

Black Consciousness: Realizing the Potential

Consciousness, in general, is used to describe being awake and aware--responsive to the environment in contrast to being asleep or in a coma.

Consciousness, in psychology, is a term commonly used to indicate a state of awareness of self and environment. In Freudian psychology, conscious behavior largely includes cognitive processes of the ego, such as the thinking, perception and planning, as well as some aspects of the superego, such as moral consciousness. In philosophical and scientific discussion the term is limited to the specific way in which humans are mentally aware in such a way that they distinguish clearly between themselves and all other things and events.

A characteristic of consciousness is that it is reflective, and is an awareness of being aware. "Consciousness of self is a particular configuration of subjectivity, or subjective limits produced at the intersection of meaning with experience. . ." (Brush 177). This self awareness may involve thoughts, sensations, perceptions, moods, emotions and dreams. The sense of self is the major feature of consciousness which means to be able to view the world through one's eyes and recognize that oneself is the player viewing the world. Michael I. Posner and Mary K. Rothbart opine that "consciousness includes many aspects. These include awareness of the world, feelings of control over one's behavior and mental state (volition), and the notion of a continuing self" (1915).

Consciousness covers large area of discussion, and one of them is race consciousness. Race consciousness denotes a politicized, oppositional consciousness of race and racism. It means knowing that and how the personal is political and how the possibilities of one's existence are entangled with social condition. In race consciousness, "like" individuals band together as a means of immediate defense,

depending upon the nature of the social pressures, with effective counter-activity. As the adjustment of problem persists, race consciousness may ameliorate into a cohesive rationale for the perpetuation of the group identity and status. Social psychologists generally define

race consciousness as an attitude or feeling of race loyalty or affiliation which arises in the presence of threats to cultural status. It originates as a defense attitude among the individuals of an identifiable racial group and derives primary meaning from the real or putative social pressures.

. . Race consciousness is adhesive and emotive, since the unity of behavior and thought involved is imposed by external forces. (Lash 26)

Thus, Consciousness is that situation which provides knowledge to see oneself in relation to the world. It does not only cover the awareness of an individual it enhances group rationality and makes aware of their situation in a society.

Consciousness, in Afro-American community, means the awakening of the blacks from the slumber of ignorance of their social, political economic and cultural status, and the sense of self. This black consciousness, for Cone “is the black community focusing on its blackness in order that black people may know not only why they are oppressed but also what they must do about that oppression” (49). This consciousness of black means that individuals develop a sense of “We” consciousness; they identify themselves as members of a collectivity who share a particular structural and cultural location. Therefore Consciousness in black community is the black man’s self-awareness of the social, economic, and political status of black people in America. When there is “We” consciousness in the community, they always struggle against injustice and even are ready to wage action campaign.

We know through the painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was “well timed” in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never.” We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” (King 1856)

James H. Cone on black consciousness argues that “black people are aware of the meaning of their blackness in the context of whiteness. They know that their color must be the defining characteristic of their movement in the world because it is the controlling symbol of white limitations placed on black existence” (50). There always have been instances of black people resisting the white definitions of blackness. Their movement carried the cultural dimension of black liberation to new heights. It rejected the goals of integration and the creation of a “raceless” society. For black power activists, “integration means assimilation to white values and thus the perpetuation of white supremacy” (Brush 180). The resistance of the definitions means developing oppositional accounts and practices that enable members of a collectivity to resist, protest, and subvert the dominant order. In the broadest sense, consciousness in black community emerges as individuals draw on a movement’s counter discourses to identify, articulate, explain, and resist oppressive experience.

To come up with the remarks above, a politicized, critical consciousness involves “new expressions of identity that challenge dominant representations and may ameliorate into cohesive rationale for the perpetuation of the group identity and

status” (Brush 179). Dennis Chong and Reuel Rogers in their “Racial Solidarity and Political Participation” discuss four elements of consciousness: discontent with group status, perception of discrimination, support for collective strategies and group political efficacy, which are the unfolded realities in the black community. The solidarity and participation brought by consciousness helps

enable the formation of cultural enclaves, which may then be implemented with weapons of social control. When the enclaves are fortified with strategic ideological and emotional battlements, so that individuals within the social configuration compute their security and their interests in group terms, the resulting entity is presumably geared for what it regards as cultural competition. (Lash 26)

In such a scenario consciousness does not refer to the cognitive elements of the conscious mind; it denotes the group identification that refers to an individual’s sense of belonging or attachment to a social group. “Consciousness . . . combines basic in-group identification with a set of ideas about the group’s status and strategies for improving it” (Chong and Rogers 350). The group identification in the victim has self-awareness, and to know why one is the victim of inhumanity and why his humanity is encroached is the consciousness. Group identification and group solidarity lead one to feel that it is impossible to be human without fighting against the forces that seek to destroy humanity. In the context of the black people, this means that the black man knows that the knowledge of his being places him in conflict with those who refuse to recognize his humanity.

The further causes of the apparent increased friction between the two races, . . . is due to the gradual, and inevitable evolution-metamorphosis, if you please-of the Negro. The Negro has also

progressed in knowledge by his study of the white man, while the white man blinded by either his prejudice or by his indifference has failed to study the Negro judiciously, and as a consequence, he knows no more about him than he did fifty years ago and still continues to judge him and to formulate opinions about him by his erstwhile standards. Today we have with us a new Negro. (Norvell 213)

Such effects of identification and consciousness increase the account of the intervening beliefs that connect identification to political action. Consciousness potentially heightens awareness and interests in politics, improves group pride and political efficacy, alters interpretations of group problems and promotes support for collective action. Negroes Acquiring a group identity and sense of common fate is therefore just the first step toward a fully developed group consciousness. Black consciousness is not only the knowledge of the source of black oppression; it is the black man's willingness to fight against that source. So "black consciousness is black power, the power of the oppressed black man to liberate himself from white enslavement by making the primary datum of his humanity. It is the power to be black in spite of whiteness, the courage to affirm being in the midst of non-being" (Cone 50).

Though the phrases "Black Power" and "Black Consciousness" are relatively new and started to develop during the late 1960s, the reality that they symbolize is rooted in the past, during Harlem Renaissance. Harlem Renaissance became the movement of making them know about their self and roused their consciousness in terms of class, culture and social status. Conscious-raising is a term that was popularized during tumultuous social movements of the 1960s. It refers to the diffusion of an ideology that strengthens pride and identification, diagnoses group

problems, offers perspective solutions and encourages group members to act in solidarity to achieve common ends.

Discrimination in its manifestations in every phase of life is undoubtedly the most potent factor in the development of group solidarity. It is the only unifying force which the race has, and thus, while it is tragic for the individual, it has become an asset to the race, compelling unity and accelerating progress. It is the one factor which cuts across all social distinctions within the Negro group and which stimulates a race consciousness from the group as a whole. (Ferguson 35)

The term Black consciousness stems from American educator Du Bois's evaluation of the double consciousness of American black's being taught what they feel inside to be lies about the weakness and cowardice of their race. In "The Souls of Black Folk" (1903), Du Bois spoke of an African American "double consciousness," a two-ness" of being "an American, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Bruce 299). The idea "double consciousness" entailed a real opposition between the two consciousness confined within a single body. So African American was to merge his double self into a better and truer self without losing older selves.

Du Bois and Marcus Harvey gave political influence of being united to achieve the civil rights from the Harlem Renaissance period through their writings and militancy. Their assumption was that black liberation would not only come from imagination and fighting for structural political changes but also from psychological transformation in the minds of the black people themselves. Du Bois, among the early twentieth century black intellectuals, saw the crucial relationship between cultural

identity, social cohesion, and effective political action. Du Bois in “The Conversion of Races” says:

We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. As such it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals, as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development. (Monteiro 228-29)

The awareness of black people was to struggle to gain ‘physical liberation’ and ‘psychological liberation.’ They had to first liberate themselves from racialized society and gain psychological, physical and political power in the society. A main tenet of the Black consciousness was the development of black culture and thus black literature. The development of black culture and literature could promote black identity among American whites on their own way. Lash says that “race consciousness is a vitiating influence on the creative energies of the Negro authors” (25). They refused to be concerned with proper grammar and style, searching for black aesthetics and black literary values. The attempt to awaken a black cultural identity was inextricably tied up with the development of black literature. In Afro American literature the black author quests for expression which stands as an intensified image of the total American search for self. Alienation, terror and violence have been his premises which are the recurring experiences of the blacks in America.

It was not until the middle twenties that the black leaders began to speak with confidence of the race consciousness of their group.

The new confidence which characterized Negroes in the twenties resulted from many forces. Prior to World War I, militant new leaders had arisen. By demanding immediately full civil liberties and an end to segregation, men such as W.E.B. Du Bois had inspired a greater self-assertiveness in their people. World War I and the resulting mass migration of Negroes to the urban North further disrupted old patterns of life and created new hopes, as well as new problems. The fight for democracy abroad led to greater expectations at home. (Cooper 297)

For them the new race consciousness of the black community was expressed in the poetry of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, in the crusading sociology of Du Bois and Charles S. Johnson, in the primitive, almost atavistic Negro Jazz and Negro art. The new race consciousness produced “the New Negro” who was free from his racial inferiority complex, militant and aggressive and hell bent for equality in the democratic scheme of America.

In “The New Negro” Locke declared that “the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology, the new spirit is awake in the masses”, while he lauded the “development of a more positive self-respect and self-reliance”, and a “rise from social disillusionment to race pride.”

Du Bois registered similar optimism. In his famous 1926 essay “Criteria of Negro Art” he claimed that once “the art of black folk compels recognition”, then “they will . . . be rated as human.” (English 816)

The 1920s saw the rise of a noteworthy group of black writers and scholars, and America gave them considerable recognition. There is the flood of black literature which brought 1920s in the history of blacks’ movement for their

consciousness. 1920s writers were not enough to arouse black people from the slumber of racial injustice. Different writers in different periods were seen with their genre and subject by addressing the condition of blacks in America.

The earliest Negro writings were slave narratives which were very popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among novelists, Dunbar, Chestnut, Walter White, and, more recently, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Jessie Fauset, have reflected various aspects of life within their group. Countee Cullen, McKay, and Hughes have written some outstanding poetry, usually on some theme connected with race. Perhaps the most influential single voice among Negroes is James Weldon Johnson's, because of his broader sympathies and the absence of petty rancor and bitterness from his work. In the field of essays, Du Bois and Alain Locke are the chief representatives, and in the field of sociology, Charles S. Johnson's objectivity of treatment and careful array of facts is notable. More and more noticeable in the Negro literature is the trend toward objectivity, away from frenzied denunciation of white people and hot defense of the Negro. Since Negro literature centers about the Negro and derives its material from the Negro group, it is a valuable evidence of race consciousness.

(Ferguson 38)

Some of the novels, plays, poems, books and articles of Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, George S. Schuyler, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Jessie Fauset, Rudolph Fisher, Jean Toomer, Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier and others justified public acclaim. Harlem was the center of this "New Negro Renaissance," a site of the black cultural sublime, which lured black

writers to the artistic and human value of black spirituals, folk songs, folk legends and music and they were determined to transform the stereotypical image of Afro Americans as ex-slaves, members of an inherently inferior race--biologically and environmentally unfit for mechanized modernity and its cosmopolitan forms of fluid identity--into an image of a race of cultural bearers.

The blues, the spirituals, and the work songs have historically reflected the collective woes, outlook, courage, aspirations, and humor of their creators in their encounter with an alien and hostile culture. While secular songs portray major episodes in mundane individual and communal lives, the spirituals express the spirituality, inner strength, and collective unconscious of the people. The special songs have always held importance, especially during periods of enslavement, persecution, or hardship, for they provide ecstatic visions of an alternate world of solace and hope. The spirituals also have functioned as an efficient system of communication, bearing concealed messages of inspiration, insult, or revolt as well as instructions and directions for escape and freedom of enslaved or persecuted Africans in America.

(Abarry 380)

For Locke and his fellow authors, the function of cultural renaissance was inherently political that the production of great artworks by blacks in large numbers would lead to the black's "reevaluation by white and black alike." And this reevaluation would facilitate the black's demand for civil rights and for social and economic equality.

