AFRICAN IMAGE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY OF LANGSTON HUGHES' *THE PANTHER AND THE LASH: POEMS OF OUR TIME* AND YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA'S *PLEASURE DOME: NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS*

BY

BENJAMIN OLISAELOKA UBATU

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,

FACULTY OF ARTS,

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY,ZARIA

NIGERIA.

MAY,2015

AFRICAN IMAGE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY OF LANGSTON HUGHES' *THE PANTHER AND THE LASH: POEMS OF OUR TIME* AND YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA'S *PLEASURE DOME: NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS*

BY

Benjamin Olisaeloka UBATU, B.ED (ZARIA) 2006

P13AREN8115

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENTOF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A

MASTER OF ART DEGREE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,

FACULTY OF ARTS,

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY,ZARIA

NIGERIA

MAY, 2015

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis entitled African Image In African American Literature: A Case Study Of Langston Hughes' *The Panther And The Lash: Poems Of Our Time (1964)* And Yusef Komunyakaa's *Pleasure Dome: New And Collected Poems (2001)* has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesiswas previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

Benjamin Olisaeloka UBATU ....
Signature Date

CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled: African Image In African American Literature: A Case Study Of Langston Hughes' *The Panther And The Lash: Poems Of Our Time (1964)* And Yusef Komunyakaa's *Pleasure Dome: New And Collected Poems (2001)*by Benjamin Olisaeloka UBATU meets the regulations governing the award of degree of Master of Art in English Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, andis approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Professor Tanimu Abubakar	.....	.....
Chairman, Supervisory Committee	Signature	Date
Dr. Joseph Abel	.....	.....
Member, Supervisory Committee	Signature	Date
Dr. Liman Abubakar Aliyu	.....	.....
Head of Department	Signature	Date
Professor Kabiru Bala	.....	.....
Dean, P.G. School	Signature	Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those who contributed to the struggle and liberation of African Americans, my late father, Chief P.N. Ubatu and my late brother, Mr Marcellinus Ubatu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My utmost gratitude goes to the Omniscience God for giving me the knowledge to accomplish this research. I am most grateful to my supervisors, Professor Tanimu Abubakar and Dr. Joseph Abel for their innumerable contributions towards the successful completion of this thesis. I also acknowledge the efforts and supports of my lecturers, Professor Yakubu Nasidi, Dr (Mrs)O. O. Omokore, and Dr Ezekiel Akuso. Thanks and God bless you all.

I wish to specially appreciate my wife, Sylvia Nneka Ubatu (nee Unoneme) for her understanding and encouragement during the course of this thesis. My thanks equally go to my son, Master Chukwunwike Sylva (Jnr), my sister Mrs Christophine I. Bemegbunam (nee Ubatu), my brothers, Toochukwu and Chukwuebuka and other family members. You are all great and sources ofmotivation and encouragement to me.

To you my course mates, Jackson, Binebi, Kevin, Doro, Ngozi, Bilkisu, Victor, Mohammed, Zakari and Agustine I say you are wonderful. Thank you so much my friends, especially Mr Brume Tadafe, Dr. and Mrs Ahmed Bello and family and Mr Bartholomew Komka, my roommates; Mr Emmanuel and Mr Andy for your encouragements and supports. May God bless you all.

ABSRACT

This thesis is concerned with the how image of Africa is presented in African American literature using Langston Hughes' *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Time (1964)* and *Yusef Komunyakaa's Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems (2001)*. The study employs New Historicism as an analytical tool to explore how the African American writers use poetry as a mouthpiece to assert their African origin at a period when it was widely believed by the Eurocentric critics that African Americans have totally lost Africanness. It also shows how the fusion of two distinct cultures has led to the emergence of a hybrid culture that has produced a great art, and concludes that societies should focus more on what unites them than what divides them in order to foist a more united and prosperous society. African image in the context of this research centres on the issues of slavery, racism, identity formation, disenchantment, struggle for freedom and integration. The presence of African image in the African American literary creation is anindication of their consciousness of Africa as their ancestry and their acceptance of dual heritage in U.S.A. The study is not concerned with a comparative analysis despite using two poets from two different literary eras; it rather focuses on the connection between the two poetic eras which lies in their expression of African elements and displeasure with the status quo in the American society and their desire for integration. However, Langston Hughes is more conservative (and sometimes uses caustic language) and uses blues tradition in addressing the subject matter,while Yusef Komunyakaa, who is more versatile and universal in addressing the subject matter sees Africa as a source of inspiration. These writers accept Africa as their root which they cannot return physically. They also argue that America is equally their origin although they are not fully accepted, and express their desire for integration. They therefore illustrate how the Blacks, having found themselves in the web of dual identity crisis with its numerous challenges, plays significant roles towards resolving the issues of identity formation/crisis and cultural hybridisation that characterised the changing face of the history of U.S.A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover page	i
Title page	ii
Declaration	iii
Certification	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstracts	vii
Table of contents	viii
1.1. Background.	1-4
1.2. Statement of the Problem.	5-7
1.3. Objectives of the Study.	7-8
1.4. Scope and Limitation of the Study.	8
1.5. Justification / Significance of the Study.	9
1.6. Methodology.	9
1.7. Exploration of African American Society and Their Literary Experience.	10-16
1.8. The Development of African American Poetry.	16-27
1.9.1. A Brief History of Langston Hughes and Yusef Komunyakaa.	28
1.9.2. A Brief History of Langston Hughes.	28-30
1.9.3. A Brief History of Yusef Komunyakaa.	30-31
Works Cited	32-33
2.1. Literature Review.	34-43
2.3. New Historicism as a Theoretical Framework.	43-44
2.3. Historical Development of New Historicism.	45-50
2.4. The Distinct Ideas / Tenets of New Historicists.	50-51
2.5. Questions for Textual Analysis.	51-52
Works Cited.	53-57
3.1. The Blues Tradition and Black Man's Dilemma in Langston Hughes' *The Panther And The Lash: Poems Of Our Times*.	58-78
Works Cited.	79
4.1. Black Consciousness and Memory of Africa as Inspiration in Yusef Komunyakaa's *Pleasure Doom: New and Collected Poems.*	80-94
Works Cited.	95
5.1. Conclusion.	96-99
Bibliography.	100-105

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1.BACKGROUND

Africa is the root of the Blackman in the world. But capitalism and colonialism forcibly uprooted him and planted him on other continents outside Africa, where capitalist and colonialist tendencies were meted out in full force. According to Acholonu (1987:78) 'the colonial experience is the common heritage of the Blackman, be he in Africa or in the African Diaspora. Together, they share the black man's burden'. In the course of his departure and crossing over to the New World, the Blackman carried along some parts of his material and immaterial culture. Consequently, the images of Africa sprouted up outside the African continent and many African writers in Diaspora have projected this.

Some early Eurocentric authors described Africa as primitive, barbaric and evil, and often equated her with darkness (Dark Continent), thereby regarding Africa to be 'outside history, permanent and fixed and not in any way open to transformation or change' (Acholonu, op. cit.). Hall (1997) cited in Holloway (1990) presented the Eurocentric perception of the black slaves in two broad categories. First, the Blacks were projected as subservient creatures that were naturally created and fitted for slavery but were at the same time naturally lazy and indisposed to workaccording to their nature to profit their masters. The second was the belief that the Blacks were naturally primitive, simple and cultureless which made them innately uncivilised. Also,Cartey (1991) cited in Daniel (2008:9)observes that African images have often been portrayed in Spanish Literature in a stereotype way as "a figure to ridicule, a slow, dumb, witless, clod, a caliban. And 'Negro' became an epithet of scorn, and 'black' was synonymous with Negro". These misrepresentations ofthe Blacks informed the widely held belief by some

early Eurocentric critics that the Blacks lack the intellectual endowment needed to engage into highly creative activities like poetry.

According to Butcher (1971), the need to dissuade this prejudiced image of Blackman and the fact that most of the early African American writers experienced only a nominal slavery (they were rather groomed in favouritism by their white masters) informed a fundamental perception of Africa in the creative imagination of the early African American writers like Lucy Terry (1746) Jupiter Hammon (1761) and Phillis Wheatley (1773). They tried to match their creative prowess with the Whites and wanted to write like the whites. This gave testimony of the intellectual and artistic endowment of the Negroes in a period of doubt. However, their projection of Africa was devoid of any personal identification with the predicaments of the Blacks, especially the colour crisis. They did not make any concerted effort at redeeming the bastardised image of the Blacks in America. Butcher (1971:117) argues thatHammon's "An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York achieved popularity because of its ambivalent tone in regard to slavery." Similarly, Wheatley published her first book of poetry while in England in 1773. Thus, when:

> *Already anti-slavery sentiment was crystallizing, and Negro contemporaries of Miss Wheatley were denouncingslavery. Yet, because she had experienced only nominal slavery, the young poetess permitted herself no specificidentification with the cause of abolition. Indeed we findher saying: " 'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land"; later she wrote even more explicitly in "Lines to the studentsof Cambridge University": 'Twas not long since I left my native shore - // The land of errors and Egyptian gloom.* (Butcher, 1971: 119).

The emergence of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s opened a new vista of black consciousness among the African Americans and other blacks in Diaspora. This cultural and

intellectual association was formed by the African Americans to assert themselves, and protest the racial, socio-political and economic subjugation of the Blacks in the United States of America. Many black consciousness writers emerged at this literary era. Prominent among them are: Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Angelina Weld Grimke and many others. They recreated the African image and black consciousness that have been consigned. Since then, Africa has been presented in the African American creative writing as an image of reality as well as an idea. The poems of Langston Hughes and YusefKomunyakaa are poetic assertions of their African heritage and deep longing for root. This therefore forecloses that slavery did not really annihilate African elements as some Eurocentric critics have often argued.

Besides, this intellectual cum cultural movement saw to the emergence of the Negritude Movement between 1934 and 1948. The movement whose major proponents, Leopold Sedan Senghor, AimeCesaire and Leon Damas, from the beginning disputed the ideas that the black man fell down from the jungle trees and that his ancestors were monkeys gambolling in the wilds of Africa. They rather argued that Africa had an original civilization, which was superior to most of the current models (Mphahlele, 1962). In this regard, African American literature acted as a catalyst for the awakening of racial pride that necessitated the promotion of African ideals among the Blacks both on African continent and the Diaspora.

The Harlem Renaissance brought about a socio-cultural revolution in the African American society and art as a result of which blacks found pride in their body pigmentation, overcame the shame of their past and then began to express their black consciousness. Some of these writers like Marcus Garvey and Maya Angelou have argued for a physical return to Africa, while others like Langston Hughes and YusefKomunyakaa saw Africa as a source of inspiration. Consequently, Africa has remained a fundamental issue in African American literature.

