated by Afrikaners against all nonwhite peoples in South Africa.

Race is an umbrella term which captures wide varieties of meaning according to its usage. People of different interests in different historical context used the term in different ways. From the earlier human history to till now, the term bears its meaning in terms of prejudice, discrimination, inequality, injustice and so on. If we

trace out the ancient human history, we find the usage of the term as loaded with the interest of the ruler to impose the inhuman system, over the 'ruled', namely slavery.

In ancient Greece, Greeks captured slaves after raiding the hamlets of far and wide and considered the non-Greeks as 'barbarians'. They distinguished themselves with 'other' on the basis of cultures, background, and varying geographical areas. Likewise, in the Hellenic world, the Ethiopians and blonde Scythians were regarded inferior to the Greeks. Moreover, the usage of the category of race to classify human population into many factions on the basis of physical characteristics is relatively recent.

The merchant capitalists in the seventeenth century institutionalized racial prejudice in terms of slavery. For their commercial plantation of cash crops, they needed massive quantities of labour power and brought millions of Africans in the New World. Thus, the Indians and then Blacks were enslaved. Initially, they justified slavery system reasoning that Blacks and Indians were not Christians that they were 'infidels'. However, one of the big tasks of Christian world was to convert non-Christian people into Christianity, thereby integrating them into and making them part of the western Christian world which placed a burden on the Christians to treat the new converts equally. Thus, "the myth of black race that is inferior" as Dough Jenness in his seminal essay *Origin of Myth of Race* states was developed to rationalize the institution of enslavement of blacks from Africa. Jenness further proclaims:

...but the ideological rationalism did not stand the test of time because as Indians and Blacks became Christians, it could no longer justify keeping them in bondage. In its place a more insidious and long-lasting edifice was built: the concept of 'race' on the basis of skin color. (293)

This rationalization made the Blacks not only temporary inferior but one with which they would remain so generation after generation. Skin color was the physical character signalled out to brand an entire part of human race. Like ranchers would put a brand on cattle, it made hard for the Blacks to escape the slaveholders. Everyone in the society knew that if you had black skin, either you were a slave or could be enslaved. Thus, skin color became a convenient mechanism for the enslavement of millions of labourers.

Race has been a cause of more “misunderstanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in a language” (Brace 116). It is in fact, a prejudice conditioned by perception. This perception dehumanizes people by stereotyping them, by denying them, their variations and complexity on the basis of their physical, mental, moral, social and religious differences, which is socially formed notion. It includes the superiority complex of one’s own race or ethnic group over others. Such indoctrinated mindset of the ‘ruler’ created hierarchy between whites and blacks. They garnered the fantasy of the word ‘white’ with positive connotation that there were inevitable associations of white with light and, therefore safety and spiritual cleanliness, purity, transcendence, virtues and so on whereas blacks with dark and, therefore danger and dirt, sin and number of negative terms.

During the Elizabethan period, whites exaggerated the variation in skin shade by calling slave Africans ‘blacks’ or using Spanish and Portuguese term ‘negroes’ for the purpose of abuse. Race has been a cause of more “misunderstanding and human suffering than anything else that can be associated with a single word in a language” (Brace116). It is, in fact, a prejudice conditioned by perceptions. It dehumanizes people by stereotyping them, by denying them, their variations and complexity on the basis of physical, mental, moral, social, and religious variety which is socially formed

notion. Race includes the ‘superiority complex’ of one’s own race or ethnic group over the other.

America and other European countries bear the long history of racist social practices for example; the white racist society created the hierarchy between Whites and Blacks. Ironically, whites always tried to ‘define, and represent’ their black counterparts as inferior and unfinished European as Chinua Achebe assesses in his critical essay entitled, “Colonialist Criticism”. Achebe repudiates the white racist-colonialist mentality of representing Blacks and marks this mindset as fault which stem from the assumptions that African America is “my brother , but the junior brother”(70). Achebe condemns white racist mentality:

In the literary field too, equally drawn to the big brother arrogance, they see the Black writer as a somewhat unfinished European who with patient guidance will grow one day and write like every other European, but meanwhile must be humble, must learn all he can and while at it give due credit to his teachers in the form of either direct praise or, even better since praise sometimes goes bad and becomes embarrassing, manifest self-contempt. (Achebe, 38-46)

Comparatively, the usage of the term ‘race’ with the purpose is a recent social practice. During the Elizabethan era, The term ‘Negro race’ was meant to be black, ugly, cruel, sexual, rampant and barely human. In the Victorian era, many racists were of the opinion that:

We could divide human beings into smaller number of groups, called races; in such a way that all the human members of these races shared certain fundamental, biologically heritable, moral, intellectual

characteristics with each other they did not share with the members of any other races. (Appiah, 275-277)

The world saw lots of social, economic, intellectual and political upheavals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The growth of invasion, 'conquest' and migration gave birth to heterogeneous world population. The term 'race' became much more poignant during the colonial period when the people of different places came into contact with one another. The division of human society in the name of race is inextricable from the need of colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject people and hence justify the imperial enterprise. It provides impetus to draw a blind distinction between 'civilized' and 'primitive', 'rational' and 'irrational' and the same necessity for the hierarchisation of human types. It quickly became supportive ideas to fulfill their imperial mission, dominance, and 'enlightenment'. Thus, the study or racial doctrines and ideologies "took new mode during post-enlightenment period and reached its height during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it was defined according the idea that races embodied a package of fixed physical and mental traits". (Bulmer and Solomon18)

With the course of time, the twentieth century brought a change in the theoretical approach towards race. The newly introduced thought was quite liberal and focused on 'monogenism', the idea that there is only one species of man living on the earth today. Human history witnessed the role of great peoples' movement to instigate such changes which institutionalize the belief that there are no such classifications as Negroes, Caucasian, and Mongoloid which have importance for biological purposes, if any there is no hierarchy between them as practised in the past.

## Study of Racism

Racism is defined as a set of beliefs that valorizes the superiority of one's own race over than that of others. This belief system discriminates the human types on the basis of physical characteristics which is the product of prejudice and stereotypical mode of thoughts based on color or race. It involves the superiority of one group, ethnicity of its cultural practices over the 'other' because the entitled inferior group lacks the set of criteria prescribed by the privileged group. Racism provides symbolic support for social structures, as sustained relative domination.

Racism encompasses the elements of history, culture and ethnicity. It takes new shape according to the fluctuation of difference social, political and cultural institution in course of time. Instead of following the notion of singularity, it involves diverse scholarly ideas which has been shaped and deformed by several power politics. Racist ideologies and practice have distinct meanings bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle. George Mosses provides a clear argument about its socio-historical reality. He writes:

Racism has its foundation both in the enlightenment and in the revival of the eighteenth century. It was a product of the preoccupation with the rational universe, nature and aesthetics, as well as with emphasis upon the eternal forces of religious emotion and man's soul. It was part too, of the drive to define man's place in nature and of the hope for an ordered, healthy and happy world. (41-44)

During the nineteenth natural scientist made an attempt to prove the racial differences between the Whites and Blacks through the biological and scientific criteria. After the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, the racist scholar tried to hypothesize the notion of racial inferiority giving it a scientific veneer. Doug



Jenness regards “the raft of so-called scientists were brought onto prove that it was through natural selection and evolution that Blacks were closer the apes in the evolutionary chain”. (203)

Because of the tendency of giving the political interest (as it was necessary for the whites to maintain the strata by oppressing the Blacks) a scientific color, scientific racism emerged. They tried to establish superiority of whites over the Blacks over the Blacks declaring that blacks have smaller size and shape of skull than the whites. Likewise, conducting several IQ tests, they try to justify the so called inferiority of the Blacks race on the basis of the objective of the objective data. The politics of such racial research is to rule over the oppressed group. The hidden truth is that though waged with scientific weapons the goal in this has always been political; indeed the debate has no strictly scientific purpose or value.