We ask not charity but justice. We no longer want perquisites but wages, salary and commissions. Much has been said anent that white

man's burden. We admit to having been a burden, just as an infant that cannot walk is at one time a burden. But in the natural order of things the infant soon ceases to be a burden and eventually grows up to be a crutch for the arm that once carried him. We feel that now we are able to take our first, feeble diffident steps, and we implore the white man to set his burden down and let us try to walk. Put us in your counting rooms, your factories and in your banks. (Norvell 218)

It was this time when writers, artists, scholars, aesthetes and bohemians became aware of the standardization of life that resulted from mass production and large-scale national impulse that drives the hundred millions steadily toward uniformity. Through their artistic creation they foregrounded the troubles of their people and that converged them to understand others problems as their own. This uniformity of blacks enhanced their race consciousness as a collective sentiment.

Through race consciousness the members of a race become a historic group, acquiring a past, aware of a present, and aspiring to a future. Race consciousness is essentially a characteristic of minority groups, more specifically, of oppressed minority groups, and takes the form of a feeling of solidarity among group members. It has been studied as manifested . . . where the sentiment is unusually intense due to the larger numbers of Negroes and the greater discrimination they suffer. (Ferguson 32)

Race, racism and race consciousness must be understood historically and culturally. When intersecting race and gender experience of women of color are examined, the racial dimension can be problematized. Race consciousness of women of color is crucial in finding the image of color people in America. A woman whose

racial and economic situation forced her into hard labor and made her the victim of sexual predators was defined as unwomanly and therefore unworthy of protection from those who exploited her. Black women were in a double bind. They could expect neither gender solidarity from white women nor racial solidarity from the black men. In this situation black women understood that they were more marginalized by white and were oppressed more by racism. Black women along with their condition in male dominated society have struggled against white people who have oppressed them in every way. They know how race and racism affect their lives and how they are exploited and victimized. So they have resisted the racism by cultural productions- literature, music, and so on. Zora Neale Hurston and Jessie Fauset are the ones who helped raise consciousness in black community by representing their sex. Gender consciousness and race consciousness are always relative to one's experience within a concrete cultural and historical context.

This context includes other people, economic conditions, cultural and political institutions, and knowledges and discourses. Within a given situation, identity is a product of a person's interpretations and reconstructions of her own history. The discourse available for understanding and interpreting experience discourses the change with differing historical conditions, mediate identity. (Brush 177)

The examination of black consciousness, which addresses the social, political, cultural, and economic status of Afro-Americans, becomes incomplete without talking about the attitude of whites towards the black from the beginning of their arrival in Europe and America. The African slaves were brought to Virginia as early as 1619. After this time the slave has managed to survive mainly by restructuring his psychology around the system of values he discovered in his new country.

Undoubtedly he is the only American who has had to rely on so exclusively on the American environment in order to recreate his identity and pride. His identity and pride become possible only when he becomes conscious on his race.

One of the effects of race consciousness on a group is the development of race pride, and a long and glorious race history is the foundation for this pride. The greater part of Negro's life in this country was far from glorious, so that Negroes have turned back to Africa and sought there the historic past they lack. . . . Pride is felt by those who can trace their ancestry back to Africa, both W.E. B. Du Bois and R.R. Moton do this in their books. (Ferguson 36)

The Negro group is very much concerned with the individual. When a Negro makes a success it is credited not only to him, but to the race. The group keeps close track of Negroes who have been successful in all fields, especially those who have excelled in competition with whites. Because race pride is in itself a defense mechanism against prevailing opinions of inferiority, it is often misplaced, and mediocre accomplishments are praised in the highest terms. A good deal of Negro literature comes in this category, as well as some musical and artistic attempts. Negroes have undoubtedly produced stars of the first magnitude in many fields. The stardom of the Negroes is judged, not on its own merits, but as adding to the prestige of the race.

There is a unanimous opinion about the race pride brought by consciousness. W.O. Brown says that "race pride is an aspect of race consciousness. It implies the tendency to place highly one's race, to exalt its virtue, to take pride in its past, its great men and its achievements. It becomes the central, crucial human grouping" (92). With the history of the African slaves in America grows consciousness, the

feeling of self and the cultural and political solidarity among the blacks. To know the self is to know the historical self and for black people this involves the investigation of other black selves who lived in a similar historical setting. It is appropriate to say that black consciousness is as old as black slavery and the predicament of slaves written by slaves themselves is the vivid example of black consciousness, which draws the attention of whole black community why and how they are given the lower status to animals. So

the importance of slavery lies in two areas. First, it has been the major determinant of American race relations. The legacy of slavery led in the nineteenth century to the institution of Jim Crow law designed to separate blacks and whites, to segregated housing and schools, to discrimination in the dispensation of justice, to the myths about interracial sex, and to economic and political oppression. Second, slavery played a crucial role in the creation of contemporary black culture and preservation of African cultural elements in the Americas. (Berry 501)

Slavery played a crucial role in the creation of contemporary black culture and the preservation of African cultural elements in the Americas. For the sake of honor of his race, he should have a clear picture of the mental condition out of which he has emerged. They could have clear picture of their condition via folktales, which were their African heritage. In America folk tales became popular among the blacks since it was a means of entertainment, inculcating morality in the young, teaching the value of cooperation, and explaining animal behavior.

Among the slaves folktale was also a means of training young blacks to cope with bondage. By modeling their behavior on that of the rabbit

or tortoise, the slaves learned to use their cunning to overcome the strength of the master, to hide their anger behind a mask of humility, to laugh in the face of adversity, to retain hope in spite of almost insuperable odds, to create their own heroes, and to violate plantation rules while escaping punishment. In many of the tales a slave uses his wits to escape from work and punishment or to trick his master into emancipating him. (Berry 504)

Slave narratives are other elements which helped raise consciousness in black people by giving the picture of middle passage and the brutality of whites. They told of the horrors of family separation, the sexual abuse of black women, and the inhuman workload. They told of free blacks being kidnapped and sold into slavery. They described the frequency and brutality of flogging and the severe living conditions of slave life. They also told exciting tales of escape, heroism, betrayal, and tragedy. The narratives captivated readers portraying the fugitives as sympathetic, fascinating characters. Slave and ex-slave narratives are important not only for what they tell us about African American history and literature, but also because they reveal to us the complexities of the dialogue between whites and blacks. As historical documents, slave narratives chronicle the evolution of white supremacy in the South from eighteenth century slavery. Slave narratives were the anti-slavery writings that provided the most powerful voices contradicting the slaveholders' favorable claims concerning slavery. By their very existence, the narratives demonstrated that African Americans were people with mastery of language and the ability to write their own history.

The slave narratives are an ideological and emotional reflection of the great majority of the Afro- American people as well as a stunningly

incisive portrait of Slave America. They are the voice of the majority of Black people, as literally as that can be taken. They are also a genre, a distinctive body of work that indicates a way of living and thinking in the society. They are anti-slavery: fierce indictment of U.S. slave society. (Baraka 5)

The slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789) is widely regarded as the prototype of the slave narrative written in a form of autobiography in the early 19th century. This autobiography was the manifestation of race consciousness or race feeling and the protest against social evils by the use of Negro themes and primitivism. Equiano’s seagoing adventure, spiritual enlightenment, and economic success in England and Americas are original testimony against slavery that what they must do about the oppression. Equiano says that he witnessed the rape of girls as young as ten and maintains that the pregnant slaves were treated as harshly as the men were without regard for their condition. He sums up the situation in his address to the planters:

When you make men slaves, you deprive them of half their virtue, you set them, in your own conduct, an example of fraud, rapine, and cruelty, and compel them to live with you in a state of war, and yet you complain that they are not honest or faithful!...But, by changing your conduct, and treating your slaves as men, every cause of fear would be vanished. They would be faithful, honest, intelligent and vigorous; and peace prosperity and happiness would attend you. (Rolinger 107/8)

This autobiography of Equiano is an example that blacks could represent themselves effectively through writing. It was a great answer against the charge of

David Hume that Africans were inferior to other races, and one of his reasons for inferiority was for the Africans' "lack of arts." But Monteiro opines that "races are large groups of people united on the basis of civilization, culture, language, and recognizable phenotypic characteristics" (227). His narrative gave of how Africans did, actually, have involvement with the arts. This autobiographical slave narrative freely presents the brutality of whites over blacks and places more emphasis on the monstrosity of slavery and appeals more insistently for its total and immediate abolition. He makes clear his dedication to social change by expressing his moral outrage toward slavery and by structuring his story to the freedom of slavery as the top priority of his life in slavery. An indication of his stance on the issue of race and slavery is found in a quote from his memoir.

I can with truth and sincerity declare, that I have found amongst the Negroes as great a variety of talents, as among a like number of whites; I am bold to assert, that the notion entertained by some, that the blacks are inferior in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice, founded on the pride or ignorance of their lordly masters; who have kept their slaves at such a distance, as to be unable to form a right judgment of them.

(Rolinger 108)

Equaino's slave narrative is an example which links the history of slavery and the slaves' awareness of how they are derided and degraded by the atrocity of whites. The slave narratives are the records which permeate the history of Afro-American people and their social, political, economic and physical resistance to the condition of oppression.

Intellectual resistance infuses the written record created by this people.

Indeed, that record insofar as it has come down to us and in all its

forms-petitions, poems, songs, folktales, formal histories, stories, novels, plays autobiographies, writings in periodicals-in largest part is made up of the rejection of and arguments against concepts of racism and specifically against the idea of the innate inferiority of African-derived people” (Aptheker 336).

A consistent theme in the literature not only rejects the concepts of inferiority of the blacks but also projects the idea of superiority, not only in term of ethical or moral superiority, but carrying over also into standards of beauty, aesthetic sense and modes and values of life. The present status of blacks is defined by the being of their fathers, what they said and did in a white racist society. It is only through finding out what the responses of their fathers were to white condemnations placed on their existence, and that they can come to know what their responses ought to be to white people who insist on defining the boundary of black people. The white oppressors are inclined to blot out all the past events that are detrimental to their existence as rulers, giving the impression that their definition of humanity is the only legitimate one in the world.

The consciousness of the black rejects white oppressor’s definition of being by re-creating the historical black being, which is an antithesis of everything white. It is recognizing that the feelings of blacks about America are not new, but stem from past black rebels who prepared the world for their presence. E. B. Du Bois, William Totter, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Stokey Carmichael are the black radicals who laid the foundation to the enlightenment of the blacks about why they are oppressed and what they must do about the oppression. The Garvey “Back to Africa” movement was the first attempt to unite all the black people of the world in a movement for their social and political uplift. It would be seen from these evidences

that American Negroes do feel to some extent the world consciousness that Dr. Du Bois has worked so hard to develop in them. Any such sentiment works directly to further the race consciousness of the American Negro group. The race consciousness of the American Negro group is occupied with world consciousness. "Tied up with the growing race consciousness of the American Negro is a growing world consciousness among all the colored peoples" (Ferguson 36).

"Negroes must acquire a sense of dignity, a sense of personal pride and value in their identity. All the civil rights legislation in the world . . . would not do one iota of good until Negroes themselves transformed their self-defeating concepts of themselves" (Margolies 158). Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and Gabriel Prosser are the significant examples who could not reconcile themselves to slavery and chose to risk death. For them death was acceptable than to accept the European definition of man. European took African blacks as no man by relegating them that they didn't have any life and feelings. By declining the thoughts of the European whites, black radicals strongly put their view that every people should be the originator of their own designs, the projectors of their own schemes, and creators of the events that lead to their destiny- the perfection of their desires. Paul Laurence Dunbar attempts an artistic representation of the life, behavior, attitudes, and sentiments of African Americans.

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till the blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener string-
 I know why he beats his wing! (8-14)

The sense of individuality and their entity in the society began with the slave ships, the auction blocks, and the insurrections. It began when white people decided that black people and their children should be slaves for the duration of their lives. But it is not possible to enslave a people because of their blackness and expect them not to be conscious of color. Consciousness begins only when they know about their color. To know blackness is to know self, and to know self is to be aware of other selves in relation to self. To be conscious about his color means that the black person knows that his blackness is the reason for his oppression, for there is no way to account for the white racist brutality against the black community except by focusing on the color of the victim.