African skills in arts, ironworks, architecture, music and musical instrument, which were introduced into America by the African American ancestors, helped to shape American cultural styles. Their skills in agriculture contributed tremendously to the flourishing American plantation economy. Besides, the Africans brought with them African words and linguistic patterns, religious beliefs and worship styles, aesthetic values, musical forms and rhythms, all of which have contributed tremendously towards the hybridisation of American culture and literature.

Eurocentric critics have often mirrored African American poetry without penchant, especially the Harlem Renaissance poets. They see their projection of African images as a mere sentimentalism and over idealisation of fantasies about Africa, which was intended to evoke sympathy and pity with the trials of the oppressed African Americans and probably necessitate revolutionary change, which it failed to achieve. However, a more critical exploration of African American poetry, which this study intends to do, reveals that the portrayal of African elements by the poets goes beyond Black Nationalism and invocation of pity and sympathy. It is rather a display of racial maturity and sensitivity by African American writers to their African heritage and root, which may not really be glorious but they are proud of it. Besides, it is also a mouthpiece fashioned out by the African Americans to reach out to the world and to express their displeasure and aspiration for integration in American mainstream. African American poetry therefore is an advocate for a total re-evaluation of the issues of racial prejudice, slavery and socio-political and economic marginalisation of the minority or less advantaged groups in our society, and the need for a total integration of such groups in order to fashion out a liberal society, especially in this era of globalisation.

1.2.STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the early stage of black consciousness in the African American imaginative writing, especially the Harlem Renaissance, Eurocentric critics dismissed some African themes on the ground that the writers expressed what some of them referred to as 'mere sentimental primitivism', 'sentimental idealism', 'black nationalism' and idealisation and fantasies about Africa. Some equally perceived their works as being 'more poetic dreaming than understanding'. (Brown1978). They argued that such works were meant to arouse feelings of pity and sympathy for the oppressed African Americans in their trials and tribulations and offered a platform to write about the evils of slavery, the intention of which was to set in motion a revolutionary change. But instead it elicited outpouring of Christian love and sympathy particularly by Northern women who demonstrated 'how the slave system violated the most basic bonds of humanity, such as that between mother and child'. (Reid, 2008:25). Commenting on this argument, Brown(1978:1) succinctly submits that:

> *Stephen H. Bronz, for example, dismisses what he callsthe 'artificial tradition' of Africanist themes in HarlemRenaissance writing; according to Wayne Cooper, black writers of the twenties merely perpetuated plantationimages of the happy 'primitive Negro'; Sterling Brown alleges that their idealization of Africa 'was more poeticdreaming than understanding'; Harold Isaacs sneers at'the poet-aesthetes of Harlem ... trooping back to the Kraals and the jungles dens'; and Langston Hughes, whostarted his writing career in the Harlem Renaissance, is singled out by Arthur P. Davis for a 'phony ... black nation-alism' based on 'fantasies'*

This study argues that the presence of African elements in African American literature is evidence that Africa occupies a crucial position in the literary ethos of the African Americans. It

is rather the writers' assertion of African heritage and their expression of deep longing for root. The writers use poetry as a tool to show that although they cannot return to Africa, it remains their motherland and there is no reason to be ashamed of their African origin, not minding the betrayal by Africa that led to the circumstantial influx of the Blacks into the U.S.A.

African Americans contributed immensely to the flourishing U.S.A. economy and helped in ensuring political stability in the country by their full participation in the American civil war that brought the Northern America and the Southern America together to form a formidable economy and a political super power, and to attain the great American dream. However, at the attainment of the American Dreamthe Blacks were racially segregated and discriminated against and therefore denied active participation and full benefit in the thriving U.S.A. economy. In fact, they were seen as the Otherin U.S.A. So, poetry became the mouthpiece for expressing their discontentment and yearning for integration. Using the same poetic voice they argue that the problems of Blackman are similar everywhere, be him in America, Africa, West Indies and other continents. In view of this, they call for Diaspora cooperation and unity to fight the cause of Blackman in the world.

The study is equally premised on the fact that man is a cultural reservoir. One's culture is often implicated (consciously or unconsciously) in whatever one does. This implies that one cannot be totally alienated from one'sculture when someone is confronted with culture threatening conditions however terrible and enduringthey could be.Contrary to the opinion of some Eurocentric critics that there was a considerable desertion of African elements in the New World by the African Americans since they passed through a separate cultural development and also mingled withthe civilisation of their masters, the Whites, this study argues that a contact between two or more different cultures, as witnessed in the U.S.A. between the Blacks and the

whites, does not necessarily lead to a total elimination of the weaker culture(s) by the stronger one; rather, such circumstance oftenresultsinto the emergence of a hybrid culture,the type that can be seen in U.S.A today. Besides, this study illustrates that the presence of African images in the African American poetry indicates that African continuities are still sustained in the New World, and that slavery did not exterminate African elements in the life of the African Americans. This is contrary to the argument widely held by some Eurocentric critics that since African cultural institutions and practices were not fully brought over to the New World by the ancestors of the slaves and sustained in their totality, their continuations cannot be sufficiently proven. Besides, the study seeks to establish that slavery is better appreciated as providing a platform for hybridisation of the U.S.A. and African heritages.

The exploration of African American poetry, particularly Langston Hughes' *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times* and YusefKomunyakaa's*Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems* has revealed that the African American writers present African world view, which, though they cannot physically return to, they feel related to. This image of Africa has enabled them overcome the fears and shames about their past and also helped them to bear their predicaments in the U.S.A.It has also helped them to work towards achieving a cultural revolution and social integration and participation the U.S.A.without minding the colour of their skin.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed at illustrating that:

- African American writers use poetry as a mouthpiece for asserting their African heritage and root.

- ❖ The devastating effects of slavery did not annihilate the African elements, but instead provided the platform for hybridisation of American and African heritages.
- ❖ African American poetry is a distinct and authentic poetic voice for expressing dissent and desire for integration.
- ❖ African American writers use poetry as a medium to advocate for Diaspora unity to liberate the Blacks from oppression.

1.4. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The research examines African images in African American poetry using Langston Hughes' *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Time* and YusefKomunyakaa's*Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems* as a case study. The choice of the poems for the study is because much have not been done in the African American poetry, especially in the Nigerian universities, which can be attributed to lack of materials as well as the widely held belief by many people, including the scholars, that poems are difficult.

Besides, the two poets, Langston Hughes and YusefKomunyakaa, are chosen as representations of the Harlem Renaissance and the contemporary time, respectively in the African American literary era. Langston Hughes is one of the most intelligent and highly revered poets of the Harlem Renaissance (the age of the birth of black consciousness in African American literature). His poetry is a summation of black consciousness and the major events that took place in American slave era as they affected African Americans. YusefKomunyakaa on the other hand is an outstanding poet in the contemporary African American era. He is an intellectual whose poetry is widely applauded for his versatility and universality of subject matter. He views African image from a broader and a more universal perspective. He shifts from African

American milieu to Diaspora to bring to bear Diaspora relationship in his subject matter. These poets from two different literary eras are chosen to examine the link between the two periods, particularly in addressing African image.

1.5. JUSTIFICATION / SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The common goal of every research undertaking is the acquisition, verification, updating, growth and development of knowledge, or to refute already existing knowledge, to help meet human needs and also to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the researcher. According to Singer (1961:15) cited in Akuso (2005), the objective of any research undertaking is "the acquisition and codification of knowledge whether to aid in solving human problems or to satisfy intellectual or aesthetic objectives of the researcher". This thesis therefore contributes to the expansion and codification of the existing knowledge of African American literature. It serves as a contribution to the ongoing effort by the black consciousness writers to popularise and portray the African image in the African American literature.

This research also explores a stylistic and thematic shift in African American literature. African American literature has gone a long way to come to what it is today: it has undergone different stages and transformations from the early days of slavery to the contemporary time. Every literary generation or era in African American literature, though it may not have a centralised style and themes as obtained in most literary movements of the ages, often has a unified ideology – the black consciousness, which distinguishes it clearly from the corpus of American literature. This research, besides, seeks to establish that African American literature is distinct from American literature; hence, it should not be studied or criticised in paripassu with American literature or as an inferior part of American literature as critics have often done in the past. A systematic and comprehensive study like this will provide a sound comprehension of

African American aesthetic values and will stand as an invaluable asset to researchers, scholars and any person who finds interest in African American literature.

1.6. METHODOLOGY

This thesis is based on the analyses of the primary texts. The researcher also consulted secondary materials both literal and non-literal works, including learned articles, seminars and conference papers that treated African American history and literature. Relevant internet materials were also consulted in the course of carrying out the study. However, the analyses, findings and the arguments of the study were based on the primary texts under study.

1.7. EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND THEIR LITERARY EXPERIENCE

The knowledge of slavery is a prerequisite to understanding African American literature. According to Barksdale and Kinnamon (1972: 2), understanding of early Afro- American literature is depended on the circumstances of slavery, in two ways. The first is the negative effect slavery had on Africans by divesting them of a substantial portion of their own culture. The traumatic experiences of the horrendous ‘middle passage’, and brutal oppression and force labour in America left them with literature of oral medium. The second is that the agents of slavery tried to obliterate the slaves’ sense of culture and personality and also denied them access to formal education. They therefore lacked the opportunity to produce written works. This accounts for why their literary outputs were sparse before the late 18th century.

African Americans are the racial group in the United States of America whose dominant

ancestry is from sub-Saharan West Africa. They have been called varieties of names at different points in history. These include Negroes, Colored, blacks, and Afro-Americans. According to Harris (2008), 'African American, black, and to a lesser extent Afro-American, are used interchangeably today. Richard (1976:5) states that:

> *the terms black or Afro-American or any other terms in a collective sense can be used to include those people, regardless of how white they may appear, who have the (1976:5) slightest trace of 'black' blood.*

Sometimes, black immigrants from Africa and Caribbean Islands are referred to as African Americans, although they often have histories, cultural practices and languages different from that of the African Americans born in U.S.A, especially the first and second generation immigrants. According toBrawley(1970), the history of African Americans encompasses the experiences of the black race/racial group in the United States from the time they arrived in the land around 15th century to date. Their history is intertwined with the history of blacks in the various countries of Latin America and the West Indies.

Hortonand Horton (2008) opine that Africans and their descendants have been a part of the story of the Americas as early as late 1440s, during which they served as scouts, interpreters, navigators, and military men to the European explorers, who first encountered the Native Americas. These assertions have also been corroborated by Carson (2007: 42) thus:

> *Seventy-five years before the English first tried to establishcolonies in North America, Africans had been in the Americas. By 1580, 45,000 of them had arrived in the Spanish colonies in Florida and present day New Mexico.*

These historical records show that from the earliest days of settlement in America,

especially in the North America, some blacks were free and freely lived with whites. But what they do not clearly show was the process by which African slavery became the widespread institution by 1700. According to Frazier (1978),

> *by the beginning of the 18th century, any African in the English colonies was assumed to be a slave unless he could prove otherwise. Except in exceptional circumstances, not only theoriginal African but his descendants forever were confined to slave*

This exploration informs that African heritage might have been rooted in the New World before the emergence of the circumstantial slavery. The early Africans might have been practicing their culture without obstruction from any angle. But since they lacked written expression, they could not have written any work as a testimony today that their cultural practices were sustained in the New World. However, they resorted to folk narratives, which are traditional to Africa, as a means of transmitting their heritage from generation to generation. This forms a part of the fundamental consideration to the presence of African image in African American literature. Besides, culture is not static; it is ever dynamic. It is therefore possible that African heritage might have undergone some transformations as a result of its contact with American heritage, and vice versa. This does not in any way suggest an extermination of African elements in America. Instead, it should be seen as a significant factor in the hybridisation of American culture and literature.