Thus making science as an authority to propound and perpetuate the exciting the racial prejudices, racial scientists diverted the issue to suit their interest. Therefore, the study of racism in twentieth century is the study of political racism because genetic differences between the Blacks and Whites are studied under the scientific criteria giving the political color.

While we talk about racism different angles of reception by the people in society, the issue of the level of people’s involvement in this process is mention worthy. Racism exists in both conscious and unconscious, as well as in personal and collective level. Whatever its existence is, the effect is very much disastrous and damaging to the victims and the perpetrators if it is practised in an unhealthy manner. Accordingly, Gerzina has rightly states:

...racism at individual level involves a misguided personal belief that an entire social group is deficient or superior

because of a set of moral, intellectual or a cultural traits, set of beliefs, behaviours ... that are thought to be indicated by the groups' biological origin. (126)

It also takes places both in explicit and implicit level. The discrimination made on a direct or open mode of behaviour is the explicit one which is also known as overt racism whereas the implied or hidden mode of discriminating attitude takes place in implicit or covert racism. Racism, after all, begins at personal level. No one is born racist rather it is acquired through social process. When an individual nurtures racist doctrine learned by the society, the individual level of racism takes the form of institutional racism which ultimately culminates into the cultural racism. Actually, it provides a stamp of legality. Afterwards it becomes the mindset or the system/institution which is actually very difficult to phase out.

### **Reflection on American Racism**

American racism incorporates with centuries of slavery system ,decades long legal segregation ,the failure of the reconstruction project and the Emancipation as mirrored in the experience of African American in terms of their deferred dream , and sporadic racial conflict in the recent democratic state.

If we assess the history of racism in American soil, we are pushed back to centuries. With the arrival of European settlers in America, they brought with them some menial labourers from the west coast of Africa and later this population increased very swiftly .As a result, the whole southern and northern part of America including some of European continent became full of Black population. From this period onwards, the relationship the Whites and the Blacks developed as that of master and slave respectively. The inclination of Whites to exploit Blacks as slaves came from ethnocentrism, hierarchical beliefs and prejudice against blackness all

leading to the idea that Africans were an inferior-unchristian people who could be held as a property. This set of mind allegedly pronounced that slaves were of barbarous, wild, savage and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the law, customs, and practices.

Slavery system in America reflects the racial exclusivity as well as uprooting, domination and dishonour of life and devoid of community support. The life of Blacks during the slavery is characterized by extreme pain and misery. Inhuman treatment, sexual exploitation and physical torture became rampant. The separation of family members and massive physical torture was a day-to-day phenomenon. Furthermore, the blacks endured cultural hegemony as the master of the plantation sought to rule the lives of the slaves and tried to impose his norms and values on them. Kevin Thomas Miles reveals the bitter reality of American racism:

The African was.... defined as an inferior human being. The representation of the African as 'other' singled phenotypical and cultural characteristics as evidence of the inferiority and attributed condition of Africans therefore constituted the measure of European progress and civilization. (Miles30)

The American Revolution led the Northern states to adopt gradual emancipation plans whereas in southern states where the economy was agrarian and slave-based, slavery remained pretty much untouched. The founding fathers provided for, but delayed for decades, the termination of American participation in the international assured federal support for the capture and return of fugitive slaves. When the Virginia statesman and slaveholder Thomas Jefferson, became the third president of the U.S., nine out of ten were still enslaved, however, ad living below the Mason-Dixon Line that divided the North from the South. They build and tended the

homes of their white masters, tilled the fields their masters owned, and toiled in their masters' workshop and factories.

Up from the slavery, the study of American racism involves the discussion of the Civil war that erupted in 1861 and ended in the defeat of long nightmare, 'slaveocracy'. By the war's end, the transplanted Africans who had endured bondage and grown in great numbers had been transformed from assorted African identities into a new people an amalgam of Black, White, and Red humanity. However, they had become acculturated, absorbed with an American consciousness and a desire to attain the 'American Dream'. Civil war brought a formal end to slavery in 1865 and the subsequent ratifications of the fourteenth and fifteenth Amendment guaranteeing black citizenship and voting right which created great hopes among African-American that the great day of jubilee had arrived, that the dark night of racial degradation was forever over.

But as Robinson observes that the account of Black advancement in the south after slavery and the subsequent revival of white supremacy is a sad chapter in American history. He declares, "the nation's white leadership grew tired of "the Negro question" during the years following the civil wars and became more committed to selectional reconciliation than the protection of African Americans' newly granted rights" (63).

The picture of Black plantation life in the south was more painful. In his critical essay, "In Search of Freedom: Slave Life and Culture in the Antebellum South", Norrice T. Jones explores the works, family, and religion of the masses of former slaves and the ways forced Black labourers struggled to survive and defeat the power of slaveocracy. He notes that strong sense of community often surfaced in their quarter, a sequestered part of plantation where resident whites rarely turned. He

concludes that the “semi-autonomous world became breeding ground for subtle and covert form of day-to-day resistance as well as more dramatic kind of defiance” (255).

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, racism has come to be seen as having three dimensions: prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism. Prejudice refers to unbounded and usually negative beliefs and attitudes about racially defined groups and individuals; stereotypes, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and the like. Discrimination directs attention towards preferential or determined actions taken toward racially defined groups and individuals because of race. Finally, institutional or structural racism stands for a product of the systematic allocation of resources, privileges, and rights differentially by race; it is distributed across the whole range of social institutions both historically and in the present and it does not require intention of agency to be perpetuated.

The constant humiliation delivered by the white racist in African American to defy the law of segregation which remained as ruins of slavery. Segregation in the United States prevailed in terms of legal or social practice of separating people on the basis of their race or ethnicity. Segregation by law, or *de jure* segregation, occurred when local, state, or national laws required racial separation, or where the laws explicitly allowed segregation. *De jure* segregation has been prohibited in the United States since the mid-1960s.

*De facto* segregation or segregation in fact, occurs when social practice, political acts, economic circumstances, or public policy result in the separation of people by race or ethnicity even though no laws requires or authorizes racial separation. *De facto* segregation has continued even when state and federal civil rights laws have explicitly prohibited racial segregation. The Congress of the United

States prohibited legally sanctioned segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. At the end of the 20th century, de facto segregation remained a problem in many places in the United States. De facto segregation has resulted from residential housing patterns, economic factors, personal choice, white flight from central cities, and private, and often illegal, discrimination by home owners, real estate agents, and lending institutions. The results are often segregated neighborhoods, and consequently segregated schools, recreational facilities, and other public and private institutions. This state sanctioned segregation, prejudice and discrimination and use of violence in their peaceful rally for equality to pursue the American Dream in the land of opportunity, forced them to form an alternative racial strategies that ran along a spectrum of attitudes and actions ranging from assimilation to separation.