Therefore, black consciousness is the power of the oppressed black man to liberate him from white enslavement by making blackness the primary information of humanity. It denotes the social, political, cultural, economic and physical resistance to the condition of special oppression of the black community and their knowledge about it. Since the nature and extent of discrimination against the Negro is clear. Negroes have not been permitted to affiliate with organized labor; they have been excluded from many fields, in fact from practically all fields but domestic service and unskilled labor. They receive consistently lower pay than do whites doing the same work, are the "last to be hired and first to be fired" (Ferguson 34). Politically, also, the Negro in the South has no privileges. The disenfranchising measures of the Southern States have taken from him his only means of remedying inequalities and injustices in education, recreation, and other facilities controlled by state and municipality. But it is in the realm of things social that the weight of discrimination falls most heavily on the Negro, in the form of segregation of the races and its implication of the inferiority of

all Negroes to all whites. Segregation is sanctioned as a means of avoiding race contact. Socially,

the Negro meets the most irritating repercussion of race prejudice, such subtle forms of insult as the refusal of the terms “Mr.” and “Mrs.” to Negroes, and the use of the terms “nigger,” “negro,” and “negress.” Negroes resent the flippancy with which some white men write about the race, and a Negro is never safe from being referred to in a slighting and contemptuous manner in newspapers. (Ferguson 35)

The solidarity and collectivity in black community is the phenomenon that has been founded by intellectual resistance and has permeated the history of the Afro-American people. It is the power to be black amongst the whiteness and the courage to establish their entity where there is not the assumption that the blacks are the being. This consciousness on the Negro has been to cause him to build up a common social, economic and cultural heritage for the members of his group. With this race conscious solidarity

the Negro is increasingly able to lead his own life apart from the whites. He has built up stores, and banks, schools, and colleges, hotels and theatres, catering to his own people, because of the restrictions and embarrassments he suffered when attempting to patronize white institutions. This separate group life, established because of discrimination, is supported by race consciousness and its attendant race loyalty. (Ferguson 33)

So the race consciousness of the afro- American is the enhancement of their solidarity and collectivity, and the realization of self, which encourages them to find their power and heritage.

Harlem Renaissance: The Voice of the ‘New Negro’

Harlem Renaissance refers to the African American literary movement which began toward the end of World War I and flourished during the 1920s and 1930s.

“The New Negro”, a collection of essays, poetry, and graphic art edited by Howard philosophy professor Alain Locke in 1925, served as a cultural manifesto, expressing the aspirations and visions of the movement Locke identified Harlem as a cultural and social Mecca for African Americans or the race capital” (Murchison 44-45). It attempted to redefine the dreams and aspirations of a black population undergoing the violent pains of immense physical and psychological dimensions. Its participants had descended from a generation of parents or grandparents who were slaves and themselves having lived through the gains and losses of Reconstruction after the American Civil War, which took place from 1861 to 1864. Fleeing the poverty and injustices of the South, these participants, tried to recreate a new world among the urban centers of industrial America. Drimmer says that

the mass migration of southern and Caribbean peoples to the urban centers of America brought millions for the first time to the very center of industrial area. It was a force that had to be reckoned with. Blacks not only had to claim their physical turf, but far from the moorings of the plantation and southern paternalism, they had to define themselves in a capitalistic and individualistic world. (327)

Geography and migration played a key role in the description and formation of the Harlem Renaissance—the New Negro era. The great migration, which began just prior to the World War I and continued well after, had a profound effect both on the cities of the north as well as the southern rural communities left behind. A destination for many of the migrating blacks, Harlem symbolized the progress made by blacks

from slavery through the mid-1920s. During the 1920s, nearly a half million African Americans left the rural south for the urban north. David Krasner clarifies this flow that “within a decade more than three quarters of a million would follow, increasing the black northern population from 1910 to 1930 by 300 percent” (534). This flooding of black from south to north is addressed by Alain Locke as “the wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city center” (963). These migrating black people were rejecting the south’s history of racial violence and lynching, escaping from poor rural farming, and seeking a better future.

Harlem Renaissance is the maturation of urban afro-American intelligentsia, symbolizing the movement of large numbers of the Black masses out of the Afro-American nation in the old Black Belt South into the rest of the United states , as an oppressed national minority, transforming from largely Southern, rural and agricultural , a peasant people, to the present day when almost half of the Black masses live in the North, Midwest, and West, in urban centers, as part of an industrial working class. (Baraka 6)

The Harlem Renaissance was the result of race riot and other civil injustices prevailing long in America. The oppression and negligence of whites over black made them aggressive and united to establish their own identity and rights through literary initiation. For blacks, their art was a way to prove their humanity and consciousness. To come out from the chasm of racial segregation and injustice created by American whites, they choose the creation of art and literature.

Harlem as a site of the black cultural sublime was invented by those writers and artists at the turn of the century determined to transform the stereotypical image of Negro Americans as ex-slaves, members of an

inherently inferior race-biographically and environmentally unfit for mechanized modernity and its cosmopolitan forms of fluid identity-into an image of a race of cultural bearers. (Gates Jr.10)

Black people are aware of the meaning of their blackness in the context of whites. They know that their color must be the defining characteristic of their movement because it is the controlling symbol of white limitations placed on black existence. Black consciousness is recognizing that the social, political and economic status of black people in America is determined by white people's inability to deal with the blacks. So the poet and humanist, James Weldon Johnson, summoning Negroes to face down their adversity, chose these words:

Far, far the way we have trod,
From heathen kraals and jungle dens,
To freedmen, freemen, sons of God,
Americans and Citizens. (13-16)

No! Stand erect and without fear,
And for our foes let this suffice-
We've bought a rightful kinship here,
And we have more than paid the price. (73-76)

Every race has its own language, art, culture, and literature. Harlem Renaissance concerns with black consciousness, their creation of art and literature bring their problem into limelight and search the end of discrimination in America. Harlem renaissance was a movement of Afro-American people whose sole mission was to achieve identity and dignity. In the history of America and Afro-Americans, the 1920s was a decade of extraordinary creativity in the arts of African Americans

and the creativity of Afro-American found its focus in the activities of African Americans' living in New York City, particularly in the district of Harlem.

1920s was the time when writers, artists, scholars, aesthetes and bohemians became aware of the standardization of life that resulted from mass production and large-scale efficient industrialization-the "Machine Civilization" that "profound national impulse (that) drives the hundred millions steadily toward uniformity." (Osofsky 230)

The movement witnessed an outpouring of publications by African Americans that was unprecedented in its variety and scope, so this period obviously qualifies as a moment of renaissance, in which unusually fertile cultural activity took place.

. . . flowering in literature called the Negro Renaissance gave voice to the new spirit awakening in Negroes in the twenties. In addition, the Negro Renaissance became a part of the general revolt by the writers of the decade against the gross materialism and outmoded moral values of America's industrial society. Negro writers found new strength in their own culture. (Cooper 297)

The decade saw the rise of a noteworthy group of Negro writers and scholars and America gave them considerable recognition. Some of the novels, plays, poems, books and articles of Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, George S. Schuyler, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Jessie Fuset, Rudolph, Jean Toomer, Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier were good enough to their own sight to justify public acclaim.

The writers of Harlem Renaissance were extremely mobile, who felt joined not divided, by their wanderings. During the late 1800's and early 1900's many southern black moved north, hoping to find opportunities in the northern industrial

centers. With this shift in population, the New York City Community of Harlem developed into cultural center for American blacks. There a cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance was established during the 1920s. The movement encompassed music, art, and literature, and included such writers as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Arna Bontemps.

Nearly all the Harlem Renaissance writers were urban wanderers.

Even those who were raised in small towns came to Harlem via other cities-- Northerner W.E. B. Du Bois from the faculty of Atlanta University, Southerner Zora Neale Hurston from service as a manicurist in Washington DC, Westerner Wallace Thurman from the post office in Los Angeles, young Langston Hughes arrived from Cleveland, Nelle Larsen from Chicago, Rudolph Fisher from Washington DC, Dorothy West from Boston, and before them James Weldon Johnson came from Jacksonville, Walter White from Atlanta, Jessie Fauset from Philadelphia, and Claude McKay from Kingston, Jamaica. They were from cities and on the move. (Bremer 48-9)

All these writers, being united, developed a vision of an urban home that was at once an organic place, a birthright community and a cultural aspiration. In all three of these dimensions the vitality of their home reached out even across continents joined in oppression. And Harlem, New York, their capital city within a city, was the center. Whether or not they happened to be living there at any particular time, the Harlem Renaissance writers regarded Harlem as their primary, symbolic home. In Harlem

collectively they developed a vision of an urban home that was once an organic place, a birthplace community, and a cultural aspiration. In all three of these dimensions, the vitality of their home reached out even across continents joined in oppression. And Harlem, New York, their capital city within a city, was the center . . . Thus their Harlem focused an exemplary attempt to make a home for modern urban transients. Their lives and works tried Harlem's strength as well as its limitations as home place, community, and aspiration. (Bremer 48)

Although the literary forms and techniques used by the writers varied widely, the writers all shared a common purpose to prove that black could produce literature equal in quality to that of white writers. At the same time, the Harlem Renaissance writers focused on capturing the general sentiments of the American blacks of the time. In doing so they expressed their displeasure concerning their overall condition and articulated their cultural heritage. Charles S. Johnson, in the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, asserted

the new racial poetry of the Negro marks the birth of a new racial consciousness, and the recognition of difference without the usual implications of disparity. It lacks apology, the wearing appeals to pity, and the conscious philosophy of defense. In being itself it reveals its greatest charm. In accepting this life it invests it with new meaning” (Lash 31)

These people viewed Harlem Renaissance as a civic as well as an aesthetic enterprise. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. himself says “All renaissances are acts of cultural construction, attempting to satisfy larger social and political needs. Indeed literary and cultural movements are always at least in part, critical constructions as

well, and many critics construct the 1920s and 1990s as clear peak periods of African American cultural production” (English 807). Harlem’s African American newcomers constituted a critical mass large enough to sustain a subculture and to achieve high visibility.

Literature and the arts became the field of political enhancement as well as artistic expertise. The arts and particularly literature were the cheapest access to converge the African American culture. Harlem had its own cultural resources of language, folkways, and ritual aesthetic forms from the wandering mass of African Americans. Although seriously compromised by poverty, undependable white patronage, and a colonized color consciousness, Harlem had its own cultural institutions-political organizations, clubs and cafes and theatres, newspapers, and places of worship. Among these Negro institutions the Negro press was the one which

concentrates on news of Negroes, or news which directly affects Negroes. Negro newspapers are almost all weeklies, and are published in large cities where there is a large Negro group, Baltimore, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In a study made of Negro press in 1922, it was found that more than three-fifths of the news directly concerned with the problem of race, with social notes the next largest heading. The militant nature of the Negro Press is shown in the names of the newspapers: Advocate, Challenge, Whip, Crusader. (Ferguson 37)

The Harlem Literary Renaissance of the 1920s was a quest for an image. It was a search for an adequate sustaining model of the kind of American the Negro might become. It was a desperate effort to fill a socio-psychological vacuum in the area of race relations in America’s cities since the Negro’s situation was degraded,

desperate, and sub-human. Both races knew the Negro was the white man's slave, both knew how the Negro was expected to behave, and the possibilities of his life situation. The situation was so unfavorable that finding the image of the black was difficult but necessary. Du Bois in his "The Souls of Black Folk" points out the problem of the twentieth century in relation to races and says that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line"(613). So the writers of this period felt a desperate need for clearly defined images.

For Keller "An image is the conception of his own traits and characteristics and behavior, and possibilities that an individual projects upon his notions of social place and expectation" (29). It is a mental composite and individual carries about. It is made up of what and where he thinks he has been what and where he thinks he is, and what and where he thinks he may look to be. When people share views and impressions of themselves and their world and their place and proper roles in it, they possess a group self-image. Such a group vision of itself spans the past, the present and the future. Such a group self-image furnishes patterns for behavior and suggests what roles are acceptable and expected. On the basis of these images, people communicate and conduct their lives; they are the necessary underpinning of human social behavior.