One of the most significant moments in the history of the African Americans is the

docking of twenty (20) African captives in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. They arrived on a 'Dutch man of war'. About a hundred African captives started the journey but only the twenty made it because the ship ran into a bad weather. The twenty captives, who were sold to the colony, were treated as indentured slaves, and, after some years, were freed like their white counterparts from England. They later became economic competitors in the new world. The system of indenture slave was later replaced by a race-based slavery in which the Whites used the Blacks as slaves. Consequently, the black slaves were subjected to somewhat dehumanising conditions on the plantations, which created rather a sustained psychological and emotional onslaught on them and rendered their creative abilities redundant. They became their white masters' personal properties and depended on them for survival. Worst still, they were displaced and mixed up on the plantation to deprive them of their cultural benefits, tribal affinities, language, family, friends and affection. The class stratification in the society was such that the Whites would continue to rule the helpless black slaves on the economic and social ladder. The encounters between the slaves and their white masterson the plantation resulted into the growth of a hybrid culture which is a mixture of both the white and the black culture. Similarly, the sexual encounters between the white masters withtheir black female slaves also resulted into the birth of a hybrid personality called 'colored', who was not accepted into the mainstream of the white community, and was always looked at with susceptibility in the black communities.

The disoriented pattern of identification and 'pigmetocracy' dominant in U.S.A. established a terrible relationship between the Blacks (including colored) and the Whites, the Blacks and the Colored, and even among the Blacks.Since literature does not exist in a vacuum, African American literature emerged to fill in the vacuum. It sprouted up as a literature in revolution that, by mixing rebellion, protest and the avant-garde gave rise to a new black

...a writer who encounters himself in a category called Negro. He carries this definition like a limb. It travels with

consciousness of ideological, political and literary possibilities. (Dash, 1975). Therefore, African American writer, as George(1968) cited in Dash (op, cit) puts it, is

The famous Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on 1st January, 1863 [during American Civil War (1861-1865)] and was later made law by passage of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865 outlawed slavery in U.S.A.consequently, aboutthree million black slaves regained their freedom. Equally, the 15th amendment, which was ratified in 1870, extended the rights to vote to the black males. However, the rights were not enforced in the Southern America except with the presence of union troops that occupied the region during the 'Reconstruction'. When they withdrew in 1877, white Southerners immediately reversed the situation. Terrorism, championed by Racist groups, like the notorious Ku Klux Klan, was used to deter blacks from voting, holding office, and enforcing labour contracts. Eventually, the Whites established the law of segregation to segregate against blacks in public places like transportation system, schools, restaurants, and other public facilities. This continued until in 1910, when blacks, under the umbrella of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), mounted serious legal challenges to segregation, and lobbied legislatures on behalf of black Americans. They also established an independent community and institutions like schools, banks, newspaper, and small businesses to carter for the needs of the community.

The period between 1910 and 1950 was very significant in the history of the African Americans. Besides their achievements stated above, especially under the auspices of the

NAACP, the largest internal migration in United States of American history took place this period. According to Harris (op.cit) 'over 5 million African Americans moved from southern plantation to northern cities in hopes of finding better jobs and greater equality'. This led to the settlement of blacks in a New York suburb called Harlem. The result of this is the emergence of the inevitable cultural movement known as Harlem Renaissance, in the 1920s. The movement used art, music, and literature to demonstrate the creative abilities of African Americans. This period also saw the emergence of a new generation of African American political leaders, like Marcus Garvey, a Black Nationalist, and A. Philip Randolph, a unionist, who found unflinching support among urban African Americans. In line with this, African American literature can be seen as art and cultural expressions produced in response to black experiences from the traumatic dislocation from Africa to America, the nefarious 'middle passage', slavery, oppression, segregation, and fight for freedom, equality, social integration and participation to creation of a new American society.

The 'landmark decision' in the case of Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka by the United States Supreme Court in 1954 stopped legal segregation against the Blacks in the South. This energised the Civil Rights Movement in their struggle to gain full citizenship rights and to achieve racial equality in the United States, especially in the South using nonviolent means like marches and sit-ins, boycotts, and refusal to abide by segregation laws. However, in the 1960s, the continual attempts to use violence to hold onto segregation by the Southern whites forced the African Americans to question the effectiveness of nonviolent protest in the cause of their struggle. Hence, militant black leaders like Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam and Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther Party emerged. They encouraged blacks to defend themselves, using violence if necessary. The pressures from the Civil Rights Movement prompted U.S.A.

government to pass into law the 1965 Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights, banning all forms of discrimination against the Blacks and brought equality to black voters throughout the South. Consequently, African Americans have made remarkable impacts in politics, economy and literature in America.

Summing up the overview of African American literary experience, Cobb (1972) cited in Richard (1979: 9) gave four parameters black literature should be evaluated. They are:

- Confrontation with an alien and usually hostile society.
- Dualism, or a sense of division between one's own self and that of the dominant culture.
- Identity, a search that embraces the question 'whom am I?'
- Liberation, both spiritual and political.

According to Richard (op. cit), this conceptualisation, when infused or saturated with the personal feelings and insight of black writers, helps reveal the peculiarly black perspective, the closeness and understanding conditioned by racial memory and by ethnic kinship to the shared history of the Black as victim.

1.8. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY

Poetry is the first and the earliest genre of literature that started in African American society. The genre is as old as African American society itself; it predates the emergence of the United States of America as an independent country. It started as oral or folk poetry, which were sung by black slaves on the American plantations not just as a means of entertainment or relaxation, but as a way of expressing the brutality and oppressions they were subjected to, and their dissatisfaction with the harsh realities in which they were helpless. It was rendered in form of songs, spirituals, blues, rap, minstrels, African American gospel music, and often

accompanied by musical drums. This form of poetry is spontaneous, eloquent, realistic and more empathic than the written poetry.

Poetry according Williams Wordsworth is a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. June Meyer, an African American poet and critic sees poetry as:

> *an exact transliteration of reality and dreams into new realityand into new dreams. Poetry is the most precise use of words because it*
>
> > *is most particular, intense and brief. Poetry is the way I think and the way I remember the way I understand or the way I express my confusion, bitterness and love. ... poetry challenges the apparent respectability of abstracti ons by offering a completely particular statement of a completely particular event whether the event is a human being or the response of one human to poverty, for example.* (Clarence, 1969: 142).

Clarence explains that African American poets, unlike most white poets, are profoundly conscious of forces that ironically protect them from the empty patterns of intellectual gentility and individualism, and at the same time keep their approach fresh. So, their poetry is shaped by their experiences in the world, both deeply personal and social. In line with this, Quentin Hill quoted in Clarence (op, cit) submits that the purpose of their poetry, which function parallels the function of their music in giving motion back to the people, is to evoke response in its audience, the black masses, since ideally it is the mass of black people who are speaking. He quickly adds that 'the response evoked must lead to change whether that change be immediate or proceeding over an undetermined period of time'. The African Americans therefore, have been able to use

poetry to versify their socio-political and historical experiences in America, from the traumatic experiences of the 'Middle Passage' to overcoming the depressions associated with slavery, fight for freedom and equality, actualisation of full American citizenship and fashioning out of a new America.

The chief among the causes of a sporadic spread of this form of literature is the fact that African Americans had traumatic experiences and feelings which they needed to share with the whole world but, unfortunately, lacked the written medium because, as slaves, their masters were more concerned about their personal gains rather than the slaves' education and personal development. Consequently, they found solace in oral art forms to express their feelings, emotions and experiences which brought them a kind of psychological and emotional escape from the harsh realities of the time.

The contemporary African American poetry articulates the totality of politico- socio-cultural principles of American society which has been informed by various historical forces and in which subsumed is the racial discrimination and segregation against the blacks and other minority racial groups in America, who have contributed to the development of American society. It is a characteristic of quest for socio-economic and psychological emancipation advocated through a distinctive literal voice, and has been a major thematic preoccupation of the contemporary African American poets. This poetry started its journey in the 18th century with the poem 'Bars Flight' (1746) by Lucy Terry, though it was not published until 1855, when it was published in Josiah Holland's 'History of Western Massachusetts'. Others are Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, whose poems are 'An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries' (1761) and 'Poems on Various Subjects' (1773), respectively. The poems of these poets are very remarkable for two main reasons: first,they are attempts to convince the

world that intellectual capabilities needed for artistic creation are not special preserves of the Whites, and that blacks are therefore not in any way inferior to whites in this regard. Second, the poems were used as tools to advocate for ideals of liberty and justice thereby indicting slavery and the perpetrators of such dehumanising acts.

The 19th century African American poetry witnessed a great influx of anti-slavery poets, both from black and white communities. Prominent among them are George Horton and Elymas Rogers, Charles Reason, James Bell, John Brown, James Whitefield, among others. George Horton wrote enough poems to gain his freedom, although he was not freed until the arrival of the Union soldiers. A few of his poems contained anti-slavery crusade, but are not match with the anti-slavery poetry of the likes of Charles Reason and Elymas Rogers (Negro poets). Rogers, for instance, is notable for his 'The Repeal of the Missouri Comprise Considered' (1856), which reveals not only poetic ability, but also a concrete sense of historical reality and social responsibility (Butcher, 1971). Whitefield denounced America's hypocrisy in his America and Other Poems. He says:

Thou boasted land of liberty
It is to thee I raise my song
Thou land of blood, and crime,
and wrong.... (Butcher, 1971: 119).

It would be recalled that in its Declaration of Independence, America affirmed a basic belief that 'all men are created equal' and have absolute rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. White abolitionist poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Walt Whiteman made a landmark in anti-slavery poetry. They used their poems to indict slavery and also paid tributes to Negroes. Lowel,

in his 'Commemoration Ode' does more than moralise:

Bow down, dear land, for thou has found release...

Bow down in prayer and praise!

No poorer in thy borders but may now

Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow....

(Butcher, 1971: 119).

On the other hand, Whitman, with a familiar universal identification in his poem, 'Song of Myself', says:

The hounded slaves that flags in the race,leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat, The twinges that sung like needles his legs and neck the murderous buck-shot and bullets,

All these I feel or am...