Tension between these two positions characterized Black protest thought from the 1890s through the two World Wars into the 1960s. These divergent strands of thought were evident in the century- the conservative educator, Booker T. Washington, who disavowed integration and preached accommodation; the Marxist scholar, radical integrationist and advocate of organized protest, W.E.B. DuBois; the Jamaican immigrant pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey, who supported selective black repatriation in Africa; the militant Christian social reformer, integrationist and advocate of non- violent protest, Martin Luther King, Jr. ; and the vocal Black Muslim separatist, Malcolm X. Although King was personally active in the Second Reconstruction following World War II, the theories and strategies associated with each of these thinkers efficient the broad struggle for freedom and justice that emerged in 1950s. Clayborne Carson traces the Civil Rights Movement from its initial integrationist phase through the enunciation of the somewhat separatist concept of Black Power. For Carson, Martin Luther King who emerged as the most forceful

leader of the movement during the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott in 1955-1956, and the major black organization the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) stand out as key actors in the struggle that ended 'Jim Crow' in the south and led to the passage of major black rights law by US Congress in the mid 1960s. The crusade, waged in alliance with liberal whites, often Jewish organizations and students, set the stage for the existence, integration between then and now of trained and talented blacks into the American mainstream.

However, the integrated campaign for black rights brought a serious fragmentation of the movement. It was then that seething ghetto discontent erupted in bloody and costly riots across the country as Langston Hughes in his poem *Harlem* interrogates the white society "what happens to a dream deferred/.../or does it explode" (1..11)? As Hughes predicted in this poem the racial conflict took the violent confrontations, and the riots and burnings in Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, Newark and other major cities. During 1960s along with the massive protests against Vietnam, black separatist gained mass appeal, the alliance of blacks and Jews was broken over strong political differences, and the Black Panthers and The Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) appeared.

In literary field too, there were two poles of African American writers: one who associated themselves with The Black Arts Movement producing literary works about black audience, addressing the lower-class black mass and evoking black cultural artifacts in order to nurture the Black Power Concept whereas the other attempted to raise the issue of cultural identity by evoking the modernist form with which they intended to call the white audience for broader and liberal mindset and

conveying the message that “blacks are whites and whites are blacks ..... American identity is the integrated identity of the white-black identity as a whole. (Ellison, 52)

In the literature produced by whites, Blacks are ‘represented’ as savage, bumpkin, mugger, uncivilized, irrational, and immature and so on. These stereotypes whites ‘created’ have damaged the identity of the blacks. As a result, the blacks developed the psychology of humiliation for generations. To resolve the conflict between the distorted identity and the real identity, African American writers take retreat from their unique culture which actually helped them build confidence as a writer, preserve the root culture and amend the stereotypical identity. Indeed, unique African American culture gives a hard blow to racial insult prevailed in letters and the society.

### **Literary Response to Inequality, Prejudice and Discrimination**

African Americans, in the modern American society are trying to overcome the adversity of racial inequality, prejudice and discrimination by depicting the distinct black culture in their writings. To restore race pride and rehabilitate the damaged psyche of the black multitudes based on reverence of their African roots, they proposed not only a new racial nomenclature- that of black of African American in place of Negro. They promoted with major success, the use of African grab, hair styles, languages, names, dances, art, religion, as well as African-delivered value system. Most importantly, they have called for the study of black history from an Afro centric perspective.

Since their works first appeared in the eighteenth century, African-American writers have voice distinctive strains which have deeply affected the tone and the tenor of African literature. Begging with the early Black poets Phyllis Wheatley of Boston, they have illuminated, through various genres, the African American



experiences and frequently advanced social agenda. Examples of such efforts appear in black literature of the early nineteenth century as reflected in African American oral tradition, the slave narratives, the Harlem of the 1920s, the Black Aesthetic Movement of the 1970s, and the present work of leading black writers like Richard Wrights, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and so on.

Addressing the critical issues of culture and identity, the rapid resurrection and restoration of black power in the land of their ancestors produced among the African Americans a wave of new awareness and appreciation of their identity and heritage. In his assessment of African American literature, published in 1957 book, *White Man, Listen!*, Richard Wright says, “The negro is America’s metaphor” (51). By this he meant not only that blacks were the symbolic embodiment of the history of America in the sense of being outcast people trying to find a new identity in the new world but also that they were, through the circumstances of being forced to live in a country whose laws, customs, and instruments were leveled against them which is constant reminders of the anguish of being without an identity. Instead white American has charged the Negro American with being without a past or tradition just s he himself has been so charged by European and American critics with a nostalgia for the stability typical of European cultures. But Wrights saw:

...the African- American quest for an identity, in his struggle against human alienation, against being a symbol of the abyss of estrangement, a deep political and philosophical resonance that, in fact, gave America both an aesthetic- blues, jazz music- and crucial forms of social engagement against the idea of alienation: first, abolition, then Reconstruction, and, finally, the Civil Rights Movement and these

quests for identities strengthen and inform African American literature.

(52)

When examined the history of African American writings, we find that the Black writers explored with variety of subject matter and theme ranging from slave narrative to captivity narrative and autobiographical and confessional writing to the highly modernist form of writings. Whatever their style and techniques is, all of them tried to depict the African American issue in their writings. Gerald Early assesses the trend prevalence among African American writers. Early states:

Slave narrative is the earliest form of black American writing that formed a coherent body of work, that expressed a plain ideological task and purpose and set forth the themes of identity and community experience that were to characterize all the writing that came after.

(178)

Moreover, the problem faced by the early Black writers was quite painful. Because they were unable, without the aid of a vouching white editor or friend, to appear before the public as guarantors of their own stories, black authors at the earlier stage were at a severe disadvantage. Finally, there was the problem of audience- whom the 'slave narrator wished to address and why. Obviously, in this instance, the slave narrator desired to move white readers to act against slavery. This means that the literature had to present the black narrator as palatable to whites who were, almost exclusively, committed to white supremacist ideals. The black narrator and all black writers are therefore accused of ignoring the fact of being representative of his race and of neglecting to cast undue aspersions upon it.

On the other hand, black literature has been charged over the years by white critics with- being more than social protest, or more sociological or a literature

without technique, style or literariness. But the contradiction of their critique lies in the depiction black community to be dependent, precarious, improvised, and areas or configurations meant to be polished and contained. Unquestionably, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1952 as an antislavery novel created lots of difficulties in Black communities. The name of title character was to become a hated epithet among blacks and long shelf-life of the work as popular theater was to have a number of troubling stereotypes endure as near-myths in the American imagination.

That is to say, whites used slave narratives as weapon in order to distort the reality of Blacks whereas for the Black writers it was meant both to be a protest, crossover literature for the whites to help the whites understand the true nature of slavery of the Black American experience and, in some sense, a 'race literature' addressing the needs of black self-esteem and racial community.

In the age of freedom, since Civil War, there have been three crucial periods for African American literature: The New Negro of Harlem Renaissance era, the early Civil Rights era of the 1950s. During these periods, the African American writers had an incredible strength and self-confidence to express the meaning and function of African American literature. The spirituals, gospels, Blues, along with jazz and Black popular music including rap-all embody African American Literature. Writer like Ralph Ellison resists the stereotyping depiction of African American people, their experiences, their culture and work of arts in terms of slavery and segregation only. Drawing from African American cultural forms, including sermons, the folk tales, the dozens, the blues, and the jazz to articulate unique Black identity as an important stakeholder of American national identity. Furthermore, he observes that lack culture has long "fascinated white imagination and frequency, seduced whites into becoming

culturally part black without realizing it” (366). The cultural codes remain the most inferential in shaping literary in him.