The Harlem Literary Renaissance was a sustained search through the literary medium to discover in image which migrant Negro-Americans could accept and use and which white city Americans would accept and use. It was a search for an image on the basis of which both race could conduct their lives with some comfort and assurance. (Keller 29)

The Harlem writers made a wide range of responses to their concern with the "New" Negro and his role in the life of the city. They projected many trial images into

the literary medium. Their awareness of the new needs in the cities had been crystallized by the long and swelling migrations, by the lamentable treatment of Negroes and American soldiers during World War I, and by the shocking reception of these soldiers upon their return from the war.

The Negro today is inevitably moving forward under the control largely of his own objectives. What are these objectives? Those of his outer life are happily already well and finally formulated, for they are none other than the ideals of American institutions and democracy. Those of his inner life are yet in process of formation, for the new psychology at present is more of a consensus of feeling than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program. . . . One may adequately describe the Negro's "inner objectives" as an attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape warped social perspective. (Locke 966)

This awareness was deepened by the contrast between their country's promises to "Make the World Safe for Democracy" and its reluctance to allow Negroes a share in democracy's benefits; it was sparked into literary activity by a vanguard of Negro intellectuals. It came to full expression as the Harlem writers' search for a practical sustaining image for the Negro people of America's twentieth-century cities. But there was no agreement on what that image should be. This is why the Harlem Renaissance writers stressed different, sometimes incompatible attitudes, convictions, needs, resentments, visions, hopes, suggestions, plans, and despairs.

What the Negro wants and what the Negro will not be satisfied with until he gets is that treatment and that recognition that accords him not one jot or title less than that which any other citizen of the United

States is satisfied with. He has become tired of equal rights. He wants the same rights. He is tired of equal accommodations. He wants [the] same accommodations. He is tired of equal opportunity. He wants the same opportunity. He must and will have industrial, commercial, civil and political equality. America has already given him these inalienable rights, but she has not always seen to it that he has received them. America must see that the Negro is not deprived of any right that she has given him otherwise the gift is bare, and in view of her recent international exploits she will stand in grave danger of losing her national integrity in the eyes of Europe and she will be forced to admit to her European adversaries that her constitution is but a scrap of paper. (Norvell 216)

However, several writers gave close attention to the need for group cohesiveness and the need for group pride. Almost all wrote as if they understood the need to develop pride of race. They agreed on this; but they disagreed on how to achieve it. With a measured, near-marvelous insight for a man, James Weldon Johnson wrote of Negro women as a group. He extolled their charm and compared them with their white sisters: "...the Negro woman, with her rich coloring, her gayety, her laughter and song, her alluring, undulating movements-a heritage from the African jungle-was a more beautiful creature than her sallow, songless, lipless, hipless, tired-lookin, tired moving white sisters" (Keller, 32). Like Weldon, Harlem Renaissance writers understood what this kind of observation would do to make any women feel proud. They agreed that they must create a group image for power to improve their conditions. Black feminism could become the group image for power and for foreshadowing and improving the conditions.

Black feminism is also composed of body of knowledge and understanding that positions itself as critical theory to criticize and address social problems. It further argues that Black women intellectuals are central to the production of Black feminist thought. Black feminists contend that there can be no separation of ideas from experience and that black feminism is not a set of abstract principles, but it is a set of ideas that come directly from the historical and contemporary experience of Black women. (Woodard 268)

During the Harlem movement in America, African Americans worked not only with a new sense of confidence and purpose in poetry, fiction, drama, and the essay, as in music, dance, painting, and sculpture but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many black artists in the long, troubled history of the peoples of African descent in North America. The creativity that took place in New York City was many respects a heightened version of the unusual cultural productivity and it permeated in the major cities of the North. The creativity of black Americans was expressed in various forms. It came from a common source that was the irresistible impulse of blacks to create boldly expressive art of a high quality. The art and literature of black Americans was as a primary response to their social, economic, and political conditions as an affirmation of their dignity and humanity in the face of poverty and racism.

Locke urged Negro artists not to allow the fetters of discrimination to shackle their minds or cramp their style, for it they were to become artistically and culturally mature and to contribute to the cultural democracy of America, they would have to be soul-searching, creative,

dynamic, self-confident and sure of their craftsmanship. (Ochillo 173-4)

After the African slaves were brought to America, Negro has managed to survive, mainly by reconstructing his psychology around the system of values he discovered in his new country. Arthur A. Schomburg, talking about the history of slavery, says that “history must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset” (938). Just as black men were influential factors in the campaign against the slave trade, so they were among the earliest instigators of the abolition movement. Indeed there was a dangerous calm between the agitation for suppression of the slave trade and the beginning of the campaign for emancipation. Undoubtedly he is the only African who has had to rely so exclusively on the American environment in order to recreate his identity. This almost unadulterated Americanness of the Negro is, of course, reflected in his literature. Paul Lawrence Dunbar in his poem, “The Colored Soldiers”, recalls the recognition made by Negroes:

And their deeds shall find a record
 In the registry of Fame;
 For their blood has cleansed completely
 Every blot of Slavery’s shame.
 So all honor and all glory
 To those noble sons of Ham-
 The gallant colored soldiers
 Who fought for Uncle Sam! (73-80)

In the history of Negroes slavery became the catalyst to bring civilization in the Africans. So Zora Neale Hurston, in her “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”

remarks “Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it” (1009). The poetry and polemics of free Negroes prior to the civil war appealed to the Americans on humanitarian grounds, on Christian and democratic principles. America, the true land of democracy, was not practicing the norm and values of egalitarian society and the spirit of black people was shattered by white’s malpractice of democracy. Even in those parts of the country where slavery did not exist, Negroes, then and now, were the subject to the worst form of political, social, and educational segregation, as well as grinding poverty, police and mob brutality. “They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as “dirty nigger-lovers” (King 1862). Despair, isolation, and violence were the great American existential themes and Negro authors frequently lived in these themes. Claude McKay’s poem, “Enslaved,” written in 1921 is rich in evocative detail of the theme:

Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,
 For weary centuries despised, oppressed,
 Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
 In the great life of the Christian West;
 And in the Black Land disinherited,
 Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,
 My heart grows sick with hate, becomes as lead,
 For this my race that has no home on earth. (1-8)

Revelation of the human suffering is the business of the artist, so the black artist could not dominate human suffering and they started to come out in the form of deluge in the 1920s. Black writers depicted the reality that was prevalent in American

society mirroring in his work the experiences of those who share his world, the evolution of his expression is significantly more than a matter of passing interest.

When black writers started writing about their problem in literature in their own way they used vernacular lucratively. “In African American literature, the vernacular refers to the church songs, blues, ballads, sermons, stories and in our era, rap songs that are part of the oral, not primarily the literate(or written-down) tradition of black expression” (Gates 1). In rhymes and songs the suffering of the colored people has been presented best:

We raise de wheat,
 Dey gib us de corn:
 We bake de bread,
 Dey gib us the crust;
 We sif de meal,
 Dey gib us de huss;
 We peel de meat
 Dey gib us de skin;
 And dat’s the way
 Dey take us in;
 We skim de pot;
 Dey gib us de liquor,
 And say dat’s good enough for nigger. (Gates 38)

This song unfolds how Africans in America have managed to survive and even to prevail.

In Harlem literature vernacular has been extraordinarily influential for writers of poetry, fiction, drama and so on. In the work of Langston Hughes, Sterling A.

Brown, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison, the vernacular has become dominant ingredient, which qualifies the originality of Africans and encompasses vigorous, dynamic processes of expression, past and present. It makes up a rich storehouse of materials wherein the values, styles and character types of black American life are reflected in language that is highly energized and often wonderfully expressive.

Literature in vernacular, to a large degree, accounts for the black American's legacy of self-awareness and endurance. Refusing to use white Americans' ethos and world view, African American expressed in these vernacular forms their own ways of seeing the world, its history, and its meaning. African Americans have attempted to humanize an often harsh world with honesty, toughness and humor. Gates Jr. and McKay, in "The Norton Anthology of African American Literature", say that

certain Negro writers of the 1920s and 1930s (and their literary offspring of later decades) consciously sought to draw artistic power from the vernacular in their writing. In some cases- one thinks of works of Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and Zora Neale Hurston as examples- writers celebrated such forms as blues and sermons and tried to capture them on the page with a little intrusion as possible. (2)

Black American artists took stock of lives and destinies of their people against the backdrop not only of the United States but also of the world. In the poetry, fiction, drama, music, painting and sculpture of Harlem renaissance, the artists represent a prodigious achievement for a people hardly more than half-century removed from slavery and enmeshed in the chains of a dehumanizing segregation. In the Harlem renaissance period, black American artists laid the foundations for the representation of their people in the modern world with a complexity and a self-knowledge that have proven durable even as the African Americans' condition changed considerably with

the unfolding of the twentieth century. Harlem renaissance rediscovered the ancient confidence and sense of destiny of their African ancestors and created a body of art on which future writers and musicians and artists might build and in which the masses of black could see their own faces and features accurately and lovingly reflected.

“In serious music” a Negro can be a pioneer and thus contribute to racial advancement and to inter-racial understanding, and he can have the satisfaction of doing something eminently worth-while. In the philosophy of redemptive culture, an African American working in art music served the race both as a leader and role model and as a cultural ambassador to whites by being one of few in that field and demonstrating the talents and capabilities of blacks. These individuals were not merely artists but cultural activists-promoters of race relations. (Murchison 67)

In this way, Harlem Renaissance is the substratum of race consciousness of a black people. After being united in the cities of America, they declined the severity of racism, which is anti-human and anti-social practice. Race consciousness is a vitiating influence on the creative energies of the Negro authors and so through art and literature, in the Harlem renaissance, black community was arisen from the slumber of ignorance. The racial solidarity for identification and consciousness begins from the past, whose credit goes to Harlem movement. This consciousness strictly focuses on group identification rather than on the cognitive elements of consciousness. Claude McKay at the very core of Renaissance poetry exposes racial solidarity in his sonnet entitled “If We Must Die.”

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot. (1-4)

Black Americans are determined to establish their identity at any means because the end justifies the means. Their creativity and militancy shown to found their image in America are the firm means. They are ready to sacrifice but they do not want to lose their culture inherited from their ancestors. The Harlem Renaissance used the past as a way to affirm the new deep feeling of race. The African heritage became a way of expressing part of the psyche of the race. This general affirmation of their past encouraged a marked attitude to use past as a tool useful for developing the present, not as nostalgia. Marcus Garvey in "The Future as I see it" says with determination that "we shall go forward, upward and onward toward the great goal of human liberty. We have determined among ourselves that all barriers placed in the way of our progress must be removed, must be cleared away for we desire to see the light of a brighter day" (977).

Thus, Harlem Renaissance brought black writers in one place to advocate their rights through art and literature. Their artistic creation succeeded in constructing awareness and solidarity among the scattered Negroes for their progress and liberation in the future.

Cane: Integration of the Western and African Heritage

Cane, classified as a composite novel written in 1923 by Jean Toomer, revolves around the origins and experiences of African Americans in the United States. The experiences of African Americans in the United States have been postulated in structure between narrative prose, poetry, and play-like passages of dialogue. In this context, Rice says, “In *Cane* the idea of expressing and reciting is reflected in the sounds, songs, and chants which were so much a part of the black folk spirit” (100). About the songs and singers in the *Cane*, Rice further clarifies:

Song and singers permeate the stories in *Cane*. “Karintha” begins with a fragment of song-like verse: “Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon/ O cant you see it, O cant you see it.” “Becky”, “Carma”, “Blood Burning Moon”, “Rhobert”, and even the play “Kabnis” contain similar song fragments. Someone “made” a song in “Karintha”. Louisa sings in “Blood Burning Moon”; Fern sings brokenly in “Fern”. The narrators of “Rhobert” and “Avey” sing; Dan Moore tries to sing in “Box Seat”. There’s a singer in “Kabnis” who turns the whole countryside into “a soft chorus”. (594)

Toomer envisions the Negro woman as possessing all the primitive instincts, African heritage, and the lust for life that refuses to be contained in a sterile and mechanistic world. In contrast to the male, the female in Toomer is rich with sensibility, beauty and fertility. Comparing the theme of Toomer’s *Cane* and Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom*, Van Mol writes “thematically, both *Cane* and *Banana Bottom* deal with the development of a Black Consciousness which is envisioned largely in terms of a reconciliation or blending of what might be called the “intellect” of the Western world and the “primitivism” of the African heritage” (48). In *Cane*

these two worlds-Western world and African heritage- are more overtly separated with the female characters, for the most part, representing the world of the African heritage, while the male characters are associated with the Western world. Tension is largely created through the juxtaposition of the two cultures which influence twentieth century Western Blacks-- the African pull of their past and the Western necessity of their present.