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,
I myself become a wounded person. (Butcher, 1971: 120).

Whitman and Lowel, because of their more universal perception and approach, created the most artistic and lasting anti-slavery poetry (Butcher, 1971: 120).

African American poets also used dialect tradition, although they did not make much success or wide recognition until the entrance of Dunbar in the literary scene. Lawrence Dunbar in real sense did not experience actual slavery nor had any first-hand experience of the Deep South or plantation life. Obviously, he obtained accounts of slavery from his mother, who was an ex-slave. His folk and dialect poetry is picturesque, often amusingly idyllic, in the final analysis he was categorised as part of the apologist tradition. Despite his tremendous popularity and unrivalled artistic prowess, he failed to take into consideration the sufferings and wickedness of

slavery from the physical, economic, moral, or democratic point of view. Several Negro poets like J. Mord Allen, Daniel Webster Davis and James Edwin Campbell imitated Dunbar, although they cannot be approximated with his popularity. They all continued with the familiar plantation tradition, following the pattern established by Dunbar.

The poems of James Weldon Johnson mark a slight movement from the familiar plantation tradition, although he was still part of the apologists. His poetry represents a combination of folk consciousness and intellectualism. His Fifty Years and Other Poems contain some outstanding poems, one of which, 'Go Down Dearth', is a magnificent folk funeral sermon with a memorable blend of poetic imagery, folk superstition, and verisimilitude. It reads:

> *And God said: Go down, Death, go down,*
> *Go down to Savannah, Georgia,*
> *Down in Yamacraw,*
>
> *And find sister Caroline.*
> *She's borne the burden and heat of the day,*
> *She'slabored long in my vineyard,*
>
> *And she is tired -*
> *She's weary -*
> *Go down, death, and bring her to me.* (Butcher, 1971: 123).

The apologist or self-pity tradition employed by the 19th century African American poets could not continue in the 20th century as a result of ideological shift in the American society. Actually, structural slavery has been outlawed, but rather than integrating the African Americans into the mainstream of American society, they were discriminated and segregated against. They were not seen as citizens of the United States of America. This raised the question of 'who am I' in the African American communities. Hence, the poets of this era (post slavery) saw reasons to shift emphasis and find a new voice to address their predicaments.

In the early 20th century William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a professor of Sociology at

the University of Atlanta, prophesied in the opening lines of his famous *The Souls of Black Folk*, that 'the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line'. This prophecy in deed came to fulfilment. Du Bois wrote his first poem, 'Litany at Atlanta' immediately after the 1906 Atlanta race riot, which was marked by excessive violence and brutality. Social inequities, predictions of labour revolts, acknowledgement of Darwinism, bitter protest against mob rule and subjection of human beings to brute violence were poetic themes that stood in marked contrast to those favoured before 1912 (Butcher, 1971: 124).

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's, also known as Negro Renaissance, brought a new impetus to African American literature in general, and poetry in particular. It was more than a reflection of the triumph of realism or naturalism. Negro poets, like their fellow artists in the other genres, made a 'deliberate cessation' in their struggle to influence majority opinion, and also delineated selves from the propagandistic or apologetics motives in order not to stifle their artistry. This marked a literary independence of African Americans. Consequently, Langston Hughes, declaring this literary independence says:

> *We younger Negro artists who create now intend toexpress our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. If colored people are pleasedwe are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves.* (Butcher, 1971: 125).

The leading poets of this era are Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Sterling Brown. The poets, for the first time reflected a race consciousness; they

found pride in the colour of their skin, and divested themselves of the older apology and self pity. Having renounced the traditional dialect, James Weldom Johnson created what he called 'poetry in free verse' in which he utilised the truer idioms of the folk imagination in "God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse (1929)". In 'Shroud of Color' Cullen shows a deep sense of race and race loyalty, pride, and group confidence and presents the Negro as a chosen race. The poem reads:

Lord, I will live persuaded by mine own
I cannot play recreant to these:
My spirit has come home, that sailed the
doubtful seas.
(Butcher, 1971: 126).

Similarly, McKay in his sonnet, 'Africa' presents a more dignified image of Africa than the Wheatley's prejudiced view of Africa as 'The land of errors and Egyptian gloom'. It reads:

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,
The sciences were suckling at thy breast;
When all the world was young in pregnant night
Thy slaves toiled at their monumental best.

Thou ancient treasure land, thou modern prize,
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddles-eyes
Watches the mad world with immobile lids. (Butcher, 1971: 127).

The Harlem Renaissance poets also introduced elements of social protest in their poems to address the exigencies of the moment. This is well explicated in Fenton Johnson's 'Tired', and McKay's famous 'If We Must Die'. In 'Tired', Johnson says:

I am tired of work; I am tired of building up
somebody else's civilization.
Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane;

... Pluck the stars out of the heavens.
The stars mark our destiny.
The stars marked my destiny.
I am tired of civilization.

Still in the same social protest mood, McKay in 'If We Must Die' says:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs,
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark and mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed in vain...

The Harlem Renaissance heralded a turning point in African American literature in general. The African values were projected in a positive form and could be in appreciation by African Americans, who before now could not look at their roots and past with ambivalence. Before this time, African American literature was chiefly read by other blacks. But through the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance, African American literature, together with other black fine art and performance art, began to make entrance into mainstream American culture. By the 1930s, the African Americans have made rapid and remarkable social gains. Hence, the poets reflected 'an increasing degree of self-assurance, of what might be termed 'racial poise', and of both national and international identity'. They began to participate in politics and other sectors of the national life, which has hitherto been a special reserve of whites. The poets shifted emphasis from protest poetry to a more universal theme. They projected their theme of racial prejudice with subtlety into that of world concern for human rights and dignity. Margaret Walker, one of the influential poets of this era, in the conclusion of her poem 'For My People', pleads:

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born.
Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. ...

... let a beauty full
of healing and a strength of final clenching be the

...let the dirges disappear. Let a
race of men now rise and take control.

Similarly, Melvin Tolson's 'Dark Symphony' concludes:

Out of abysses of illiteracy
Through labyrinth of lies
Across wastelands of Diseases...
We advance!

Out of dead-ends of poverty,
Through wilderness of superstition,
Across barricades of Jim Crowism...
We advance!

With the people of the world....
We advance!

Other prominent poets of this era are Rober Hayden and Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African American Pulitzer Prize winner. They both skilfully combined universal theme with racial overtones, thereby expressing in their poems the transcending of human identity over racial identity.

The need to be free in the real sense of it continued to trail the African Americans in the 1940s. With the growing influence of the Civil Rights Movement in the campaign against racism and colour crisis, coupled with need to ensure the survival of democracy, which has been threatened by war, especially World War II, the African American poets decided to extend their themes to address these issues without rescinding their struggle. Owen Dedson relates racial issue to war. He sees war as a result of racial prejudice. Therefore, they would continue to fight

until they win – full rights, full citizenship and equal opportunities with whites in America. In 'Conversation on V', he asks:

Now what is this here victory?
It what we get when we fight for it.
Ought to be Freedom, God do know that.

Also, Myron O' Higgins gives a vivid picture of what literature of this period was like. In his 'Sunset Horn', which has been seen as notable, sincere and courageous war poem for its reflection of 'quiet, unrhetorical strength', he says:

O, we went quickly or a little longer
... categories, creed and race
Evaporate into the flue of common circumstance.
We sought a transcendent meaning for our struggle.
... One day the rest of you will know the meaning of annihilation...

... O in that day
When the tongue confound, and the breath is total in the horn
Your Judas eyes, seeking truth at last, will search for us
And borrow ransom from this bowel of violence.

Other influential poets of this period include Margaret Walker, Robert Hayden, Melvin Tolson and M. Carl Holman. They include a group of highly cultivated and thoroughly sophisticated intellectuals who, like their white peers, reveal an increasing preoccupation with style and technique (Butcher, 1971: 141). Besides, this group of poets also exhibited a great variety and a growing mastery of poetic technicalities in their works. But this is not unexpected, because as Brooks rightly argued that every African American poet has 'something to say', as everything about him is a raw material. And as artists none would like to offer raw materials, instead they would prefer to polish them to make them more insinuating, and therefore, more overwhelming.

A Great Depression hit the poets in the 1950s as a result of which the cultural and

political assertions that have characterised the literature of the African Americans met their waterloo. However, by the end of 1950s there was a fertile ground for political militancy and the New Negro had already been instituted to take up the challenges. In the 1960s, New Black Poetry sprang up and reacted to the racial chaos. This was largely culminated and aroused by the racist minded activities like the 1960s bombings, the burning ghettos, the screaming sirens, the violent confrontation between blacks and the white police, and the cruelty of black poverty amid bounteous white affluence (Barksdale and Kinnamon, 1972: 806).

Another group of poets that emerged during this period is the Broadside Press Poet, so called because of their social, political and moral broadside attack on the American society, using caustic, bitter, and sometimes cynical tone. These poets moved forward from protest literature into defining a new black nationalism that was set to elate the African Americans from the despondent and pessimism which characterised the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. This is articulated in Amiri Baraka's 'Black Art' (1978), in which he argues that 'the pessimism of the earlier years had been replaced by a vigilant and militant activism in the new poetry'. The core objective of this poetry is to achieve a social change and moral and political revolution in America. According to Wagner (1973), this poetry is also characterised by the use of street speech and black ghetto idiom both which reflect and demonstrate a trend towards the deployment of black folk material that is eloquently exemplified in the poetry of Sonia Sanchez, Don Lee and the other Broadside Press Poet whose use of Black ghetto speech is also an index of racial assertiveness. Another notable poet of this era is Nikki Giovanni.

From the 1970s till date, African American poetry has continued to evolve. The poets have a strong belief that poetry can be used to drive home socio-cultural, political and moral revolution in the society, and they have been committed to this cause using their poetry as a

medium. The poets made unquantifiable impact to the struggle for total emancipation of the African Americans. In recognition of the impact made by the poets of this time, Maya Angelou was given audience to read a poem at Bill Clinton's presidential inauguration. Besides, Rita Dove won a Pulitzer Prize award and at the same time served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995. Other poets that made landmarks at this period include YusefKomunyakaa, Cyrus Cassells, Thylias Moss, Natasha Trethewey, among others.

1.9.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF LANGSTON HUGHES ANDYUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

The history of the two poets, Hughes and Komunyakaa are essential for this study. This is because New Historicism, the analytical framework for this study, proposes that there is an interplay between literary texts and historical contexts. It argues that historical and cultural backgrounds of events are sources of raw materials for literature, and literature mirrors them. So, they serve as co-texts to each other. Therefore, having lived in racial American society, the history of the two poets would propel good analyses.