Unlike the white writers, most frequently studies literature courses, African American writers were created mostly by need rather than by desire. There are obvious reasons more the more utilitarian motives of African American writers, protest against unjust treatment, search for the Black identity, arguments about equal facilities are the major themes of their writings. Recovering their annihilated history and reconstructing their disturbed identity, writers like DuBois and Hughes make bold representation and expression of Black cultural identification in their aesthetics without fear, shame and humiliation. They concentrate on the issue of upliftment, empowerment and valorization of their own culture. Although much of the works of Black writers still exhibited the despair, hopelessness that one found in Richard Wrights, some like James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison quite critically, muted elements of social protest by going off in new direction, writing more textured, densely complex works about the inner psychological life of Black people.

### **Black Aesthetics**

First articulated by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) in *The Myth of Negro Literature* (1962), the concept Black Aesthetics signals the reversal of previous understanding of African American artistic production. M. H. Abrams claims:

The Black Aesthetics called for the exploration of energy and freshness of the vernacular, in rhythms and modes emulating jazz and the Blues, applied especially to the lives and concerns of lower-class blacks, and addressed especially to a Black mass audience. (12)

The Black Aesthetics was voiced or supported by the representative writers in the movement rejected, as aspects of domination by white culture. Whereas the earlier

critics called for the integration of Black Art in mainstream America, Black Aestheticians demanded that African American artists, look not to the white middle-class for their artistic criteria, but to their one unique and vibrant culture. As formulated by the critic and poet Larry Neal, the Black Aesthetic “purposes is separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology” (Abram, 19). Privileging the vernacular and relying the example set by Black jazz musicians, the Black Aesthetics is a profoundly non-assimilationist concept insisting that Black culture alone is enough to produce and legitimate the works of African American arts. Larry Neal calls for the integral relationship between Black Art and Black poem:

....Let Black people understand  
 that they are the lovers and the sons  
 Of lovers and warriors and sons  
 Of warriors Are poems and poets and  
 All the loveliness here in the world. (22-26)

In the writings and work of Black artists in particular through the debate centered on questions of images, social value and aesthetics; more specifically, they were “about the business of destroying and myth that have crippled and degraded Black people, and the institution of new images and myth that will liberate them” (Fuller 22). The premise behind this particular belief and practice was that white Americans’ traditional consideration of the cultural value of Black people were poisonous if Black people themselves ingested such ideas or tried to practice them. The notion that Black culture and aesthetics (when Black people were granted that much credit by their critics) were forever inferior to or dependent upon European-derived aesthetics would inevitably lead to practices that would cause Black people to detest, and perhaps even destroy, themselves. According to critics like Addison

Gayle, Maulana Ron Karenga, Amiri Baraka, and Lerry Neal, the responsibility of the Black artist was to use the word, to use language as a tool invested with the power to transform ideas generated by Black people into action, especially revolutionary action. Fuller further declares:

In essence, then, the advocates of the new Black Aesthetics perceived the Black artist's role as that of a direct advocate of the Black masses and a staunch adversary of any agency that upheld oppressive stereotypes, whether that agency originated with or outside of Black communities. (65)

Only Black artists are capable of creating and judging literature that represents Black communities, a literature that would replace negative myths about African Americans with new narratives that extolled the virtues within the community that those outside the community had previously classified as vices.

### **The Black Aesthetics in Black Novel**

Black writer adopts a new formal model for Black literary art by evoking their own cultural experiences. There are two major repositories for abstracted models representative of the Afro-American people. On the one hand, the Afro-American novelists can create his models from the content of the value system basic to the Black American social group. The body of novels molded from this repository is not reflective of anything peculiar to Black people since the scale of values typical of Black Americans is also typical of other social groups with a cosmology similar to that of the Black American.

In the past, the African American novelists seeking to be representative of his people have generally designed the metaphysical structure of their novels to reflect the ideological component of Black American culture. On the other hand, the African

American novelists can create their models from the formal symbols and modes of expressions derived from the culture of Black Americans. The body of novels molded from his repository is reflective of the African American people, because these formal elements contain qualities of the distinctive personality of the Black American social group arrived at through the common experience of the group. These novels constitute the basis for a 'Black Aesthetics' elaborated in literary form.

The perpetual development of African American literature has led to the prominence of oral art forms in Afro American society. These art forms provide the major repositories for the Black novelists in his attempt to mold a written medium foreign to his culture into an expression of his native culture. As a result, one major source for the novelist is search of formal models to incorporate into metaphysical structure.

All Black music may be classified as processes of expression designed to imitate the human voice. Miami Amiri Baraka, in describing the impact of orality on Black music, has said:

Even the purely instrumental music of the American Negro contains constant reference to vocal music. Blues-playing is the closest imitation of the human voice of any music I have heard; the vocal effects the jazz musicians have delighted in from Bunk Johnson to Ornette Coleman are evidence of this. (Wade and Wade, 28)

Ellison incorporates jazz pattern in his *Invisible Man*. In the universe of Ellison's protagonist, man's life is a series of antiphonal calls in search of identity. The need for recognition of his ego moves man to seek identity from others through their understanding of his sensory messages, both aural and visual. In a memorable scene, the protagonist youthful, aloof, optimistic, reflecting the pragmatism of the

present- engages in antiphonal duet with a cart man –a prototypical folk character, extroverted, with blacks yet wary of whites, rich in the knowledge of native music and folklore, suggestive of the uninhibited quality of the past. The second form of Black music which has been employed by the Black novelists is the Blues .The Blues are secular Black music, vocal or instrumental, whose musical structure consists of a variation of statement of a theme, a repetition of the theme, and a resolution of the theme. One means of adapting the Blues structure to the novels is by incorporating the character, theme, and plot of the Blues in the metaphysical structure of the novels. In *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950), *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953), *Simple Stakes a Claim* (1957), Langston Hughes moulds his work out of the psychology and philosophy of the blues.

Another major source for formal models that can be incorporated into the metaphysical structure of the novel is the oral folklore of the Black American. Characteristically, the masses of people in an oral culture evolve a code of symbolism indicative of those customs, attitude and belief derived from their common experiences. The system of symbols is transmitted by word of mouth to succeeding generations. One form of oral folklore produced by the African American is the folk tale, a fictional narrative in prose or poetry delivered orally. Likewise, Black speech idiom itself is another source for models of form which can be incorporated into the metaphysical structure of the novel. In the oral culture, demonstrating facility in verbal contest is a primary means of acquiring prestige within the group. Historically, the Black American has evolved a set of oral contest rituals to release tension, as well as to determine status. One of the oral rituals is ‘rapping’ - talking for the purpose of entertaining and gaining rapport with an audience. Rapping embodies the structural characteristics is that it seeks to invoke the antiphonal responses from the audience.



The major subject for the 'rap' tends to be 'I', and the primary function of the 'rapping' is the stimulation of the individual ego by impressing the group with one's exploits so as to achieve self-actualization.

These models discussed above embody the major theme of the quest for cultural identity announcing the Black's willingness to trust his own experiences, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his master to define these crucial matters for him. In the succeeding chapter, the theoretical modality discussed above will be used as a tool to analyze the text in detail.