The effect of modern civilization, however, is the atrophy of that sensibility. Dwarfed and enslaved by the society, the Negro female succumbs to corruption and loses her finest instincts. Ironically, as the female loses her awareness, the male becomes more conscious of the loss and attempts to rescue her. Toomer, finally, reconciles both male and female through an acceptance of the past and the healing contact of the soil. This juxtaposition of Negro male and female unfolds throughout *Cane* providing unity of theme and structure. “In *Cane* the quest for self-defined, unified self gets played out most vividly in Toomer’s narrative representations of the body, in which the body becomes the site for both external and internal conflicts--oppressions and repressions” (Whyde 43). *Cane* is a work that aims to produce unity from fragments and the songs sympathize the African experience with the slave experience, the black experience with the white. William Dow further says “*Cane* is a productive rewriting of “race” allowing for the recognition of multiple authentic African American voices, identifications complicated by class, gender, and geography, and greatly enriched by the significant modulations in narrative address that Toomer undertakes” (60).

Cane comprises three general sections. The first section is set in the rural South, with an emphasis on stories of individual women. The rural south suggests the African living in America with their agrarian base and their suffering because of

racial segregation. The second section takes place, for the most part, in urban setting, such as Washington D. C., and Chicago. The third section, *Kabnis*, is a drama set in a single locality in the South. With the shift to the Northern, urban settings of part two, Toomer is able to establish new ground for staging the modern African artist's encounter with true art of the race's past.

In the cabarets, dance halls, and theatres of Washington D. C. and Chicago, he identifies emerging forms of African American art that continue to provide a critical alternative to the culture of respectability, while offering his protagonists more mediated and potentially salvational access to the defining violence of Southern black experience.(Esmunds 155)

In part one, a series of female portraits; in part two, the black ghetto of Washington D. C.; and in part three, the writer's quest for a usable past can be found. The changes in setting--from the black peasantry in Georgia to the Negro community of Washington D. C., back to rural Georgia again--reveal a more subtle change in the consciousness of the characters. Toomer, by changing the setting of the novel, shows through his search for primitive roots, through his emphasis on proximity to the soil and through his search for the past, redemption from the materialism of his age. "Love of land, a return to the past, a loyalty to one's instincts as they are transmitted from one generation to the other by means of the blood, are the themes common to this novel"(Cancel 26). Negro soul has been better portrayed in the female characters and shows all the beauty and the sensitivity of his race.

The themes of the novel appear to arise from the conflict between a world that is technological, culturally white and spiritually sterile, and the one that is agrarian, culturally black, and richly primitive. Van Mol commenting on Toomer's *Cane* and

McKay's *Banana Bottom* says that "for both Toomer and McKay the development of an adequate modern Black consciousness must involve not simply a return to the spontaneous primitivism of the African heritage, but an integration of that primitivism with the intellect of the modern Western world." (49). The most easily recognizable pattern is its division into three sections: stories separated by poems of the agrarian South; stories separated by poems and vignettes of the urban North; and 'Kabnis' a story drama involving an urban Negro living in Georgia. From three angles, *Cane's* design is a circle aesthetically, from simple forms to complex ones, and back to simple forms. Regionally, from the South up into the North, and back into the South again or, from the North down into the South and then a return to North. From the point of view of the spiritual entity behind the work, the curve really starts with Bona and Paul (awakening), plunges into Kabnis, emerges in Karintha etc., swings upward into theatre and Box Seat, and ends (pauses) in Harvest Song. In the context of "Theater" and "Bona and Paul" Edmunds writes:

the radical power of black dance sets the stage for two stories in *Cane*, where it holds out a similar power to unite and liberate participants across lines of color and class. In these stories, Toomer locates the power of black dance in its symbolic engagements with the displaced indexes of racist atrocity. In "Theater" and "Bona and Paul", jazz dancing breaks apart and recombines key elements of the lynching plot, simultaneously marking and overturning the power of that plot to maintain the oppressive and repressive conditions of every day life.

(157)

In the first part of the novel, Toomer portrays female characters that are metaphorically associated with song and land. "The two metaphors most often

associated with women in this section are women-as-song and women-as-land” (Whyde 43). The woman’s body in part one is continually transformed into poem or songs in such a way that it becomes the narrative direct link to the African-American’s origins and their consciousness. One of the most dramatic examples of dividing the female body occurs in the short poem, “Portrait in Georgia” (1105). “Each body part is figuratively linked to the violence done to the slave’s body-lynchings, burnings, and whippings. The poem imagistically and forcefully expresses the pain of the African-American” (Whyde 43-44).

The novel begins with the Karintha section and ends with “Kabnis.” It begins with the possibility of agentic black female subjectivity in “Karintha.” “Perhaps the most dramatic shadow woman is Karintha who is described as carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. . . . The imagistic similes and the unqualified, undefined noun take place of Karintha’s body” (Whyde 44). This opening sketch establishes the text’s trajectory for all the Southern black female characters as it traces the movement of the feminine, in relation to the masculine, from the position of active subject to that of passive object. As a child Karintha had been a pure spirit “a wild flash that told the other folk just what it was to live (1089). She had been like airborne dust, a whirl, all fluidity and moving energy. There is male gaze upon Karintha that makes of her soul a growing thing ripened too soon. Karintha is a woman and so she becomes the altar to which men bring their bodies, their money and other material things in return for sexual favors. In the process she becomes less a living being than an ideal, an idol. Karintha’s transition from child to woman marks her transformation from subject to object; she becomes static, inscribed into the position of sexual object by the power of the male gaze. Sexual terrorism and lynching are the repeated events in part one of this fiction.

To begin with, “Karintha” is the story of a lively, lovely, innocent young girl, “a November cotton flower.” “The poem “November Cotton Flower” placed near this story suggests that innocence such as Karintha’s in a free, natural force that instinctively resists social oppression” (Ramsay 83). Watching her, the old men who ride her hobby-horse show strong sexual desire and the young men anxiously wait for the days when they will mate with her. Unaware of her attractive female power, she plays and runs “like a black bird that flashes in light” (1089). In the story Karintha, “black bird and black horses” are the repeated images, which can be seen in the poem “Reaper”.

Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
 Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones
 In their hip pockets as a thing that’s done,
 And start their silent swinging one by one.
 Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
 And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds. (1-6)

These images are helpful to recognize the entity and pride of the blacks who are engaged in farming with traditional equipments. They are proud of their culture since they have racial consciousness, which has taught them to accept their root. The farming of blacks is directly or indirectly attached to their African culture and values. The soul of blacks is more linked with the soil than any other new fangled things. “There is an implied comparison between black men and black horses; both function rhythmically, monotonously to harvest the crops, to cut the weeds. Both are black. Both are a part of the agricultural rhythm, just as cane is” (Rice 101). She behaves like any other child her age stoning the cows, beating her dog, and fighting the other children. Awareness of her body comes, however, as she overhears her parents

making love. Loss of innocence follows shortly after. As she grows to be an enticing, irresistible female, she has only contempt for the old men. In order to “bring her money” and make love to her, the young ones “go to the big cities and run on the road” or “go away to college” (1090). One day she gives birth to an unwanted baby and burns him. But guilt, symbolized in the smoke, “so heavy you tasted it in water” (1090), burdens her conscience and she prays for forgiveness. Her loss of innocence is brought about by the insensibility of the men who did “not know the soul of her was a growing thing ripened too soon” (1090). The story emphasizes the corruption of the female beauty, the desecration of a young premature female soul by male insensitivity.

Becky has the same theme. Like Karinthia, Becky is a victim of the hypocrisy of white and black men alike. A white woman, Becky has two Negro sons who grow up to be sullen and rebellious against the town which has not accepted them along with their mother. Soon, they shoot two men and have to leave. Just as Karinthia is made to prostitute herself and even to kill, so Becky becomes insane. Ashamed of their sin, both black and white men build her a shack by the railroad and bring her food. The insane Becky’s prayer, “pines whisper to Jesus” (1092), recalls Karinthia’s baby fallen from her womb onto a bed of pine needles in the forest. “In Becky the image of the whispering pines recurs at points in the story where the pain intensifies, such as the descriptions of Becky and her child being cast out and of the contorted growth of the children, and finally the news of Becky’s death and the departure of the children” (Rice 101). The blue sheen of God of the hypocritical towns- people has listless eyes. The Bible they throw on the wooden pile which buried Becky when the shack fell down on her means nothing to them. It is just an aimless rustle on her mound.

This story is followed by “Cotton Song.” Toomer establishes songs and singers as an important part of the culture. This song reflects the tradition of the black’s work song. When a group of people become conscious they seek their tradition to make their identity. This song is “written in the tradition of the work song . . . Toomer explores the form and meaning of the traditional black folk song” (Rice 594).

Come, brother, come. Lets lift it;
 Come now, hewit! roll away!
 Shackles fall upon the Judgement Day
 But lets not wait for it.
 God’s body’s got a soul,
 Bodies like to roll the soul,
 Cant blame God if we don’t roll,
 Come, brotherk, roll, roll! (1-8)

Carma, the next female figure, shows the primitive richness of the Negro woman. Bane, her husband, works with contractor and away most of the time. His neglect prompts her infidelity. For, Carma is as full of life as the singing girl in the “yard of a whitewashed shack” whose feminine fullness goes out to other men: “Her voice is loud. Echoes, like rain, sweep the valley. Dusk takes the polish from the rails . . . Pungent and composite, the smell of farmyards is the fragrance of the woman. She does not sing; her body is a song” (1094).

Even the narrator rejoices in Carma’s beauty because “God has left the Moses-people for the nigger” (1094). In her zest for life, Carma is just obeying the invitation of nature, “Wind is in the cane. Come along” (1094). A jealous, impulsive man, Bane kills a man and goes to jail. Carma continues to receive other men. “Toomer refuses

to criticize adulteries committed when her husband is away for long periods: “She had others. No one blames her for that.” That is because Carma’s strong African inheritance makes her a natural being standing outside conventional Christian Judgement” (Ramsay 85). Her quarrel and her feigning to shoot herself in the forest is a conscious strategy on her part to get rid of her husband.

Toomer depicts slavery, and the psychological and cultural suffocation of the blacks. This suffocation becomes creative tension. This creative tension produced *Cane* because in that work Toomer “delves into his own consciousness bringing out from its depths his strong and often conflicting feeling about his identity and heritage. These feelings lie at the heart of *Cane* and give the work its power” (Rusch 17). Toomer, in the poem “Song of the Son.” produces blacks’ identity and their heritage:

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
 Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,
 Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
 One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes
 An everlasting song, a singing tree,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery,
 What they were, and what they are to me,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery. (16-23)

Like the previous female figures, Fern is both an unreadable mystery to men and a life-giving force that can not be enclosed. She enslaves every man she comes in contact with because they can not understand her and because she is “above them”. She isolates herself from men and becomes a “virgin” (1097). “Fern, the title character is a binary contradiction, being both black and white, a part of black and part Jewish woman named Fernie May Rosen. Also in self contradiction, she is part

whore and part Madonna” (Ramsay 79). Her mysterious eyes possess the soil and the countryside which flow into them. Men, likewise, are hypnotized by her. Meant for contemplation of Georgia’s dusk, the narrator observes, her eyes would be vacant and lost in Harlem’s indifferent throngs. In their obtuseness, men reach for her body, but fail to touch her soul. Even when the narrator attempts to reach her soul, “that unnamed things,” he, too, fails. His efforts only sharpen her pain and isolation and she becomes hysterical and faints in his arms.

A nine year old girl with a chalk-white face, Esther, too, fashions a dream world of her own where Barlo, black and noble like an enslaved African king transplanted to America, becomes the hero. However, Barlo disappears not without first impressing in Esther’s mind “the only living patterns that her mind was to know” (1102). At sixteen, still the dreamy girl whose maternal instincts are beginning to awaken, she dreams that she gives birth to a baby whom she loves frantically. At twenty two, she is neither attracted to nor attractive to men. As she insists her father in his grocery store, Barlo is the only subject of her dreams. When she is twenty-seven, Barlo returns to town. Her mind “a pink mesh bag filled with baby toes” (1104), she becomes jealous and possessive about Barlo. When she discovers that the real Barlo is not the noble black African of her dreams, and that he consorts with whores, she sees him as repulsive and hideous. Built upon a dream, now broken, her world disappears. Thus, the blunted male figure once again fails to respond to the susceptibility.