1.9.2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri on the 1st February, 1902 and died of cancer on the 22nd May, 1967. He was the great-great-grandson of Charles Henry Langston, brother of John Mercer Langston, the first black American to be elected to public office, in 1855. So, he was a member of an abolitionist family. He was raised by his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas. At the age twelve he left his grandmother to live with his mother and stepfather in

Illinois. He attended Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, and started writing poetry in the eighth grade. While in the school he was selected as the class poet. His humble origin developed in him a deep admiration for those he referred to as 'low-down folks', poor people who had a strong sense of emotion and pride. His father enrolled him at Columbia University to study Engineering because he never believed he could make a living out of writing. After a short time, he dropped out with a B+ average and continued writing poetry. Fortunately, he was the first African American writer to make out living solely from writing.

His first published and the most famous poem, 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers', which he published in *Crisis Magazine*, appeared in Brownie's Book. Subsequently, his numerous other works appeared in the NAACP publication, *Crisis Magazine*, *Opportunity Magazine* and other publications. He gained some early recognition and support among important black intellectuals such as James Weldon Johnson and W. E. B. DuBois. While at the Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, D. C. as a busboy he gave three of his poems to Vachel Lindsay, a famous critic, whose enthusiastic praise won him a wider audience.

As a Renaissance man, someone with a wide interest and is multi-talented, he used jazz and blues forms, the key elements of the Harlem Renaissance, to express his arts. He believed that they expressed wide range of African Americans' experience, from grief and sadness to hope and determination. He was considered as one of the most important writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, an African American artistic movement in the 1920s, whose primary objective was to celebrate black life and culture through all forms of art. Typical of a Harlem Renaissance artist, Hughes had a strong sense of racial pride. Using his literary works – poetry, novels, plays, essays and children's books – he promoted equality, condemned racism and injustice, and celebrated African American culture, humour and spirituality. The African

Americans found in him ‘a voice for their own experience and culture – a voice that hadn’t been widely heard until then’. In fact, his literary works helped shaped American literature and politics. He also inspired many artists of other races to write, draw, play, and sing; some even dedicated their works to him.

Hughes received a scholarship to Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, where he obtained his B.A. degree in 1929. He held many awards, among which is a Guggenheim Fellowship (1935). In 1923, he travelled on a freighter to some parts of Africa like Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea, and later to some parts of Europe like Italy, France, Russia and Spain. Prior to his return to his ‘beloved Harlem’ in 1926, he, in the same year, accepted a job with Dr.Carter G. Woodson, editor of the Journal of Negro Life and History and founder of Black History Week. Sitting in the clubs listening to blues, jazz and writing poetry were his major hobbies; and through these experiences, he developed a new rhythm in his writing.

As a prolific writer, Hughes wrote sixteen books of poems, two novels, three collections of short stories, four volumes of ‘editorial’ and ‘documentary’ fiction, twenty plays, children’s poetry, musicals and operas, three autobiographies, a dozen radio and television scripts, dozens of magazine articles and edited seven anthologies. Besides, his poems have been translated into German, French, Spanish, Russian, Yiddish, and Czech; and many of them have been set to music.

1.9.3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

YusefKomunyakaa was born James Willie Brown Jnr. on 29th April, 1947 in Bogalusa, Louisiana. Later in life he reclaimed the name ‘Komunyakaa’, which his great grand parents had

earlier given up. He is the first of the five children of his father, who was a carpenter. His childhood experiences – his familial relationship, maturation in a rural southern community, and the musical environment afforded by the close proximity of the Jazz and blues centre of New Orleans provided the fundamental themes and flavour for his works. (Daniel, 2008:18). He graduated from Bogalusa's Central High School in 1965 and enlisted in the U.S. army the same year 'doing a tour of duty in South Vietnam during the Vietnam war' until 1967.

While in the army, he served as information specialist, and later became the editor of *Southern Cross*, the military newspaper. These gave him the opportunity to cover major actions during the war, interviewed his fellow soldiers, and published articles on Vietnamese history and literature – activities that fetched him Bronze Star award. The Vietnam War experiences afforded him the materials that later culminated in the publication of *DienCaiDau* (1988), which is an integral part of Pleasure Dome (2001).

At the end of the War, he enrolled into the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, where he received Bachelor of Arts degree in 1975 and obtained his M.A. in Creative Writing from Colorado State University in 1978. He also received an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of California, Irvine in 1980, after which he started teaching poetry and creative writing in the New Orleans public school system and at the University of New Orleans, respectively. He became an Associate Professor at the Indiana University, Bloomington in 1985, where he taught until the fall of 1997, when he became an English Professor at the Princeton University. He later became a professor in the Creative Writing Program at the New York University.

He got married to Mandy Sayer, an Australian novelist, in 1985. The marriage lasted for ten years only. Later in 1990s he got married to poet ReetikaVazirani, who gave him a son. On

16th July, 2003, his wife and their only son were found dead, in an apparent murder-suicide, at Chevy Chase, Maryland, where they had been living.

As a prolific writer, he has many works and awards to his credit, some of which include: *Dedications and other Darkhorses (1977), Lost in the Bonewheel Factory (1979), Copacetic (1984), I Apologise for the Eyes in my Head (1986), Toys in the Field (1987)* and*DienCaiDau (1988),* which brought more attention to him and won the Dark Room Poetry Prize. Among others, he holds the Fellowship of Southern Writers and 2007 Louisiana Writer Award for his enduring contribution to the 'literary intellectual heritage of Louisiana'.

Works Cited

Acholonu, R. C. (1987). 'The West Indian Novelist and Cultural Assertion:SamuelSelvon's Artistic Vision' in Emenyonu, E. (Ed), *Black Culture and Black Consciousness in Literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Akuso, E. S. (2005).*Africa in the Caribbean Imagination: A Study of thePoetry of Edward, K. Braithwaite, Nicolas, B. Guilen and Derek Walcott.*Ph.D dissertation submitted to the Department of English and LiteraryStudies, ABU, Zaria. Unpublished.

Barksdale, R. K. and Kinnamon, K. (1972).*Black Writers in America: A Comprehensive Anthology*. New York: Macmillan.

Brawley, B. (1970).*A Social History of the American Negro*. New York and London: Collier and Macmillan Ltd.

Brown, L. W. (1978). 'The African Heritage and the Harlem Renaissance: A Re-evaluation' in Jones Eldred D. (Ed).*African Literature Today*. No.9: Africa, America and the Caribbean. London and New York: Heinemann and Africana Publishing Company.

Butcher, M. J. (1971).*Negro in American Culture*. Second edition. New York and Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House of Canada Ltd.

Clarence, M. (1969).*The New Black Poetry*. New York: InternationalPublishers.

Daniel, F. (2008).*The Image of Africa as Memory and Insight in African-American Poetry: An Appraisal of YusefKomunyakaa'sNewPoems*. A paper presented at the 25th Nigerian English Studies Association (NESA) annual conference held at Ahmadu Bello University, Zariabetween 24th – 27th Sept, 2008.

Dash, J. M. (1975). 'The Example of AimeCesaire' in King, B. and Ogungbesan, K. *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*. Zaria: AhmaduBello Uni. Press and Oxford: UniversityPress.

Frazier, E. F. (1963).*The Negro Church in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Harris, L. M. (2008). 'African Americans'. *Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*.Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Holloway, E. J.(Ed). (1990). *Africanism in American Culture*. U.S.A.: Indiana University Press.

Horton, J. O. And Horton, L. E. (2008). 'African American History.'*Microsoft Encarta(R) 2009[DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Mphahlele, E. (1962).*The African Image*. New York: Praeger.

Richard, L. J. (1976).*The Black Image in Latin American Literature.* USA: Uni. of New Mexico Press.

----------(1979).*Black Writers in Latin America*. USA: Uni. of New Mexico Press.

Wagner, J. (1973).*Black Poets of the United States: From Paul LaurenceDunbar to Langston Hughes*. Urbana, Chicago and London: Uni. of Illinois Press.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

African American literature is the literature of black race in the United States of America. Wikipedia defines it in a broader sense as 'writings by people of African decent living in the United States'. It quickly added that African American literature, just like African American history and life, is extremely varied. The literature explores themes and issues that are of particular interest to the African American society. These include the role of African Americans within the larger American society, African American culture, racism, slavery and equality. It also incorporates oral forms like spirituals, sermons, gospel music, jazz, blues and rap. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, African American literature is a 'body of literature written by Americans of African descent'. It further argues that African American writers have engaged the American writers in a creative dialogue as early as the pre-Revolutionary War

period, and the result of this is ‘a literature rich in expressive subtlety and social insight, offering illuminating assessments of American identities and history’.

The ruthless dehumanisation black slaves received from their white masters prompted the Blacks to create a literary genre that bore testimonies against their masters and expressed, without reservation, their intentions to be free and liberated from slavery and institutionalised racism, and also be accorded full citizenship of the United States and partakers in American dream. Therefore, the major occupation of all black writing is to define and illustrate the possibilities of a startling new vision of the world – the possibility for an authentic literary ‘voice’. (Dash, 1975).

African American literature has evolved through various stages over the years. These stages can be summed up thus: the Vernacular Tradition, the Folk Narratives, Slave Narratives, Reconstruction Period (1867-1877), Post-Reconstruction period (1877-1900), Harlem Renaissance Period (1920s), Civil Rights Period (1940-1960s), Post Civil Rights Period (late 1970s) and Literature since 1970.

Also, African American literature has undergone series of criticisms which came from both the white critics and the black critics, with emphasis at its being accepted and adjudged alongside American literature. Some critics argue that African American literature is a substandard or inferior part of American literature. They argue in line with Michel Foucault’s thesis on literature and power, that literature is a dominant culture. They see African American literature as a deviation from the norm, and an expression of the African American’s inability to create literature of a high standard. Some others criticssee it as a balkanization of American literature, which can be attributed to ‘balkanization of literature over the last few decades or as an extension of the culture wars into the field of literature’. According to these critics, literature

is splitting into distinct and separate groupings because of the rise of identity politics in the United States and other parts of the world. They rejected the art of bringing identity politics into literature because this would mean that 'only women could write about women for women, and only Blacks about Blacks for Blacks'.

However, these critics failed to consider the exigencies that necessitated the emergence of African American literature. The blacks were seen from the Eurocentric point of view as bearers of inferior culture, because they did not have written traditions. So, the earliest black writers wrote to refute this wrong notion and to prove that they were equals to the European and American authors although they were denied the very important tool for creative writing, the western education. Besides, the African Americans have dual identities. First, they are blacks and are emotionally attached to Africa, which they cannot physically return to.Second, they live in a country in which they claim her identity, but, unfortunately, they are not accepted as full citizens and are greatly segregated and discriminated against. In other words, they lived both inside and outside United States of America. So, their literature forms part of American literature in one hand, and exists as an entity on the other hand. Andrew, Foster and Harris (1997) and McKay and Gates (2004) hold the view that African American literature does not in any way balkanize American literature, rather, it (African American literature) reflects the increasing diversity of the United States, and shows more signs of diversity than ever before in its history.