### Chapter Three: Textual Analysis

#### Articulation of African American Identity in *Juneteenth*

Ralph Ellison's posthumously published novel, *Juneteenth* enunciates the meaningful presence of African American culture in American scenario. Drawing from the unique black cultural experiences; sermons, folktales, the blues, the dozens, the swing and jazz, Ellison in this fictional work seeks to confirm Black culture as the important stake holder of American identity. The African American identity has been ignored and distorted so far within white structure but *Juneteenth* interrogates the evil practices that American society endeavored so long to set up as structure. By this token, Ellison equally confirms a dignified space for the African American culture to be secured thereby offering his audience to admire the differences existed in human society and culture. His effort to place the basics of black folklore at the center of a national culture trace a journey to an imagined place in order to bring back a magical object that could redeem the American project of democracy. He realizes that black folklore is necessary for the living for a nation. However, Ellison actually advocates for cooperation, equality and freedom. Beyond the issue of mere racism, he goes to the level of humanity, of wholeness, of connected identity. Indeed, Ellison's *Juneteenth* provides an antidote to racism. Ellison considers that in order to have racial harmony of peace in a nation state, the pluralistic in terms of race, religion, and ethnicity must be arranged in such a manner that none of its members are obliged to think the society is unjust. Correspondingly, it explores the way that race or ethnicity, nationhood, identity, and the definitions of democracy in modern America intertwine, shift, or are perverted over time.

Marginalized for decades, the African American has now become the focal point in the picture. Black is no longer the shadows, hidden as in the works of mainstream writers. Ellison makes an effort to give credence to his culture and experiences of his people in the literary canvas. *Juneteenth*, therefore, puts A.Z. Hickman at the epicenter of its narrative. As his name signifies the initials “A.Z.”, representing the first and the last letters of the alphabet, the narrative begins and ends with him. As Bliss lies dying in the hospital, he, however, finds in Hickman’s company peace and comfort no one else can bring him. By giving Hickman the role of a parent and soul-rescuer to a white boy, Ellison compels his readers to suspend disbelief in his narrative of love between blacks and whites.

Ellison, in this novel portrays the way African American people live with patience and tolerance as a solution to inequality, injustice and discrimination prevalent in American society. The narrative centers on two primary characters: the African American preacher Alonzo Z. Hickman and a racist white senator Adam Sunraider. It tells the story of a black jazzman turned minister named Hickman, who raises a little boy of ambiguous background, bringing him up as a black child although he looks white. This little boy, Bliss runs away and grows up to be a race-baiting senator from New England state. After decades of separation, Hickman hears ominous tidings of danger hovering around Sunraider. The narrative begins with Hickman’s and the members of his congregation’s repeated attempt to meet the senator. He has arrived in Washington with a group of forty-three elderly members of his congregation in a special chartered plane to warn his prodigal son about the assassination plot against him but is allowed nowhere near the senator. Hickman and his groups rather gather in the senate balcony to listen to Sunraider who delivers a long spellbinding speech which becomes a bitter racist diatribe. There, suddenly

Hickman's worst fear comes true" a young black man rises up in the gallery and shoots the Senator. Reeling from the impact of several bullets, Senator Sunraider loses control. "'Lord,' he heard," his standard idiom giving way to African American vernacular, "LAWD, WHY HAST THOU..." (26). To his astonishment, the Senator recognizes Hickman's voice responding from above him: "For Thou hast forsaken ..... me" (27). After being shot, the politician summons Hickman to his side of hospital bed and their conversations spin out their shared past. Thus, the novel's main plot consists of an extended conversation between Hickman and Sunraider. Through memory, Hickman forces the former Bliss to confront his, and, by extension, America's heritage. The crux of the plot lies on Sunraider's evasion of his existence as a direct beneficiary of the richness of African American culture into a race-baiting segregationist.

*Juneteenth* focuses on a man's evasion of identity. Senator Sunraider attempts in vain but it turns out to be counter-productive: to erase his personal history by embracing racial hatred. Ellison perceives that the tendency of fantasizing America without Blacks is very common. But he claims America cannot gain its identity without African American. Ellison comprehends American identity as a whole; not merely blacks nor the whites; so black's identity offers a part of definition to this great nation. He further proclaims:

Materially, psychologically and culturally, part of the nation's heritage is Negro American, and whatever it becomes will be shaped in part by the Negro's presence. Which is fortunate, for today it is the black American who puts pressure upon the nation to live up to its ideal. It is he who gives creative tension to our struggle for justice and for the

elimination of those factors, social and psychological, which make for slums and shaky communities. (223-225)

In Hickman's mind too, "Negroes [were] the embodiment of American democratic promises, as last who are fated to become the first, the down trodden who shall be exalted" (355). This perspective on the place of African Americans fits the scheme and the structure of the novel. It is also, in Ellison's commanding use of language, a brilliant historical assessment because the story is set in the year 1957-58; Ellison places his characters at the cusp of a tremendous historical transition. As America moves quickly towards the revolutionary changes brought by what Ellison fondly refers to Negro Freedom Movement and we know as the Civil Rights Movement, he attempts to take us back in time, to the 20s and 30s when young Bliss is brought up in the black world.

Over and over, Ellison insists that whatever else a person is, the true American is also somehow black by absorbing and embracing his or her cultural blackness. In this novel, Bliss represents the common sentiment of American white. Bit by bit, the narrative reveals the fact that Hickman adopts baby Bliss from a white woman, whose accusations has led lynching of Hickman's brother. By turning the boy into his protégé, Hickman hopes to redeem this senseless death and transcend the racial hatred his people have endured. Although this promising babe wins the love and acceptance of Hickman's Baptist congregation something happens during a Juneteenth celebration that derails Bliss's life. A crazed white woman appears and declares that Bliss is her long-lost son. Hickman's congregation thwarts her efforts to kidnap Bliss, but the boy henceforth longs for the mother he never knew. In time he is reborn, not as Hickman's dreamed of redeemer of racial prejudice but as a con man and

politician. In each of these new incarnations, he will use the rhetorical skills he has learned from Hickman for selfish, secular ends.

Although completely white in appearance and blood, Bliss develops an incredible understanding of black culture and religion. Hickman also righteously devotes to cultivate Bliss's abilities because he sees in Bliss the qualities of a savior, not only for individual blacks but for America. Using African American sermon and preaching, Hickman wants to garner Bliss as blessing to be the tie that binds blacks and whites. Instead, Bliss runs from his adoptive father to pursue filmmaking, sleep with women, make millions and eventually turn into his former, younger self: white, racist Senator Adam Sunraider. For Bliss black culture is an integrated pattern of his knowledge and belief and overall identity. However, he strives to forget the black spirit buried within white skin. As a result, he embraces racial hatred. Sunraider exemplifies American racism which betrays nation's birth in a racially amalgamated culture.

The reactions of Bliss being raised in the black community of the 1920s South and being inculcated with its cultural values yields come stimulating reading. In this novel, Ellison uses the black church to reveal the strength of black experience and black folk culture. The resurrection scenes are not only satirical but also provide a penetrating view of the African American community's take on American evangelical tradition. In Callahan's writer's notes posited at the end of the text, Ellison tells us that Hickman invests a great deal of hope in young Bliss, "Hickman has staked a great part of his life on the idea that by bringing the boy up with love, sacrifice, and kindness, he would do something to overcome the viciousness of racial division"(353). The light of hope hides himself in the cloud but Hickman never attempts to bring the boy back to the parish because he understands that continued

pressure will further drive Bliss from what Hickman believes true calling: to bind America and the races together. Unfortunately, Bliss continues to rebel, to the point of complete cessation. Now Bliss is no longer an individual of enlightenment, happiness and a union of the spirits of the races rather the boy preacher has transferred into Sunraider.