“Cane is a representation of race and racial consciousness in which the representation are the “words” that Toomer wants to transform into “fact” (Webb 209). Black man’s consciousness can be seen in the poem “Portrait in Georgia” (1105), which gives the picture of lynching to blacks.

Hair-braided chestnut,
 coiled like a lyncher's rope,
 Eyes-fagots,
 Lips-old scars, or the first red blisters,
 Breath-the last sweet scent of cane,
 And her slim body, white as the ash
 Of black flesh after flame.

This poem is typically read as a representation of what a black man sees when he looks at a white woman, or in other words, as a representation of his consciousness. He sees an image of a lynching scene in a white woman's body.

Each physical attraction brings the black man closer to the consummation of death instead of love. The braid of hair is really the lyncher's rope; the eyes kindle not only his passion but the fagots to set him on fire. Her lips turn into his lesions, the 'old scars' of fears and the red blisters of his burning flesh. This poem is division between the social forces that would transform him into ashes and the linguistic or literary forces that transform her into metaphors. The social and linguistic are the twin emblems of the destruction of identity in this poem. (Webb and Toomer 211)

"Blood Burning Moon", the last story of Part One, enacts a conflict between whites and blacks. . . The characters take on a behavioral complexity and a consciousness of their own."(Dow 70-71). "Blood Burning Moon" is a reddish moon which is said to signify a night of violence, so this story immediately symbolizes racial hostility. In "Blood Burning Moon," Bob Stone, a white man, and Tom Burwell, a black man, fight to the death over Louisa, a Negro girl. "The imagery of

“Blood Burning Moon” is based upon the folk beliefs of southern blacks regarding the evil influence of the moon over their lives” (Solard 551). Stone feels an indefinable attraction toward Louisa who is lovely in her “nigger way”. In Louisa, we find the same mysterious force met in the earlier females so incomprehensible to the men: “Beautiful nigger gal. Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her.” (1109). She is sweet like the scent of boiling cane. Tom, in turn, must fight for his girl and when he cut Bob’s throat, he is lynched and then burned. In this story, the conflict is not radical, but even more primitive. Animal, irrational forces, symbolized in the blood burning moon, “the full moon, an evil thing,” involve two men for the possession of a woman. On another symbolic level, the story points toward the slow surrender of both the white and the Negro male to the destructive civilization of the North. Neither Bob, whose family was once so wealthy that the men could have all the female slaves they wanted, but whose fortune has been swallowed by the modern industrialism; nor Tom, “from factory town,” can truly possess Lousia, a symbol of the land.

Lynching is the repeated theme in this novel. The burning of black flesh in ‘Portrait in Georgia’, and the murders of Tom Burwell in ‘Blood Burning Moon’, and Mame Lamkins in ‘Kabnis’ are the examples of lynching in the south.

The lynching of blacks became relatively common in southern states after the Civil War. Between 1882 and 1910, 893 blacks died at the hands of white mobs, with Mississippi and Georgia accounting for one-third of the victims. . . . Southern blacks were more inclined to flee areas where the threat of white lynch mobs was greatest. (Tolnay and Beck 104/6)

Part Two of *Cane* is composed of character sketches, set in the North, of individuals struggling with new forms of slavery.

Part 2 centers on the fragmentation, uncertainties, and multi-social positions of the new urban black communities that the narrator attempts to “reconcile” but with which he cannot totally identify. The multiple discourses of the section, however, suggest a more complex sympathy with the narratee as well as a deep identification with a new racial-future. (Dow 61)

Slavery in part two, however, is chosen, not imposed. Unlike the characters in part one, the characters in part two are not simply passive objects, but active agents of their own psychological imprisonment. Whyde referring to McKay writes “In the North, blacks struggle to establish an identity out of the remnants of their past and the values and ideals of their newly acquired home” (46). The body in part two mediates between the intellect, associated with internalized white values, and passion, or vitality associated with their African heritage, which battle for control of the Afro-American’s body.

“Seventh Street” is a transitional piece describing the new setting-Washington D. C. Its images establish the main conflict of *Cane*. The “nigger life” in Washington’s Negro ghetto pours itself into the “white and whitewashed wood of Washington” (1112). There, the Negro is drained of his dignity and corrupted. The Negroes, wedges “brilliant in the sun” (1112), stand in sharp contrast to the Whites, “ribbons of wet wood” which “dry and blow away.” However, “the black reddish blood” is poured forth and wasted for the “soft skinned life” (1112) of the Whites. The narrator grows indignant at the corruption of the Negro, “Money burns the Pocket, pocket hurts” (1112).

This decadent civilization claims a slave in Rhobert who, like so many whites, is possessed by his house and works himself to death to make money. Materialism has completely degraded Rhobert, who should have stayed in the South with his wife and children instead of coming north to become the lifeless slave of a house. The shifting of Rhobert to the North refers to the migration of blacks.

Part two is set in the North. The movement parallels the migration of blacks northward early in this century. In part two we see the beginning of assimilation, the scattering of the group, the breakdown of the slave culture, the end of old patterns. Part two is the “modern desert” that Toomer refers to in the autobiography, where the “victrola” and the “player-piano” replace the human voice and the city replaces the community. (Rice 596)

In the history of African Americans, the mass migration from south to the north means that they are aware of their race and deserve to live in town seeking opportunities. Their shift to north from south is the indication of solidarity in their race and their search for social, political, economic, and cultural identity. Toomer, in *Cane*, portrays the historical migration of blacks through the characters of the novel.

A Negro “orphan-woman,” Avey symbolizes the fertility of the Negro soul. The narrator loves her, but she does not pay attention to him. Like Karintha, she passes from innocence to awareness of her womanhood, to corruption in a White man’s world. At first, she has intercourse with a college student whom she visits in his flat. She never reciprocates the narrator’s infatuation with her. Like the other previous males, he can not fathom the mystery of the female soul because he deals in superficialities. Unperceptive of her real need, he mistakes her indifference for indolence. He can not understand that, unlike the other earlier females, she is

displaced out of her natural environment. Like Rhobert, she belongs to the South, to the soil of which she is a mere extension. In New York, or in Washington, the Negro female loses her dignity and sensibility. The sophisticated narrator, a product of the Northern Civilization, cannot comprehend that Avey has lost her soul, that she is no more than a walking zombie. When he tries to approach her again, he bores her with his irrelevant monologues. He pours forth platitudes about an art that would open the way for women the likes of her, and a larger life for their expression. He speaks about her need and emotions, but he can not understand that her seeming laziness is ennui with the world that surrounds her. Soon, his passion betraying his chivalric mood, he tries to make love to her, but obtains no response from her. The pattern of the sensitive female and the imperceptive male is once again repeated in this story.

This design is also found in "Theatre." The setting is in Howard Theater, but the action really takes place in the mind of John, the manager's brother. His face is partly orange from the light that filters through a window, and partly shadow—a reflection of the conflict and division of his mind. His body "separate from the thoughts and pack his mind" (1118), he loves Dorris, a show girl who has crisp-curved, bushy, black hair and lips curiously full, and very red, and who "uses art, dance, to express her freedom, to connect to her African past" (Whyde 48). But in his mind her dance becomes "a dead thing in the shadow which is his dream" (1121). Toomer's description of John's reverie moves with the same rhythm and swiftness of the jazz. It also blends the meaningless real world where these Negroes live and lose their identity, with their wistful dream world. In contrast to John's imaginary world, where everything gleams beautiful and satisfying, we are faced with this dreary place. The staleness of their lives "of nigger alleys, of pool rooms and restaurants and near-beer saloons" (1118) forces these Negroes to seek relief in daydreaming. Like Avey,

Dorris has lost the robustness and lustiness of the earlier females. The male in turn has suffered a change. John is no longer the subservient slave of the female of the earlier stories. Though a very selective dreamer, he still lacks total awareness of his situation.

“Calling Jesus” reiterates the theme of the female soul oppressed by the environment of the North. Black women’s consciousness for their liberation is evident in this story. As they are hopeless about their freedom from the whites, they call the God for their salvation. They think their hope of justice is possible only from the God. This hope of justice is manifest in the sermon they give.

I vision God standing
 On the heights of heaven,
 Throwing the devil like
 A burning torch
 Over the gulf
 Into the valleys of hell.
 His eye the lightning’s flash,
 His voice the thunder’s roll.
 Wid one hand He snatched
 The sun from its socket,

And the other He clapped across the moon. (1-11)

In this story there is also the nostalgia for the past. The soul of this nameless Negro woman is “like a little thrust-tailed dog that follows her surroundings, her soul yearns for the “clean hay cut” and the “dream-fluted cane.” Her soul calls to Jesus , too, like Becky’s, for salvation lies not in the oppressive North, but in the South where “the bare feet of Christ” move “across bales of Southern cotton” (1122).

From these bales of cotton comes Dan Moore of “Box Seat” to reclaim the lost Muriel, who, like the female in the previous story, is a slave of the white society. Having capitulated to both white and Negro materialistic civilization, Muriel has no will of her own. She is a prisoner in Mrs. Pribby’s house. In fact, she has become her property like the other houses of Mrs. Pribby. Like Rhobert, Muriel has metamorphosed into the house she lives in, “The house” the rows of houses locked about her hair” (1126). Tamed and shy, she has lost her identity by surrendering her soul to Mrs. Pribby. Her spirit has been conquered by “zoo-restrictions and keeper-taboos” (1125). In the theatre, where “the seats are bolted houses” (1127), she is intimidated by the people around her: Teachers are not supposed to have bobbed hair. She’ll keep her hat on. Brenice, her shallow friend, is another slave. Muriel, however, has kept some semblance of struggle in the presence of Dan. Her primitive instincts are “still unconquered.”

To these instincts Dan, “a new-world Christ” comes to rescue her, appeals: “Shake your curled wool-blossoms, nigger. Open your liver lips to the lean, white spring. Stir the root-life of a withered people. Call them from their houses, and teach them to dream” (1123). He dreams of smashing the tenement houses that contain his people—the prisons of the Negro soul. “Baboon from the zoo,” he will break in and “smash in with the truck. . . grab an ax and brain em” (1123). He is very conscious of his mission of redemption: “I was born in a cane field. The hands of Jesus touched me. I am come to a sick world to heal it. . . Give me your fingers and I will peel them as if they were ripe bananas” (1123).

With his bare hands, he will strip free the Negro soul once again. When he knocks at Mrs. Pribby’s door “the tension of his arms makes the glass rattle” (1123). Although he is strong with the strength of the Southern soil, he encounters resistance

from the start. First, his lusty voice cracks when he tries to sing to the houses which belong to Mrs. Pribby, “No wonder he couldn’t sing to them” (1124). Once inside, he “feels the pressure of the houses” (1124). Under this pressure the spirit of Muriel and of every Negro who lives here labors and is eventually crushed.

Unable to cope with this influence, Muriel finally capitulates in the theatre. She surrenders even her passion by accepting the blood-stained rose from Mr. Harry, the dwarf, after the brutal fight. Ironically, this kind of entertainment is the refinement for which Muriel, Bernice, and the rest of the Negroes who live in Mrs. Pribby’s prison houses have sold their souls. Dan, who still sees himself as the new Samson who will “reach up and grab the girders of this building and pull them down”, or as the new Moses who cries to the White masters, “Let my people go!” rises from his seat and utters his protest of the whole Negro race throughout the ages, “Jesus was once a leper!” Goede believes that this represents Dan’s rejection of the White man’s Christianity, his “severance from Christ’s world.” To me, however, this is not a rejection, but a reaffirmation in new terms of the true Christianity. Christ is not, Dan implies with his cry, created in the image of a white dwarf. Rather, talking upon himself the sickness of the world, echoes of the St. Paul, Christ indeed became a leper. To accept the rose from this white anti-Christ, as Muriel does, is to deny oneself. Defeated in his purpose, Dan contemplates the hopeless ruin: “Eyes of houses, soft girl-eyes, glow reticently upon the hubbub and blink out” (1132). With Muriel still a prisoner, Dan realizes that there is no reason to fight for and, unconcerned, walks away.