African American literature created unique voices in isolation by weaving new styles of storytelling. The benefit of this is that these new styles and voices can leave their isolation and help revitalize the larger literary world (McKay and Gates, 2004). Similarly, the successful borrowing and incorporation of African Diasporas oral traditions and folk life into African American literature is a great feat that has broken 'the mystique of connection between literary

authority and patriarchal power'. In other words, African American literature went beyond the African Americans' 'proving their worth' to subverting the United States' literary and power traditions, which have hitherto been determined by the dominant culture as a white male activity.

African American literature has also received Attack from the African American circle. Some have argued that it should always portray the positive image of African Americans but sometimes it does not. The chief among this group of critics is W. E. B. Du Bois, who, together with the editors of The Crisis, a publication of the NAACP, had always stated that literature was a tool in the struggle for African American political liberation. Du Bois argues that African American art and propaganda must be one, because all art is propaganda 'and ever must be'. Therefore, everything said or written about the African American must be the best, the highest and the noblest in them. In view of this, he clashed with McKay in 1928 over the publication of *Home to Harlem* for its depiction of Black 'licentiousness' that only appealed to the 'prurient demand[s]' of the white audience and publishers. A similar public displeasure in African American community was thrown at Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry (1929)* for its portrayal of intra-racial prejudice between lighter-skinned and darker-skinned Blacks, as many African Americans would not accept such a public relay of their culture's 'dirty laundry' (Wikipedia).

However, some African American writers like Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman and Alice Walker have contrary opinion about African American literature. To them, it should not be seen as propaganda; rather, it should provide a realistic picture of life and people. In his essay 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain' (1926), Langston Hughes makes his position clearly known that 'Black artists intended to express themselves freely no matter what the Black public or white public thought'. He criticised the attitude of the Black writers and

poets, 'who surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration,' a situation in which a talented Black writer preferred to be seen simply as a poet rather than be called a Black poet, whereas such poet subconsciously wanted to write like a white poet. He opined that 'no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself'. This forms a fundamental perception of black consciousness upon which Hughes' artistry is based. On this note, Hughes argues in the essay that

> *we younger Negro artists now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they aren't, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.... If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, the displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temple for tomorrow, as strong as we know how and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.*

The study of African American literature reveals a proportional presence of African images in their literary imagination. Some of the African images that are profound include African religious beliefs and worship styles, rituals, hospitality, communality, the use of songs, dances, foods and entertainment during cultural celebrations and festivities (which are usually annual events), and family relations and reunion. In fact, the survival of African Americans in the American society alone is enough reason to prove the presence and continuity of African survival in the African American society. Unfortunately, some critics have denied this fact. Some even argue that African survivals can only be found directly in some isolated cities like Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Frazier (1963) argues against the presence of African images in African American society considering the devastating effects slavery had on them. He arguesin line with the thought that

slavery destroyed the African family institution and social culture, because African slaves were displaced on arrival to the New World, and were not only prohibited from performing their traditional African ceremonies and rituals but were also placed to stay close to whites, whose behavioural and thoughts pattern must have influenced them to fashion out and evolved a new culture that is independent of African culture. In other words, shipment of African Americans to the United States and the harsh conditions of slavery they endured were terrible enough to exterminate even the least observable African culture in them. Similarly, some early white racist critics have argued that 'the almost total absence of visible African artefacts in African American culture led to the general belief that nothing African survived the tyranny of American slavery'.

It is a known fact that the system of slavery practiced in U.S.A. in which the slaves lost almost everything, including their fundamental human rights, devastated the African slaves. However, that they were displaced in the New World on arrival and banned from engaging in any form of social gathering, including cultural practices, and made to stay close to whites on the plantations do not mean that they did not device means of social interaction during which their cultural practices manifested. There is no way a strict adherence to the ban would have thrived since black slaves and their white masters lived in separate quarters on the plantation. According to Jahn (1968: 142), 'the African slaves shipped over to America, as already remarked, did not abandon their culture on board ship'. He further states that 'they adapted these cultures to the new conditions, stubbornly preserving everything they could. The rest they altered, improved and expanded ...' To buttress this further, Keyes (2004: 23) describing the infusion of African customs into the West Indies life, says:

> *Enslaved blacks lived primarily on plantations in separate quarters from whites, with occasional interaction. The env -ironment fostered the maintenance, reinforcement,and continuation of African-derived practices in music making,oral narratives, material culture, philosophy, and belief system when unsupervised by the whites, blacks retreated to their traditions in such contexts as the, "invisible church", secludedplaces in the words aptly termed "brush harbours" or makeshift religious*

Since the conditions of the slaves in West Indies were like an extension of those in America, there is a great tendency that black slaves in America must have fashioned out a similar or a fairly related way of satisfying their socio-cultural thirsts. Therefore, we can rightly assert that the minimal interpersonal relationship that existed between the African slaves and their white lords, nevertheless, contributed to hybridise African American society, which in turn contributed significantly to the cultural hybridisation in America. In line with this, Herskovits(1958) postulates that Africa has made numerous significant contributions to American culture; and that African culture does not only survive as 'African's carry-overs' in America, but has also helped to shape African American culture as distinct in the United States. Against this backdrop, Wikipedia, acknowledging the presence of African image in African American literature has this to say:

> *African American literature constitutes a vital branch of the literature of the African Diaspora, with African American both being influenced by the great African diasporic heritage and in turn influencing African diasporic writings in many countries.*

There is no way African American literature can influence African Diasporas writings when in itself it lacks African presence. Still refuting the assertion that African Americans lost their African image to slavery, Okwori (2001) submits that African image were naturally

embedded in the lives of African Americans, because 'the body of the enslaved was a storehouse of knowledge, a library of performative information'. It is right to note here that every human being is a repository of culture, a cultural artefact, and, indeed, a culture in action. Based on these, there is no ploy by whites that would have prevented the futuristic manifestation of African image in African American hybrid culture, be it as a reality or in their imagination. This is therefore evident in their development of formal art forms, which, though distinct in a way from African art form, serves as a melting point of different African cultures. Wagner (1973: 31) opines that 'several studies, especially those of Krehbiel, James Weldon Johnson, and Herskovits, have shown that Negro antiphony is indisputably of African origin'.

Paying credence to the survival of African image in African American culture, Puckett (1926) states that such African trait can be found in the areas such as; burial customs, folk beliefs, and religious philosophy like beliefs in ghost, witchcraft, voodoo and conjuration. Other proponents in this regard like W. E. B. Dubois and Carter G. Woodson argue that such could be found in their arts, religion, spirituality, attitude towards authority, tradition of generosity, music, drama, poetry, folklore, oratory and technical skills. Some of these attributes can be found in the poetry of Langston Hughes and YusefKomunyakaa. For instance, in the 'Trumpet Player', Hughes says:

The Negro
With the trumpet at his lips
Has dark moons of weariness
Beneath his eyes
Where the smouldering memory
Of slave ships
Blazed to the crack of whips
About his thighs.
(Kent, 1972).

Here, Hughes probes into the repertoire of memory to project the image of a helpless

innocent victim. He keeps afresh the sorrowful memories of the ancestry past using the fashion of the blues singer. According to Kent (1972: 81), 'He probes beneath the vibrant music to the memory of the slaves' "middle passage" from Africa with its well known horrors'.

In his first poem, which he published in Crisis magazine in 1921 and dedicated to W. E. B. Dubois, Langston Hughes says:

> *I've known rivers:*
> *I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the*
> *flow of human blood in human veins.*
>
> *My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*
> *I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.*
> *I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.*
> *I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.*
> *I heard the singing of Mississippi when Abe Lincoln*
> *went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy*
> *bossom turn all golden in the sunset.*
>
> *I've known rivers:*
> *ancient, dusky rivers*
>
> *My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

Commenting on this poem, Neal (1982) observes that with direct and honest lyricism Hughes makes a mythic unity between the souls of black people and the timeless, rivers of life. He presents the image of Africa as universal and ancient having contributed actively to the building of civilizations. He shows a deep longing and emotional attachment with Africa, associates himself with the myriad of workers who laboured to build the 'pyramids', and celebrates the African American's African heritage.

The poet uses the image of Mississippi to illustrate the circumstantial influx of African slaves into America, the horrors that are associated with it, and the Union conquest of the confederacy and the abolition of slavery in the United States. Neal opines that Mississippi, which is referred

to as the 'Father of Rivers' among the Indians is the mightiest and most legendary river on the North America. By making references to rivers in Africa and America the poet does not only see himself as a witness to history, but also shows that just as rivers are united, his soul is one. This implies that he converses for a kind of imaginative return to Africa rather than physical return of all black people to Africa.

Similarly, Daniel(2008) in his presentation of African image in African American poetry submits that YusefKomunyakaa's New Poems is a demonstration of 'the capability of African-Americans to use images and symbols of Africa from both personal and historical point of view and the store of individual memory and imagination to face the demons of everyday life'. He observed that Komunyakaa's New Poem is a retrieval of stored racial and ancestral memory 'to heal the future'. Also commenting on the tribute to the music of Richard Johnson in 'Tenebrae' for its African flavour, he posits that:

> *It is also good to note that this connection is not only in the musical ethos that binds the Diaspora musical flavour to African patterns and rhythms, but most importantly in the*

Looking at Africa in the literary imagination of the African Americans, he observes that Komunyakaa presented image of Africa as memory and insight. Exploring the works of Komunyakaa, Salas (2003) stated that Komunyakaa is a writer that has never felt depressed or repudiated his heritage. While addressing other themes like war and world events, he simultaneously honours racial and personal particularities. This gives *Pleasure Dome* a touch of universal appeal.

It is obvious from the reviews that despite the dissent voices that have tried to refute the presence of African images in African American literature or argued against it on the ground of being mere sentimental, it is suffice to say that the presence of African elements in African American literature is a form of cultural assertion and deep yearning for origin by the African American writers. It is equally a testimony that slavery did not in any way annihilate them of their African heritage.

2.2. NEW HISTORICISM AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

New Historicism, otherwise known as Cultural Poetics, is a reaction against the New Criticism's view about the meaning, nature and content of literature. The New Criticism, also known as Old Historicism, believes that a text is 'self-contained', and that 'all knowledge and cognition are historically conditioned'. Therefore,when analysing a text the critics should not go beyond the text. New Historicism challenges the view held by the new critics that history serves as a background to literature and that a written history is an objective and accurate record of what happened in the past. This means that historians can 'write objectively about any given historical time period and, therefore, are able to state definite truth about that era'. In essence, the historians through varying historical analyses can discover 'the mind set, the worldview, or the beliefs of any group of people'. This justifies that text is 'self-contained' and of primary importance in literary analysis since it mirrors the history of its time, and historical context only sheds light on the text.