*Juneteenth* is a narrative of liberation in many terms; liberation of black races, liberation of whites and liberation of whole nation. Literally, the title refers to celebration of June, marking the day two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was declared when Union troops reached Texas, and their commanding officer told the weeping, cheering slaves that they were free. If we analyze the delay of the liberation of the Texas slaves, we can come to the point that liberation is a very complex phenomenon. The delay, of course, means that “liberation is the never-ending task of self, group, and nation and that, to endure, liberation must be self-achieved and self-achieving” (Callahan). Ellison himself has chosen lines from T.S. Eliot as epigraph to talk about the fluidity of liberation:

This is the use of memory:

For liberation--- not less of love but expanding

Of love beyond desire, and so liberation

From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country

Begins as attachment to our own field of action

And comes to find that action of little importance

Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,

History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,

The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,

To become renewed transfigured, in another pattern. (I)

In the text, the issue of liberation has been mentioned in many places. Bliss ‘resurrects’ on the day of Juneteenth celebration and he is supposed to rescue the black community he has been garnered by. But he has otherwise viewpoint about liberation; “let us remind ourselves that we were not designed the supine role of passive slave to past. Ours is the freedom and obligation to be ever the fearless creators of ourselves, the reconstructors of the world”(45). Hickman in one place preaches to an audience of the last generation of former slaves and the first generation of freeman,, “There’s been a heap of Juneteenths before this one and I tell you there’ll be a more before<sup>3</sup> we’re truly free” (255). Liberation, Ellison implies, is an ongoing process, never a done deed. So, freedom did not come at once rather it came long after its announcement, and its arrival was only the sign of the liberation. The blacks cannot enjoy liberation unless the whites respond positively. The case is quite contradictory in American soil; whites are trying to distort the reality of liberation due to which the black world has to suffer. So, people like Hickman have a moral duty to liberate the wretched soul of white folks. Hickman does the same thing; he is rescuing the doubly soul of Sunraider. Likewise, for Hickman tries to liberate his community through spiritual existence. By this, Ellison strives to establish the relationship between black folks’ liberation and common American liberation.

As *Juneteenth* goes back to the setting of 1860s in order to depict the moment of freedom of black slaves, it also raises the issues of racial discrimination, inequality and injustice prevalent in American society even after a hundred years. There are lots of textual evidences that portray the picture of racial discrimination dominant in American soil. When the text opens, we find two scores of elderly black people from South are pleading with a white lady who is supposed to arrange an appointment of the Senator. Actually, Hickman travels to Washington, D.C. with his people to try to



give a timely warning to Senator Adam Sunraider, the person who takes a great deal of delight in taunting and humiliating the whole black community in which he has grown up. In spite of the manhandling they receive from the Senator's guard, they insist on letting them just one opportunity to see the politician. In response to their claim of acquaintance with the senator, the secretary indignantly puts them down with a remark: "knows you...I've heard Senator Sunraider state that only colored he knows is the boy who shines at his golf club" (26). But they show no sign of displeasure and anger. Hickman, having heard such indignant response from the white lady, very calmly and gravely exclaims:

Oh? Very well, ma'am. We're sorry to have caused you this trouble.

It's just very important that the Senator know we're on the scene. So, I hope you won't forget to tell him that we have arrived, because soon it might be too late. (29)

As the rest of the world recognizes America as land of democracy, we wonder, seeing in this scene; its citizens being restricted from meeting their political leader just because they are labeled as from different race. Furthermore, they are subjected to the uncalled search by the security persons in the gate of Senator's office. On a subsequent occasion while trying to get an entry alone into the Senator's office, Hickman is physically abused; bodily pushed out by the guard on duty. They make repeated and tireless attempts to contact the Senator but cannot succeed. During the late afternoon rather they are seen praying quietly within the Lincoln Memorial. In some place, Hickman recalls how African American people have suffer the damage done by the whites:

They cut our tongues...

.....They left us speechless...

.....Lord, They left us without words...

.....Amen! They scattered our tongues in this land like seed...

.... And left us without language...

..... They took away our talking drums.... (120)

Under the white's monopoly, the African American people had lived a worst life. Actually, the American whites made these people speechless by making them devoid of their own language. The above-excerpted remark reminds us the scenes of black slaves imported from different countries who could not communicate with one another because their 'tongues' had been scattered in this land like seed. Hickman speaks out the miserable condition of blacks. He says that they had been chained, sold and behaved inhumanly which is obviously the dogmatic supremacy imposed upon the African American. These people are minimized all the rights and they are also deprived of their music, language and voice. African American people are suppressed, subjugated and cut by the white chauvinism. Hickman is worried that the white manipulation of power in America even snatched their 'talking drums' which was the only means of communication.

Through Hickman, Ellison depicts the ground reality of American society which bears a decade long history of slavery, racial discrimination and segregation. Transported to the Americans in the hold of slave ships, these people are sealed in coffins as Bliss is confined within it before his symbolic rebirth. But it is slavery itself that leads to the salvation of the African American as preached by Hickman on the eve of Juneteenth. Sold into slavery, the African Americans have become not only a dispersed people but also a dismembered and voiceless people.

Blacks are facing crucial problems due to the evil social practices in the history. The social structure has made them origin-lees, identity-less, and valueless

people they are treated as slave or the people meant to be slaved. Due to inequality, injustice and discrimination dominant in the American society, as Hickman opines, the blacks have identity crisis. Nobody can have the true experience like the black folks of being dislocated and uprooted. According to Hickman, white people used to scatter the blacks just like chopping pieces of potato in this land. They make all the blacks like speechless, tongueless, without language, drums and music. Hickman claims that the black people are alienated because they have crisis of identity. They have got their own name, and personality as well as existence. According to Hickman, it is better to be smart or top among the nameless folks but they are absolutely dislocated and have lost what they had in earlier days. About the loss Hickman, in his conversation with Bliss affirms:

[...] Rev. Bliss, in those days we didn't have any home...

No horns? Hear him!

And we had no songs...

... No songs...

And we had no...

... Count it on your fingers; see what cruel man has done.

Amen, Rev. Bliss, lead them... (123)

Hickman confirms his believe that the whites have oppressed the black community. They have been tortured and left identity lees forever. The blacks do not have songs nor have any dignified place for their culture. Hickman knows that whites have constructed such a biased structure which defines them in terms of negative stereotype. Furthermore, in a comedy of virtuoso naming, Bliss preaches in a dialogue with Hickman, saying that black slaves are:

Left eyeless, earless, noseless, throatless, toothless, tongueless,  
 handless, feetless, armless, wrongless, rightless, harmless, drumless,  
 danceless, songless, hornless, soundless, sightless, rightless,  
 wrongless, motherless, fatherless, sisterless, brotherless, plowless,  
 foodless mindless- and Godless, Rev. Hickman did you say Godless?  
 (180)

Bliss also preaches that the black people are forced to live as lifeless entity. In a very dramatic way, Bliss imitates Daddy Hickman in order to confirm the discrimination done by the white racist society. Ellison, by giving the role of a parent of a white boy to Hickman compels the readers to accept his theory that every true American is somehow black, whatever the genetic particulars of the person's heritage, and he/she who falls or refuses to acknowledge this is tragically outcast from his/her true American self. In his part, Hickman not only saves the soul of black folks through Godly connectedness and cultural memory but also becomes the disciplined ones with the armed vision to save the nation.