Like Muriel and Dan, Paul Johnson in “Bona and Paul” is displaced Negro whose ambivalence of identity is reflected in his “red-brown face.” In “An Autumn Leaf”, he is a mulatto who still feels the strong pull of the Southern past preventing

him loving Bona, a white girl, “Paul follows the sun to a pine-matted hillock in Georgia” (1134). In his dream, he feels the slanting roofs of gray unpainted cabins tinted lavender where “a Negress chants a lullaby beneath the mate eyes of a southerner planter.” With breasts “ample for suckling of a song” (1134) she is a picture of the fertile female. But Paul’s dreamy vision of the Southern past does not last he must follow the sun back to the world of Chicago. Paul’s friend, Art, tries to cheer him up, but to no avail. Paul suffers the melancholy of a past that is out of reach; he has “dark blood.”

Though Art has arranged a double date with Bona and Helen, Paul still dreams of the Negro woman who sends the suckling of a song “curiously weaving among lush melodies of cane and corn”(1135). For him, the Negro female is “life . . . beautiful woman.” For this reason, during the date Paul’s eyes are very critical of Bona. Though she confesses her love for him, he feels that he is isolated: “Apart from the pain which they had consciously caused. Suddenly he knew that people saw, not attractiveness in his dark skin, but difference” (1137). Their attitude toward his color stirs in him a dormant pride; their stares filled something long empty within him, and were like green blades sprouting his consciousness. When he finally seems to have solved the conflict for himself and to have found reconciliation in Crimson Gardens, Bona leaves him. His attempt to reach her comes too late. Like the preceding males, Paul ultimately fails to achieve success with a female. His immersion in himself prevents him from knowing Bona’s soul.

The third section Kabnis is a drama set in a single locality in the South. “An emblem of the last geographical movement in Cane, “Kabnis” signals the narrator’s return to rural Georgia from the urban environments of Washington D. C. and Chicago, and thus the novel comes full circle” (Dow 80). In this play most of the

play's conflict takes place within the mind of the title character, Ralph Kabnis-an educated, light skinned, Northern teacher-as he tries to grip with the terror and beauty of rural Georgia. The last section of the novel set in the South means the return of the blacks to ancestry.

Toomer indeed advocates a return to the ancestry, the South, and the history of slavery, but not for the purpose of consciousness. The return is rather for the purpose of what Toomer calls "detachment" in "The Negro Emergent": requisition that the past "now lives within" so as "to be released from an unconscious and negative concern with it. (Webb 222)

Significantly, the reconciliation which is finally obtained in *Cane* takes place on Southern soil. Kabnis, like Paul, has a conflict between his acceptance of the past and his identity. A teacher educated in a Northern school, Kabnis is both disgusted with and afraid of his new environment. He cannot sleep because of his consciousness. In an outburst of rage, he kills a cackling hen, but even then the silence is too much for him. Talk of lynching and of the Southerners' sadism toward Negroes scares him more.

Layman. . . . She was in th family-way, Mame Lamkins was. They killed her in th street, an some white man sein th risin in her stomach as she lay there soppo in her blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an th kid fell out. It was living; but a nigger baby aint supposed t live. So he jabbed his knife in it an stuck it t a tree. An they all went away. (1149)

He feels disgust for the Negro's religious expression which teaches submission to this kind of cruelty. But he too frightened to reveal his thoughts to his friends. In a

land where the whites get the boll and the Negroes stalk “a great spiral of buzzards reaches far into the heavens. An ironic comment upon the path that leads into the Christian land . . .” (1145). Not discriminating between good and bad Negroes, whites hand both. Their brutality, as narrated by Layman, terrifies Kabnis: “Seen um shoot and cut a man to pieces who had died th night befo. Yassur. An they didn’t stop when they found out he was dead—jes went on ahackin at him anyway” (1147). A rock thrown through one of the windows into their midst, sends Kabnis running through cotton fields until he locks the door of his shack behind him. The conflict within Kabnis, like that of Paul, veers between his white education and his Negro roots. His refusal to accept his past weighs him down. The presence of Father John, “as symbol of the flesh and spirit of the past” (1163), is irritating to him. Like Dan Moore, Kabnis regrets the surrender that both the Negro male and female have allowed in the South. Stella and Cora, for instance, have straightened their hair. There is still hope in them: “Character, however, has not all been ironed out. As they kneel there, heavy-eyed and dusky, and throwing grotesque moving shadows on the wall, they are two princesses in Africa going through the early-morning ablutions of their pagan prayers” (1167). Finally Kabnis accepts his past as manifested in the words of Father John, but also in the firm, cool hands of Carrie K, an uncorrupted female.

Thus, through the help of Carrie K, Kabnis is able to put away his robe, a symbol of sophistication and the negation of his blackness. Groping for affirmation, the male finally attains it in the female who, in spite of the hardening of her sensibility brought about by the white civilization, rises from her degradation. Acceptance of the past finally is achieved through the female who is also a symbol of the Mother earth. Kabnis obtains reconciliation because he reaches toward the very soul of the female, of the earth, whose touch would resurrect him. As the sun “arises from its cradle in

the tree-tops of the forest” (1170), both male and female are reunited. Their harmony brings peace and integrity to a disjoined, dissociated race.

If We Must Die: The Spirit of Defiance

“If We Must Die” is a sonnet written by Jamaican born poet Claude McKay. This sonnet, which first appeared in *The Liberator* in 1919 in the wake of that year’s large and violent race riots, is about racial inequality and persecution with a very angry tone. This sonnet dramatizes the theme of overcoming adversity in engaging an enemy. It was originally written about the race riots in Harlem in 1919, and it was a call of awareness to all African American men that it was time for them to stand up for their rights.

In the July issue of the *Liberator*, there appeared, along with six other poems, his now famous “If We Must Die.” Today, it is the one poem by which McKay is most known. “If We Must Die” was a desperate shout of defiance, almost it seemed a statement of tragic hopelessness. At the same time, it loudly proclaimed that in Negroes the spirit of human courage remained fully alive. Here is the poem which brought McKay to the alert attention of the Negro world. If not a great poem it, nevertheless, must certainly have expressed the attitude of many Negroes in 1919. (Cooper 301)

The African Americans of 1919 are the central audiences of the poet because McKay is black himself and he knows how his race is being treated. At this time black people are being forced to live undesirable lifestyles. Black people are being discriminated against because of their color and slave background. The other audience that the poet addresses in his poem is the racist white people of America in 1919. His first message to whites is that they are acting inhumane. He refers to these white people of 1919 as “mad and hungry dogs.” By 1919 slavery had already been

abolished but white people were treating blacks as if slavery had never been abolished.

In 1919, furthermore, acute interracial conflict was mounting due to the widespread white determination to reaffirm the Negroes' prewar status on the bottom rung of the racial ladder and the Negroes' aspirations for a larger share in democracy. During "the Red Summer" these various motivations coalesced and racial violence erupted on a massive scale throughout the country. (Norvell 210)

The consciousness of the African American is the determinant to accelerate the violence in 1919 because they were aware of the situation that white were not ready at all to give them the space of human being. They know white people do not give black people any respect and are afraid to accept them as part of their white community. Another message that McKay gives to his white audience is that they are lowering their self-identity by killing black people in vain and ignoring the change as expected by the whites. They keep schools segregated, force them to live in ghettos, and ride them in the back of buses. This behavior of the whites has helped bring solidarity in blacks to face the common enemy. The more the whites dominate blacks the stronger bond they make to topple the enemy. McKay tells his audience that they are acting like a bunch of cowards. White people have degraded themselves by acting like vicious dogs and should consider themselves second class and not to treat African Americans as though they are. Another message of racial awareness that the poet gives to these racist white people is that African Americans will begin to unite and stand up for themselves in groups and would fight for equality.

Some Negroes have come to realize that so long as people of Africa descent anywhere are mocked, vilified, subjugated, oppressed, and

their culture and physical traits destroyed, no Negroes, no people of African descent anywhere, are fully free, that we are all in the same boat. We should all fight together against segregation and discrimination. This is the one enduring basis of pan-African solidarity. There are unfinished task which we have to complete together. In this sense, Mother Africa demands the loyalty of all her children wherever they may be. (Drake 12)

The words of this poem radiate the poet's rage against the injustices done to his race. His hatred of the inequality is evident in his harsh descriptions of his persecutors.

“If We Must Die” resonates the feeling of conflict between whites and blacks. “During Harlem Renaissance it became a kind of rallying cry for young Negro writes, who felt it expressed their own spirit of defiance” (Heglar 23). Though the poem was written in 1919, it correlates with the race riots that occurred at that particular time in several cities throughout the United States. The race riots were obviously white people attacking black neighborhoods and so forth. Many blacks were murdered and the mass lynchings stretched form city to city. As a form of violence, lynching was fostered by an ideology of white supremacy. The worst of which was a July riot in Chicago that left dozens dead and hundreds injured and homeless.

1919 was the year of the Great Red Scare, one desperate phase of the effort to return to the pre-war “normalcy.” for Negroes, the year turned into a nightmare of bloody riots and violent death. From June until January there occurred no less than twenty-five riots in major urban centers throughout the country. The Chicago riot of July was the worst. When it was over, authorities counted 38 Negroes and Whites dead,

over 520 injuries, and 1000 families homeless. Like all Negroes

McKay felt the emotional effects of such battles. (Cooper 300)

Another example that supports the race riot is the mention of “mad and hungry dogs” in line three. The usage of the phrase is appropriate, for history verifies that dogs were used to attack, subdue, frighten, and murder blacks.

McKay is conscious about the situation prevalent in his society and making his people aware that the battle for justice will be a difficult task, but he insists blacks to partake in the battle “O Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!” He takes the approach to fight back and stand up for what is right and what every living soul deserves-basic human rights. In essence, action is the key for any change unless the word functions. Without standing up and taking action, nothing will be done and the killings against black will continue. How the poet is speaking about the necessity is the output of black consciousness. In all McKay’s purpose for writing such poem of action at that juncture was to inform the black race in general to stand up and fight back with the opposition.

Negroes finding of their voices were either trying to express their angry defiance of the wave of lynching across the country at that time, or else seeking an escape from it. The most famous and most often quoted cry of anger was Claude McKay’s “If we must die, let it not be like hogs/Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot . . .” in another poem, called “To the White Fiends,” McKay wrote:

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?

Think you I could not arm me with a gun

And shoot down ten of you for every one

Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?

Be not deceived, for every deed you do

I could match-out-match: am I not Afric's son,

Black of that black land where black deeds are done? (Isaacs 245)

In the first quatrain of the sonnet, the speaker is exhorting his fellows not to allow themselves to be humiliated and degraded as animals are when the animals are rounded up for slaughter. The poet being aware of the situation appeals to his people to understand the reality. The awareness of the poet and his initiation of raising consciousness in his people is evident in his exhortation. Nevertheless, the point is made that men should not behave as penned up animals do when confronted with an enemy who would kill them. In a battle against an enemy, soldiers must stand bravely with their fellow soldiers to protect their own lives, their family, and their countrymen.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.

Thus the speaker, in the first quatrain, urges his people not to die like hogs. He chooses hogs because hogs are slaughtered just as he feels his people are being unjustly slaughtered. He has very malicious descriptions for his persecutors and creates a picture of a rabid dog gone crazy looking for blood. He uses the simile mad and hungry dogs for his persecutors.

In the second quatrain, the speaker plainly advises his fellows to “nobly die” (5), that is, if they must, in fact, die. They must die nobly so that they will not have spilled “their precious blood” (6) for no reason. The speaker then makes a rather naïve remark: if they die nobly, “even the monsters we defy/ Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!” (7/8). It is not likely that after the enemy has prevailed, he will

honor the vanquished, except to hoist his own glory. Fighting against the brave warriors, who have at least made a valiant effort, makes the winner appear even stronger than vanquishing a weak enemy.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
 So that our precious blood may not be shed
 In vain; then even the monsters we defy
 Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Thus the speaker, in the second quatrain, begs his people to die nobly, with dignity, with their head high and not to give into the monsters. Again McKay creates a nightmarish picture exposing the wickedness of the unjust. He refers to his people's blood as precious, giving them worth, something their persecutors fail to see. The poet tells his people that dying with dignity will force their persecutors to honor them-
 Shall be constrained to honor us though dead (8).