However, New Historicists challenge this assumption on the ground that history cannot project ultimate reality because of its biases to events, and that history and literature are discourses which are interrelated and the question of one being superior to the other should not

arise. According to Bressler, Charles E. (2004: 181),

> *That historians can articulate a unified and internally consistent worldview of any given people, country, or time period and canreconstruct an accurate and objective picture of any historical event are key assumptions that cultural poetics challenges.*

He further argues that:

> *Appearing as an alternate approach to textual interpretation in the 1970s and early 1980s, Cultural Poetics – often called New Historicism in America and cultural materialist in Great Britain -declares that all history is subjective, written by people whose personal ideas affect their interpretation of the past.*

The New Historicists believe that since history is subjective, it lacks absolute truth, accuracy and therefore cannot provide an objective image of past events or the worldview of any given time or a group of people. They closely examine how all discourses, like sociology and politics, (and that of textual analysis itself) influence an interpretation of a text; based on this they submit that history:

> *Provides its adherents with a practice of literary analysis that highlights the interrelatedness of all human activities, admits its own prejudices, and gives a more complete understanding of atext than does the old historicism and other interpretative approaches.*

2.3. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism is one of the outcomes of poststructuralist theory- which reject the notion that there is an underlying structure upon which meaning can be attained, and rather contend that meaning is a continuous process, and always in a state of flux. According to Storey,

(1994: 85), “what we call meaning is a momentary stop in a continuing flow of interpretations of interpretations.” They acknowledge the works of various poststructuralists and adopt their unconventional mode of interpreting a text, especially in the area of ‘deconstructing and decentring a text’. But as Goring, Hawthorn andMitchell (2003) and Webster, R. (1996) rightly observe, the anti-formalist stance in their works distances them from structuralism and post structuralism.

As a distinctive form of American analysis New historicism began around 1979-1980 with the publication of several essays and texts, such as ‘Improvisation and Power’ and ‘Renaissance Self-Fashioning’ (1980) by Stephen Greenblatt and a variety of works of Louis Montrose, Jonathan Dollimore and others (Bressler, C. E. 2003: 181). These critics share a similar set of concerns rather than a ‘codified theory or school of criticism’. They share the view that historical methods of literary analysis from the mid- 1800 to the middle of the twentieth century were erroneous because of the widely held belief by many scholars that history served a background information to textual analysis and that historians could objectively reproduce the past events and periods into a reality.

The term New historicism according to Goring, Hawthorn andMitchell (2003) was first used by Wesley Morris in 1976 ‘to designate a mode of literary criticism derived from German historicists such as Leopold von Ranke and Wilhelm Dilthey, and American historians such as Vern L. Parring reshadowed in Roy Harvey Pearce that it is Stephen Greenblatt, who ver of Forms in the Renaissance’, a current meaning as:

> *describing groupings of critics and theorists who have rejected the SYNCHRONIC approaches to culture and literature associated with STRUCTURALISM and who have attempted to provide more adequate answers to problems associated with the tensions between aesthetic, cultural, and historical approaches to the study of a range of different sorts of TEXT.*

describing groupings of critics and theorists who have rejected the SYNCHRONIC approaches to culture and literature associated with STRUCTURALISM and who have attempted to provide moreadequate answers to problems associated with the tensionsbetweenaesthetic, cultural, and historical approaches to the studyof a range of different sorts of TEXT.

Similarly, Bressler (op., cit.) opines that Cultural Poetics was first and aptly named New Historicism by one of its Chief proponents, Stephen Greenblatt, in the introduction to a collection of Renaissance essays in a 1982 volume of the journal 'Genre'.

New Historicism is comprised of two groups of critics and theorists: the North American group, who are known as 'Cultural Poetics' and the British group popularly known as 'Cultural Materialists'. Although these groups have little differences in their assumption, New Historicism is used, on occasions, as an umbrella to include members of both groupings. However, Graham Holderness (1991: 157) cited in Goring, Hawthorn andMitchell (2003) observed that the difference between them is that cultural materialism is:

> *Much more concerned to engage with contemporary cultur - al practice, whereas New Historicism confines its focus of attention to the past; cultural materialism can be overtly, even stridently, polemical about its political implications, where New Historicism tends to efface them. Cultural materialism partly derives its theory and method from the kind of cultural criticism exemplified by Raymond Williams, and through that inheritance stretches its roots into the British tradition of Marxist cultural analysis, and thence into the wider movement for socialist education and emancipation; New Historicism has no sense of a corr-*
>
> *esponding political legacy, and takes its intellectual bearings directly from 'post-structuralist' theoretical and philosophical models.... Cultural materialism acce- pts as appropriate objects of enquiry a very wide range of 'textual' materials [... whereas] New Historicism concerns itself principally with a narrower definition of the 'textual': with what has been written....*

Later in his book *Shakespeare Recycle* (1992:34) he points out that the New Historicists have preferred to 'reproduce a model of historical culture in which dissent is always suppressed, subversion always previously contained, and opposition always strategically anticipated, controlled and defeated'.

The attempt to understand the nature, the definition and the function of literature from historical perspective, which New Criticism failed to provide, saw to the development of New Historicism. Greenblatt and other critics sought to know the meaning of literature, how it was formed, and whose interest it serves. They probed into literature to ascertain whether the contemporary issues and the cultural milieu of the times work together to form literature or it is just an art form that will be with us always. While Greenblatt was interrogating the new critics' conception about literature and textual analysis through their various limitations, other dissent voices also rose against the New Criticism's assumption; they include, among others, Deconstruction, Feminism, Marxism, and LacanianPsychoanalysis. Each of these poststructuralist theories rejected the New Criticism's assumption that a text is 'self-contained' and began to develop various assumptions about the concept of literature and varieties of approaches to textual analysis. In this period of 'cacophony of voices' Cultural Poetics or New Historicism emerged. It then proposes a 'new or alternative history to the conventional, established historical accounts and practice through which literary text had been largely studied. This is achieved by turning away from an apparently stable, fixed history which formed a kind of backcloth to the imaginative workings of the artists' mind, to a past which was uneven, fragmented, even unfinished so that history is a site of conflict which is ongoing, not a stable form of containment.'

The works of a French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and Marxist scholars like Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, Georg Lukacs, Walter Benjamin, and a cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz have a great influence on New Historicists. Foucault on his discussion on discourse depicted a literary text as parts of wider discourses, which involves other texts (literary and non-literary), institutions and social practices. Based on this, New Historicists argue that 'a literary work and a "background" are unreifiable, but must rather be recognized as elements inseparably conjoined within a shared discourses''. (Goring, Hawthorn andMitchell, 2003). They equally argued alongside the Marxist scholars that people who lived in a particular period of history shaped the history of that period; and that all life is interconnected. Therefore, they see literature as a discourse which interweaves other discourses like history, sociology, philosophy, etc to relate meaning and assume a social function. Discourses, according to Webster (op., cit.), 'can interweave with each other, so that within a specific institution employing a certain discourse, other discourses may circulate which inculcate broader social power structures'. He further asserts that:

> *By studying a text primarily in terms of its discursive organisation instead of the traditional categories such as character, plot andmorality, different readings and meanings become available; a newset of textual relations arises in which the historical and ideological operations which take place can be more readily understood.*

Borrowing from Althusser's idea on ideology and literature, they reject the view that a text has single meaning which it is the task of criticism to uncover. Althusser calls this 'interpretative fallacy'. He argues that a text is constructed with multiplicity of meanings, that in order for something to be said, other things must be left unsaid. It is the 'unsaid' (silences and absences) within a text that must be interrogated. For him, the important thing in the work is

what is not said. He further opines that between the problem posed in a text and resolution offered, rather than continuity, there is always rupture. It is by examining this rupture that we discover the text's relationship with ideology and history: "we always eventually find, at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence".

New Historicists also took a clue from the works of a cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who opines that every 'human nature' is dependent on culture, which he views as 'a set of control mechanism – plans, recipes, rules, instructions', which helps to govern human behaviour. Hence, every human being is seen as a cultural artefact. He further argues that everybody views a society in a unique way as a result of 'information gap' between what our body tells us and what we have to know in order to function in the society. This gap also exists in the society because the society cannot know everything that happens among its entire people. The society, like individuals, fills in this gap with whatever it assumes that has taken place. This results into the subjectivity of history. Therefore, a text is full of biases and therefore cannot be 'self-contained' as the New Critics claim. To interpret a text, the New Historicists argue that 'each separate discourse of a culture must be uncovered and analysed' in order to reveal how the distinct discourses interact with each other, institutions, peoples and other cultural elements. Discourse, here, is used in a narrower sense to mean the 'seemingly insignificant details present in any cultural practice', but through which the 'inherent contradictory forces at work within a culture' is revealed; and through the interaction among these discourses a culture is shaped and all human activities, including reading, writing and textual analysis, are interconnected.

2.4. THE DISTINCT IDEAS / TENETS OF NEW HISTORICISTS

- Literary text is not 'self-contained'. Literature is situated in a historical context which is

unstable and fixed but coloured by social circumstances. It is studied in its historical context and history does not serve as a background to it.

- Since history is tied up into a vast web of economic, social and political factors, works of literature and men that produce them are social constructs, who like their works are shaped and influenced by social and political forces.
- There is interplay between literary text and other historical contexts. There is no need for the traditional separation of texts into literary and non-literary texts, or 'great' literature and popular literature. Therefore, literary and non-literary texts should be read on parallel or inter-textually.
- History is viewed by New Historicists as a historical phenomenon that coalesces with other discourses like anthropology, sociology and literature. It provides materials for literary creation, and literary texts project it; they play complementary role to each other. So, literature should not be given a primary concern over history since meaning evolves from the interaction of the variously interwoven social discourses. Consequently, all discourses are necessary and must be investigated in the process of textual analysis.
- The historical and cultural background of events are source of raw materials for all texts, thus they function as co-texts influencing each other.
- History does not proceed in a linear and progressive order; hence, historical events should not be classified within specific historical periods. Besides, historians cannot claim accurate record of historical events, because 'the study of the past cannot be objective and the present transcended, it is constructed from and determined by the range of textual materials available'.
- New historicism seeks to extend the frontiers of literature by redefining literary study by

examining the institutional situation that defines what should be studied as literature while placing emphasis on exploration of literary studies rather than the actual study of texts. Thus, much attention is paid not to the interpretation of literary texts but to the examination of the original ideology that gave rise to the text and which has helped to disseminate it through a culture.

- New Historicism is unconventional in their textual analysis; it does not conform to norms as in New Criticism that a text has a hidden meaning waiting to be unveiled or unmasked. It rather proposes a new or alternative history to the conventional, established historical accounts and practice through which literary texts had been largely studied.
- An aesthetic work is a social production and the meaning of a text lies in the cultural system which is comprised of the interwoven discourses of the author, the text and the reader. To discern textual meaning therefore, the critic should look into these three main areas: the author's life, the social rules and dictates found within the text, and the text's historical context or situation as reflected in the text.
- A text is 'culture in action' because literature and history are social discourses 'and therefore battlegrounds for conflicting beliefs, actions, and customs'. A text is therefore bound to have a multiple interpretations.