Bliss, on the other hand becomes a racist. His being of a race baiting Senator instead of a savior of the American psyche is the white whale of this book. Bliss turns against his black family by chasing so called purity in his identity. By doing so, he opts to remain partial, to adopt only the white part of his heritage, thus to deny the rest. As enumerated in his essay "What America Would Be Like without Blacks", Ellison projects the major black aspects of culture and consciousness in the United States i.e. the blackness of whiteness, the whiteness of blackness. Bliss rejects the fact of his being a black so for his own selfishness and convenience; he steps to the side of the difficult path by denying blacks humanness. He passes for white because he confuses the use of showmanship to deliver God's word as he is a former preacher

and he confuses the moviemanship also. Actually, he becomes white quite simply as a leap toward the simplicity of easy formulaic answers that white is right. Actually, he leaps for easy money and personal and politician gain that his being of white delivers in advance. Bliss's problem of confused identity can be acknowledged from his racist rhetoric. We can work together, Bliss/ Sunraider exclaims:

“[t]hrough a balanced consciousness of unity in diversity and diversity in unity, through a willed and consciousness balance.... So easy to say yet so difficult to maintain.” How can the dark and light live together? Why. By seeking ever the darkness in lightness and lightness in darkness..... We filter and blend spectrum, we exalt and we anguish, we order the world. (77)

The white racist society has really turned Bliss into a race-baiting politician. He affirms that black people are problems for the society, so the whites cannot accept the existence of black people. Bliss represents the mindset of white racist society. Actually, these people are trying to ignore the fact that whites only gain their existential meaning in the presence of Blacks. However, consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or unwittingly, Bliss keeps reverting to his Negroness as Laly points out that he speaks and acts “just like one of us” (73). Watching from the gallery, Sister Neal has just said that she can distinguish Bliss/ Sunraider from the other White people. Instead, Hickman whispers back just to watch and their conversation goes:

“The way he’s using his right hand. See how he gets his wrists into it?”

“Yeah, yeah!” she said. “And he would have his little white Bible in his other hand. Sure, I remember.”

“That’s right. See. I told you. Now watch this...”

“Watch what?”

“There, there it goes. I could just see it coming –see the way he’s got his head back and tilted to the side?”

“Yeah- why, Revern’, that’s you! He’s still doing you! Oh, my lord,” he heard her moan, “Still doing you after all these years and yet he can say all those mean things he says.” (34)

Bliss though forgets that Negro life is a part of a broader American culture, and is unconsciously following it. He still uses Black speech which he masters while he has lived his boyhood in Black community. He has been brought up as the child in love and dedication in the hope that properly raised and tainted the child’s color and features would enter into the wider affair of the nation and work for the betterment of his people and the moral health of the nation.

Bliss in one scene rises out of the coffin and functions within the sermon as a representation of the possibility for the salvation of people. As, Sunraider, Prometheus-like, every time he preaches and/ or makes a public address on the floor of the U.S Senate of around the country, he steals, literally and metaphorically, a little bit light and transmits it to the African American and White American if only they would understand his signifying. This race-baiting politician can still acknowledge his love for Daddy Hickman and by implication other Blacks:

Yes, I love him. Everyone did, deep down. Like a great, kindly daddy bear along the streets, my hand lost in his huge paw. Carrying me on his shoulder, so that I could touch the leaves of the tress as we passed.  
The true father. (117)

In the dream sequences, Bliss remembers Hickman as a loving father which obviously signifies his subconscious love and attachment for his heritage which he

wants to escape. Hickman as a real dreamer has staked a great part of his life on the idea that by bringing up the boy with love, sacrifice and kindness, he would overcome the viciousness of racial division. He is the embodiment of the rhythms, the talent of improvisation, the hunger to experience life at its fullest. Instead of achieving the long-for, violent revenge, he seeks for the crime that has been committed against his family, Hickman responds to the burden of caring for Bliss. He accepts Bliss's mother's most incongruous respect in desperation and hopes that hate will not assuage his grief over his brother's lynching. So, he becomes a minister, brings up the boy as a little minister. After cutting and tying off the baby's umbilical cord, Hickman holds the future of the nation in his hands. Though the boy runs away, Hickman doesn't lose his hope, instead it intensifies his faith.

Hickman has his unique way of looking at US and is much concerned with the connected and harmonious identity. There is mysticism involved in his hope for the boy, and an attempt to transcend the hopelessness of racism. After the horrors connected with or coincidental with his coming with his coming into the possession of the child he reverts to religion and in his despair he begins to grope towards a pain. Hickman further says to Bliss:

I have thought upon you and me and all the old scriptural stories of Isaac and Joseph and upon our slave forefathers who killed their babe rather than have them lost in bondage, and upon my life here and trials and tribulations and the jokes and laughter and all the endless turns about that man's life in this world- each time I return, each time my mind returns and makes its painful way back to the mystery of you and mystery of birth and resurrection and hope which now seems endless in its complication. (276)

For Hickman, the old stories are the good samples for sketching the pictures of all not only Isaac or Joseph but all of the slave forefathers and their miserable lives; they got ready to kill their own children due to cruelty they are forced to live with. Bliss actually betrays forefathers.

Bliss has seen fear on faces of Negroes, the white woman has called herself his mother; Hickman and sister Bearmasher have taken redhead to town; Bliss has been taken home by Negro woman and there he raises her gown when she has been sleeping. Next day, he is taken to see Hickman, who has been beaten. He feels guilty over beating, believing that his connected with its being snatched by white woman and his having raised the nightgown. On the other hand, he is fascinated by the white woman and tries to follow her, is brought by church member. Later, when Hickman is recovering he takes Bliss to see movie and it is here that Bliss begins to have fantasy that his mother is one of the white movie stars. Bliss is fascinated by the whiteness and he abruptly forgets his being raised in black ghetto. There is, however, contradiction that he continued to love the old people but exchanges his obligation to them and to his past for the formal possibilities available to him through betrayal.

Bliss changes into Sunraider in order to raid Negroes' faith and hope. He escapes his black identity taken color superiority as granted. He feels guilty of being raised by black daddy so ventures into the secret of films. His fascination towards movie implies that he is preparing to enter the world of politics. In movie, the action takes place between frames, in the dark. Thus, the viewer is manipulated in the dark and he is the manipulator. Actually, he is carried into politics. As in movie, he plays politics to manipulate the ideas he learnt in the Negro community in order to fulfill his vested interest. By becoming 'white', he tries to make himself part of a whole which finally rejects his essence, and in doing this he poisons his spirit. Bliss, the



Senator, remains incomplete because Hickman is the other part of his identity. He seeks whiteness but ignores the significance of blackness and he seeks power but he has detached himself from his true source of power thereby turning himself into a political demon. Bliss is the embodiment of the whiteman's mentality. In the response of Bliss's such utterance, Hickman convinces, "Oh, Bliss; Bliss, boy, I get carried away with words. Forgive me. May be a black man, even one as old as me just can't understand the mystery of a white man's pain. But one thing I do know: God, Bliss boy, is love" (166). Being all the time victimized, African Americans have the experience of being exploited. But they do have the merciful vision like Christ by which they can apologize the culprits if they confess the crime which can be seen in the glimpse of expression uttered by Hickman in the above excerpt.