In the third quatrain, the poet exhorts his "kinsmen" along with himself to "meet the common foe" (10). Even though they are outnumbered, they must stand and demonstrate that they have backbones, they are men. If they can kill only one of those who are dealing them a "thousand blows" (11), they will have properly acquitted themselves. After all, "before (them) lies the open grave" (12), but it is better to go to that grave fighting than merely allowing themselves to lead in like sheep.

O Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
 Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
 And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
 What though before us lies the open grave?

Thus the speaker, in the third quatrain, states that though they are outnumbered they must be brave and stand firm to their persecutions that will in turn

kill their foes in spirit. He reminds them that they really have no other choice and their punishment could be no worse than they are already receiving-what though before us lies the open grave (12).

In the couplet, the speaker then rallies his comrades to “face the murderous, cowardly pack” (13) like men. Of course, he means like human beings as opposed to animals. He is not implying that women are free from this fight. Even if they are backed into “the wall” (14), they must continue to fight, and not to allow the enemy to cow them into subservience. They must stand like men and fight.

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

McKay turns the table by calling his people the true men and persecutors the “murderous cowardly pack”. His people will fight even when they know they are defeated- pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back (14).

McKay's poem reveals a fighting spirit and a will to live although the odds were stacked against him. “We” consciousness is intense in this poem since when there is “we” consciousness in the community, they never hesitate to struggle against injustice and inhumanity. The fighting spirit of the Negroes comes from Africa that's why in the writing of the black writers there is the invocation of African heritage.

Isaacs writes:

this reaching out to Africa as a “literary homeland” was one of the features of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the 1920's, the birthtime of the “New Negro”, the emergence of new Negro voices in literature. This outburst of high creativity was a product of the many moods and circumstances of the time. It was part of the world-wide postwar shake-out of hopes and values, part of the response of Negroes

in America to the postwar despair, part of their resistance to the re-establishment of the supremely white order of things. (243)

Another sonnet entitled “To the White Fiends” is a good example of poetry about the tension and trouble in the racial relationship. Claude McKay says that the whites are treating his people very poorly, and that he is just as capable of doing the terrible things that they do to him. However, he will not do these malicious things because God has shown him a light, giving him hope for a new, better life.

A part of McKay’s poetic schedule is to reverse racial stereotypes by showing the widely spread generalizations about African Americans are not only fake but can be more appropriately applied to whites. Two of the most prevalent stereotypes are the association of African Americans with savagery and Western culture’s equation of black to evil. The poem “To the White Fiends” begins with an articulation of many of the traditional stereotypes about blacks and has a threatening tone suggesting that if whites believe these lies, then they should fear and respect this violent potential:

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?
 Think you I could not arm me with a gun
 And shoot down ten of you for every one
 Of my black brothers murdered, burnt by you?
 Be not deceived, for every deed you do
 I could match-out-match: am I not Afric’s son,
 Black of that black land where black deeds are done?
 But the Almighty from the darkness drew
 My soul and said: Even thou shalt be a light
 Awhile to burn on the benighted earth,
 Thy dusky face I set among the white

For thee to prove thyself of higher worth;
 Before the world is swallowed up in night,
 To show thy little lamp: go forth, go forth!

The general concept of savageness is to become uncivilized, violent, and cruel. Concerning racial behavior in America, black people are considered to be savage and barbarous, but in America white people were disseminating cruelty by lynching black people without any cause but color. The riots of 1919 were the examples of whites' prejudice over Afro Americans. So in the poem "To the White Fiends," it has been reacted and threatened to the whites' brutality. McKay ironically raises questions to the whites "Think you I am not fiend and savage too?" This rhetorical question justifies the savageness of the blacks as it is dominant in the so-called rational white. White people think that that it is the white man's burden to make black people rational and civilized but they are being uncivilized and savage. They say the evil of the black should be overtaken by rationality but they take the help of evil which the black people do not assume.

McKay is compelled to believe in the sinful doctrine of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." If you kill black people by murdering and lynching, we are the son Africa that you think we are involved in evil deeds, we can respond as you have taught us. This is the voice of strength and awareness of black community who has determined among themselves that all barriers placed in the way of their progress must be removed, must be cleared away for they desire to see the light of a brighter day. Marcus Garvey says

we are organized for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition,
 industrially, commercially, socially, religiously and politically. We are
 organized to hate other men, but to lift ourselves, and to demand

respect of all humanity. We have a program that we believe to be righteous; we believe it to be just, and we have made up our minds to lay down ourselves on the altar of sacrifice for the realization of this great hope of ours, based upon the foundation of righteousness. (977)

From Marcus Garvey, one of the leaders of black consciousness movement, the determination of the blacks for their emancipation is strongly spoken. The voice of humanity is all pervasive in black leaders since they desire the improvement of the condition of all human kind. They decline the exploitation of human being in the name of race, gender, class, and religion. Black people are suppressed in all components of life so their solidarity seems in all determinants that may release them from the so called social, political, economic, and cultural chains.

Thus the sonnets “If We Must Die” and “To the White Fiends” are the exquisite poems in which McKay speaks the spirit of Afro Americans. To bear the trouble at any rate is not the nature of their African heritage; they can treat as they are treated. In these two poems McKay advocates that they have the capability to understand their common problems and go back to their African roots which seem to be violent. They do not hesitate that they are the children of Africa. “If We Must Die”, on the one hand, summons the racial solidarity to meet the common foe, whites; on the other hand, “To the White Fiends” justifies their blood of Africa which is never cool and calm when there risk at their people. In both poems McKay attributes blacks to the action and perseverance in need. When a group of people become conscious of their condition in any community, they do not feel difficult to foreground their selves and virtues, and these elements are associated with the historical setting.

Conclusion: Racial Solidarity and Dignity

Consciousness is that situation in which humans are mentally aware in distinguishing clearly between themselves and all other things and events.

Consciousness is always reflective, and self awareness is its major feature. Self awareness helps one view the world and provides knowledge to see oneself in relation to the world. It does not only cover the awareness of an individual, it promotes rationality and makes group aware of their social, political, economic, and cultural situation in a society. When one becomes conscious in a society in relation to social institutions, he begins to seek his role and status in the society.

Consciousness in a group sometimes comes as an awakening from the slumber of ignorance of their social, political, economic, and cultural status in society, where they are living. Race consciousness is the one that the people are aware of the meaning of their presence in the community, and it is that driving force which pokes the group to search their identity and enable them to unfold the realities of the community. When people begin to express their pent up feeling about their condition in a society, it takes the form of movement. Black consciousness is one example which took place in American Negroes as a movement to establish their own values derived from Africa. Consciousness in blacks appeared as political, gender, class, and cultural consciousness to break the shackles of race imposed by American whites.

Racial solidarity and the pride of race are the eminent consequences brought by consciousness in blacks. Since consciousness binds the interests of group and gives them strategies for improving their status. Black people in America became able to know why one is the victim of inhumanity and why his humanity is interfered. This feeling of blacks leads them to feel that it is impossible to be human without fighting against the white, the destroyer of humanity. Consciousness, in blacks, heightens

awareness and interests in politics, improves group pride, and promotes support for collective actions. So black consciousness is black power to free him from white enslavement and to be and remain black among the whites.

Consciousness in blacks begins with the arrival of Negroes in Europe and America. Though they were brought in Europe and America, they managed to survive in new geography and culture by restructuring their psychology. With the history of the African slaves in America, there grows the feeling of self and racial solidarity among the blacks. For blacks, to know self is to know the historical self, which is similar in their setting. So black consciousness is as old as black slavery and credit goes to slaves themselves who drew the attention of whole black community by writing why and how they have been suffered by the white community. The slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano is a vivid example of the manifestation of race consciousness or race feeling and the protest against social evils by the use of Negro themes and heritage.

Following the courageous steps of Equiano of foregrounding the efficacy of slaves, other blacks kept on raising the voice of humanity, dignity, and sense of pride and value in their identity. Harlem Renaissance, African American literary movement of the 1920s and 1930s, became the movement of making them know their self and roused their consciousness. During this period, black people, fleeing the poverty and injustices of the South, tried to create a new world among the urban centers of industrial America. They raised the voice that their color must have been the defining characteristic of their movement.

Harlem Renaissance concerned with black consciousness of language, art, culture, and literature. Their creation of art and literature brought their problem into publicity, and searched the end of discrimination in America. This period witnessed

an outpouring of publications whose sole mission was to achieve racial identity and dignity. This decade saw the rise of a noteworthy group of Negro writers and scholars like, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer and these writers and scholars influenced American society. All these writers developed a vision of racial solidarity for social, political, economic and cultural identity. These writers even justified their equal quality of blacks to the white writers.

The cultural productions of the 1920s focused on a search of image, which is the conception of one's own traits and characteristics, and behaviors. On the basis of image, the Harlem writers made a wide range of responses to their concern the new Negro and his role in the society. They projected many ideal images into the literary medium. These images could be seen in the cultural institutions like political organizations, clubs and cafes, theaters, newspapers, and churches.

Though the productions of the writers of this period were many and varied, their close attention was to the need for group cohesiveness and the need for group pride. Racial pride was the crux of their writings, but there was controversy in their means. African Americans worked with confidence and purpose in poetry, fiction, drama, and essays which in many respects heightened the group pride of blacks. The creativity of African Americans came from a common source that was the irresistible impulse of blacks to create boldly expressive art of a high quality. This expressive art made them artistically and culturally mature and contributed to the cultural democracy of America.

One of the artistic creations of Harlem Renaissance is Jean Toomer's composite novel *Cane*. This novel can be said a record of black consciousness. It bears the history, historical trauma, and the enlightenment of blacks in America. This

novel comprises of three parts. First part is set in the rural South with the stories of individual women. These Negro women bear a heritage from the African jungle. Innocence, ignorance, cruelty, adulteries are the wide spread African elements found in this part. The body of women produces unity from fragment, and songs, which are dominant in the stories, manifest the African experience with the white and the affluence of African culture. The rural setting of the South suggests the African living in America with their agrarian base and their suffering because of racial segregation. The dominance of female characters in part one portrays the association of Afro-American with songs and land. In African heritage earth is female body which creates and cares. Through female body in this part, it has been exemplified the all pervasive lynching in the South. Black people are so conscious that they see white woman's body as a process and performance of lynching. Black man's consciousness can be seen in the poem "Portrait of Georgia", which gives the picture of lynching to blacks.

Part Two of *Cane* is set in the North, and the characters of this novel struggle in the urban area. The migration of the characters from South to the North reminds the history of blacks and the search for social, political, economic and cultural access. The shifting of Rhobert to the North refers to the migration of blacks during 1920s. They have the journey from ignorance to knowledge and convention to modernity. Leaving the agrarian base they seek their status in the institutions dominated by whites. But they are ground by the sterile technological world and materialism. In the cabarets, dance halls and theater of Washington D.C. and Chicago, Negro characters bring the emerging forms of African American art into limelight. They are not hopeless to struggle for better future and it is perpetual. In this part African American characters seek to embody the lynching plot in ecstatic acts of aesthetic and cultural self-transformation that simultaneously transform the fabric of everyday life.

Part Three is a drama set in the South. To set the last section in the South is to advocate the return to the ancestry, and the history of slavery. When racial groups become conscious of their status, they do not hesitate to return back to the history. The title character of this drama is Kabnis, an educated, light skinned teacher of the north, who tries to foreground the terror and beauty of rural Georgia of the South. He is unable to sleep in the new environment because of consciousness. When he hears about lynching in the south he gets terrified. Through Kabnis, Toomer, in this closet drama, signifies the group identification and an individual's sense of attachment to the problems of others from the same group.

Likewise, Claude McKay's sonnets "If We Must Die" and "To the White Fiends" exemplify the solidarity of blacks to fight against the whites who have spread terror in black community in the name of lynching and racial discrimination. They feel so long as their culture and physical elements are destroyed their emancipation is impossible. "O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!" is the essence of black consciousness. The ultimate consequence of black consciousness is to bring solidarity among them for their identity and dignity. The voice of solidarity, identity, and dignity is crystal in McKays sonnets.

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