*Juneteenth* draws from many uniquely African American (and American) tributaries: sermons, folktales, the blues, the dozens, the swings and velocity of jazz. It borrows its form from the antiphonal call-and-response pattern of the Black church and the riffs and bass lines of jazz. Ellison makes African American cultural identity more vocal. Bliss- Sunraider is actually not the solution to racism in prevailed on American as Hickman has envisioned. Rather Hickman is a surest weapon who embraces religion as a means to endure racial hatred in white society. Hickman is a Christ-figure whose suffering is similar to that of Christ on the cross. From out of this suffering comes redemption for man; from out of his suffering comes redemption for the whole society thereby guaranteeing redemption for all Negroes. Thus, Ellison's characterization has a project to establish African American cultural identity by enhancing the centrality of Church in African American lives. The preacher and the congregation involve the antiphonal method of call and answer, question and response, give and take which resemble folktale.

In *Juneteenth* Ellison has placed African American culture in its heart.

Furthermore, character's memory towards their origination of culture and civilization has been traced in this novel as in conversation between Hickman and Bliss. Hickman tells:

We come here out of Africa, son; out of Africa? Way over across the ocean? The backland? Where the elephants and monkeys and the lions and tigers are? (255)

Rev. Hickman's mentioning the origin of the African American's distinct past advocates the history of African Americans as distinct, noble and unique. Thus, through the use of narrative cluster to enter into the realm of imagination which is the basis of literatures, Ellison, in *Juneteenth* has been able to articulate the black identity. The main characters in this novel are preachers and the primary setting of the plot is the black evangelical church. A.Z. Hickman is a bluesman-turned-preacher as father to a preacher-turned-politician. Born as a slave, Alonzo Zuber Hickman, nicknamed 'Brother Hickman' he bears the communal responsibility. He is actually the nation's hope for redemption in the land of injustice and discrimination. Furthermore, he has merciful vision like of Christ by which they can excuse the culprits if they confess the crime. Likewise it is significant that Ellison spends much of his time to enhance jazz and blues. As Hickman and Bliss re-enact the tale of black revival in America, the performance-in-dialogue becomes more and more jazzlike in its comic interplay:

Lord, we were dead, Except... Expect...

... Except what, Rev. Hickman?

Except for one nerve left from our ear...

Listen to him!

And one neve in the soles of our feet...

... Just watch me point it out, brothers and sisters...

Amen, Bliss, you point out it out, brothers and sisters...

... From our throat- right here!

... Teeth... Tongue... And another nerve left from our heart,

All string in the ground

... Amen, stirring, and right there in the midst of all our death and  
buried-ness, the voice of god spoke down the Word... (79)

Hickman and Bliss involve in a call-and-response pattern of conversation. This conversation draws from many uniquely African American (and American) tributaries: sermons, folktales, the blues, the dozens, the swings and velocity of jazz. It borrows its form from the antiphonal call-and-response pattern of the Black church and the riffs and bass lines of jazz. Like a jazz musician working with the blues along with other forms of music, Hickman builds *Juneteenth* sermon on fragmented variations of the Old Testament and of US black vernacular sermons.

### Chapter Four: Conclusion

The textual evidences traced in the third chapter of this research urge to conclude that Ellison is articulating the cultural identity of African American people. It is worthwhile to mention that this novel is packed full of folktales and tellers, trinkets, toasts, songs, sermons, jazzes, jives and jokes. Actually this novel presents itself as epic statement of the need for Black self-definition. The protagonist characterized as a representative black man on a mission of bringing redemption not only for the blacks but also for the whole nation, finds himself defined within white masters' structure and finally adopts black folk tradition. Hickman uses his culture as a weapon to sabotage peacefully and effectively against the white-man's strata.

*Juneteenth*, is Ellison's spiritual, multifaceted works which expresses all the pleasures of the world and of music experienced by African American. In spite of brutality blacks have endured as depicted in the works of most white American writers, Ellison as a black writer evokes his unique black culture in order to gain dignified space for it. Ellison in this novel presents Hickman as an American solution to injustice, discrimination, inequality and racial-conflict. Through him, Ellison delivers a message of peace, equality, brotherhood, fraternity and brotherhood. Actually, Ellison repudiates any kind of violent and undisciplined response against social injustice. He reflects on bringing white and black folks together to fight against the evil practice because he claims that one group cannot exist at the cost of other. He dreams of American sentiment co-existing as an integrated one rather than separated and secluded. He is of the view that black-white identity constitutes American identity as a whole. He acclaims, "America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain...Our fate is to become one, and yet many-This is not prophecy, but description"(Ellison). He is , however, unhappy that the whites

have not realized the material reality rather are trying to escape such truth by taking sanctuary in racial chauvinism or the advantage of superior social status. Bliss embodies that white mentality who tries to escape the reality of being connected to cultural blackness. He becomes a race-baiting Senator depicting the nature of power-holder. Even though, he was up brought by blacks, Bliss slams the door of their hope. Like most of the white Americans, he is not ready to accept that black people are also his counterpart. Amidst such a racist climate, Hickman stands as a Christ figure who never reacts violently rather hopes to redeem the whole nation. This is what Ellison wants to say; violence is not solution but a problem.

Due to his mild response towards racial discrimination and inequality, he has been accused of forgetting his being of black writer. He is not that uncomfortable with the accusation from his own folks, because his mission is not as that of hardcore politician rather he embraces aesthetic purpose to change the society. Through his writing, he wants to transform the damaged psyche of his own people (of those who are unable to know themselves and of those who want to respond to social evils militantly). He writes *Juneteenth* for both Black and White audience; for blacks he appeals to garner strong faith and hope about freedom and for whites he pleads to internalize the American reality. His mouthpiece, Hickman appeals the wider mass of readers to feel the heart of blacks in order to gain liberation within them. So, the novel can be analyzed as a text advocating new Black Aesthetics.

This novel brings solution along with it. Simply, if one understands that identity is not a single-faced aspect instead one needs broader worldview to recognize himself or herself. On the other hand, Hickman speaks for Ellison's sentiment that whatever else one is (whether black or white), the true American is also somehow black; the true American will have absorbed and embraced his or her cultural

blackness. Correspondingly, he talks about black folks being in some sense white thereby partaking in the mysterious complexities of all of American culture. Thus, the sentiment of connectedness within each American individual is the ground reality, as Ellison envisages. Ellison actually goes to the level of gaining the cultural identity of his race delivering the message that Blacks are also the stakeholder of national identity. For him, blacks derive their identity through whites and whites gain their identity through blacks so what needs is cooperation, equality and justice.

Ellison in this novel amends the identity of his 'Vanished Tribe'. Only culture can be a surest weapon to amend the distorted image of one's own identity. This research focuses on how Ellison rejects the trend of presenting African American culture as that of suppressed community that minimizes the people to be true to stereotypical image. Ellison brings African American culture at the centre of his novel. It is noteworthy that Ellison often tries to universalize culture because he does not prefer keeping African American culture un-ventured and unique to the rest of the world. Likewise by universalizing the experience of his people in the racist American society, he rejects the notion that African American people, their experience and their culture are only to be dealt in terms of slavery.

Actually, *Juneteenth* has gained dignified identity in American literary arena thereby being liked by white readers as well. Ellison has adopted modernist techniques. With this he has proved that African American literature is not only mere sociological document as the whites often blamed but also a symposium of well-woven piece of literature. By putting black culture at the heart of this text, Ellison pays a tribute to his culture and strives to secure a reverent space for it in literary world. Therefore, *Juneteenth* can be best understood as Ellison's master project of articulating African American cultural identity.

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