2.5. QUESTIONS FOR TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Stephen Greenblatt suggests that when analysing any text from a New Historicism or Cultural Poetics point of view, the following questions should be asked and investigated:

- What kinds of behaviour, what models of practice do this work seems to reinforce?
- Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling?
- Are there differences between my values and the values implicit in the work I am

reading?

- Upon what social understanding does this work depend?
- Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work?
- What are the larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame might be connected?

This thesis draws on New Historicism because of itsgreat deal of attachment to African American literature. African American literature is viewed as ‘an art and a cultural expression’ through which the African American writers articulated the hub of their historical experiences from the forcible removal of their ancestors from Africa and slavery to contemporary time. The content and theme of their literary works over the years has been dominated by the slavery experiences, oppression, racism, colour crisis, struggle for freedom, social integration and participation, and articulation of new American society, where the blacks would be ‘coheirs to the American dream of liberty, justice and the pursuit of happiness’. To analyse a literary text having cross-cultural elements as can be seen in African American literature, there is a need to go beyond the text, and New Historicism, as a literary theory, becomes a good analytical instrument to the study.

WORKS CITED

Abrams, M. H. (1981).*Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fourth edition. Canada: DanS. Norton and Peters Rushton.

Acholonu, R. C. (1987). 'The West Indian Novelist and Cultural Assertion:SamuelSelvon's Artistic Vision' in Emenyonu, E. (Ed), *Black Culture and Black Consciousness in Literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

'African American Literature' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American_Literature. Retrieved 14/01/2009.

African American Literature (2009). Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

African American Literature (2009). Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Akuso, E. S. (2005).*Africa in the Caribbean Imagination: A Study of the Poetry of Edward, K. Braithwaite, Nicolas, B. Guilen and Derek Walcott.*Ph.D dissertation submitted to the Department of English and LiteraryStudies, ABU, Zaria. Unpublished.

Aliu, M. (2003). "Marxism and Literature" in Aliu, M.(Ed), *Linguistics andLiterature in Language Arts: An Introduction*. Kano: Rainbow Royale.

Andrews, W., Foster, F., and Harris, T. (Eds). (1997).The Oxford Companion of African American Literature. Oxford: University Press.

Barksdale, R. K. and Kinnamon, K. (1972).*Black Writers in America:A Comprehensive Anthology*. New York: Macmillan.

Bastide, R. (1971).*African Civilizations in the New World*. London: C. Hurst and Company.

Brawley, B. (1970).*A Social History of the American Negro*. New York and London: Collier and

Macmillan Ltd.

Bressler, C.E. (2004).*Literary Criticism: an Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Brown, L. W. (1978). 'The African Heritage and the Harlem Renaissance: ARe-evaluation' in Jones Eldred D. (Ed),*African Literature Today*. No.9: Africa, America and the Caribbean. London and New York: Heinemann and Africana Publishing Company.

Brown, S. (1969).*The Negro in American Fiction, Negro Poetry and Drama.*New York: Arno Press and The New York Times.

Butcher, M. J. (1971).*Negro in American Culture*. Second edition. New Yorkand Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House of Canada Ltd.

Clarence, M. (1969).*The New Black Poetry*. New York: InternationalPublishers.

Dabydeen, D. And Wilson-Tagoa, N. (1987).*A Readers' Guide to West Indianand Black British Literature*. London: Rutherford Press.

Dash, J. M. (1975). 'The Example of AimeCesaire' in King, B. and Ogungbesan,K. (Ed), *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*. Zaria: AhmaduBello Uni. Press and Oxford: UniversityPress.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1939).*Black Folk, Then and Now*. New York: Holt.

----------(1969).*The Souls of the Black Folk.* ----------.

Eagleton, T. (1983).*Literary theory: an Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Frazier, E. Franklin (1963). *The Negro Church in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Daniel, F. (2008).*The Image of Africa as Memory and Insight in African-American Poetry: An Appraisal of YusefKomunyakaa'sNewPoems*. A paper presented at the 25th Nigerian English Studies Association (NESA) annual conference held at Ahmadu Bello

University, Zariabetween 24th – 27th Sept, 2008.

_____. (2006),*From Folk Tradition to Global Concern in African-American Poetry: The New Focus in Rita Dove's American Smooth and Yusef Komunyakaa'sDienCaiDau*. AnUnpublished Master's Thesis submitted to the Postgraduate School, AhmaduBello University, Zaria.

Gates, L. H. (Jnr) and McKay, N. (Eds). (1996).*The Norton Anthology ofAfrican American Literature*. U.S.A.: Norton and Co.

Goring, P., Hawthorn, J., Mitchell, D. (2001).*Studying Literature the Essential Companion*. London: Hodder Arnold.

Harris, L. M. (2008). 'African Americans'. *Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*.Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Herskovits, M. J. (1958). *The Myth of Negro Past*. New ed. Boston: BeaconPress.

Holloway, E. J.(Ed). (1990). *Africanism in American Culture*. U.S.A.: Indiana University Press.

Horton, J. O., And Horton, L. E. (2008). 'African American History.'*Microsoft Encarta(R) 2009[DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Hughes, L. (1959).*Selected Poems*. New York: Knopf.

Jackson R.(Ed). (1963).*Black American Writers: Bibliographical Essays*. Volume 1. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Jahn, J. (1968).*A History of Neo-African Literature: Writing in Two Continents*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Joans, T. (1971).*A Black Manifest in Jazz Poetry and Prose*. London: Calder and Boyars Ltd.

Kent, G. (1972).*Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*. Chicago: Third World Press.

Keyes, L. C. (2004).*Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Urbana and Chicago: University of

Illinois Press.

Klinkowitz, J.(1978). 'Early Writers: Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, and Benjamin Banneker' in Inge, M. Thomas, Duke, Maurice and Bryer.

Luga, C. A. I. (2008).*Literary Space and the Print Media in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of The Guardian and New Nigerian Newspapers*. A Seminar paper presented as a PhD proposal in the Department of English and Literary Studies, A.B.U. Zaria. Dec.,2008.

Mphahlele, E. (1962).*The African Image*. New York: Praeger.

Neal, L. (1982). 'Langston Hughes: Black America's Poet Laureate' in Richard, K. (Ed), *American Writing Today*. Forum Series Vol. 1.

Okwori, Z. J. (2001).*Echoes in the Bone: Africanism and Performing Religion in the America*. A paper presented at the viii annual conference of theAmerican Studies Association of Nig. (ASAN) at Hill Station Hotel, Jos from 13th –16th August, 2001.

Ploski, H. et. al(Ed). (1989).*The Negro Almanac: A Reference Works on theAfrican American*. USA: Gale Research.

Richard, L. J. (1976).*The Black Image in Latin American Literature.* USA: Uni. of New Mexico Press.

----------(1979).*Black Writers in Latin America*. USA: Uni. of New Mexico Press

Salas, A. M. (2003). Race, Human Empathy, and Negative Capability: the Poetryof Yusef Komunyaka. West Chester University Fall 2003.

Muse.jhu.edu/journals/college_literature/v030/30.4salas.html.

Storey, J. (1994).*An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* London:Harvester Wheatsleaf.

Taylor, R. (Ed). (1977).*Background Lectures in English Literature*. Benin-City:Ethiope Publishing Corporation.

Wagner, J. (1973).*Black Poets of the United States: From Paul LaurenceDunbar to Langston Hughes*. Urbana, Chicago and London: Uni. of Illinois Press.

Webster, R. (1990).*Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Arnold.

Wood, P. H. (1978). 'It was a Negro Taught Them: A New Look at African Labour in Early South Carolina' in Frazier, E. and Thomas, R. (Ed). Third edition. *The Underside of American History*. Vol. 1 to 1877. USA: Jovanovich, Inc.

Woodson, C. G. (1968).*The African Background Outlined*. New York: Negro Universities Press.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1. THE BLUES TRADITION AND BLACK MAN'S DILEMMA IN LANGSTON HUGHES' *THE PANTHER AND THE LASH: POEMS OF OUR TIMES*.

Langston Hughes' ***The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times***, published posthumously in 1974, is a collection of Hughes poems in which he, using blues skills, shows his definite and political stance against slavery and racism as practiced in the USA, and considering the fact that the age, according to Lawrence Lieberman, 'demands intellectual commitment from its spokesmen'. Hughes uses blues tradition as a distinct creative ability to lucidly explore the horrible experiences of African Americans in U.S.A. race politics. He probes into the well of memory to bring afresh the circumstantial influx of African slaves into America and the horrendous experiences of the 'Middle Passage'. The lyricism of the poetry gives it distinct musicalfeatures that help to balm the wounded ego of the African Americans. Hughes uses his poems to appeal to the conscience of all concerned and those who listen to him,to look into the dehumanising treatmentAfrican Americans receive in America.He also indicts U.S. Government that fights for justice, equity and freedom of all mankind, but allows such wickedness in her land. He equally calls on the humanity in general to re-examine the issue of racism, especially as it is practiced in U.S.A. In doing this, he keeps his sensibility at pace with the realities of the times.

Blues is a kind of music that is sung by a single voice followed by one or more instruments and is usually sung without a chorus. It gained entrance into the African American community in the early twentieth century, and borrowed harmonic and structural devices and vocal techniques from work songs and spirituals. According to Gates (Jnr) and McKay (1996), blues 'involved a compellingly rhythmical sound that relied on patterns of call/response between singer and instrument too'. This call/response pattern is derived from the music pattern of the

West and Central Africa, a situation whereby a singer calls out song lyrics in anticipation that the group will sing the lyrics. Ralph Ellison cited in Gates L. H. (Jnr) and McKay N. (op., cit.) observes that,

> *The blues is an impulse to keep the painful detail and episodes of a brutal existence alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jazzed grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.*

Besides, Gates L. H. Jnr and McKay N. (op., cit) submit that:

> *All blues songs involve improvisation, sometimes just in terms of timing and emphasis, sometimes more elaborate reinvention of melodies and even meanings. They also involve particular sounds – train bells and whistles, sexual groans, conversational whispers, rhapsodies, shouts, stories, especially in their first rural incarnations, barnyard noises as well.*

Blues resembles spirituals in form, but unlike spirituals it is secular in nature and thus promises no heavenly grace or home, but instead offers 'a stylized complaint about earthly trials and troubles, a complaint countered, if at all, by the flickering promise of an occasional good time or loving companion'. Ralph Ellison, for instance, sees Richard Wright's Black Boy as the blues because of 'its refusal to offer any solution'.

In the 'The Backlash Blues' (8) Hughes paints a typical African American situation in the U.S.A, which presents the Blacks as the Other. They are depicted as second class citizens in the country and are made to assume a subservient role. Thus,they are given a second class treatment;that is, they are subjected to live in substandard houses. They are substandard because

they are poorly constructed, and the environment lack basic amenities and infrastructural facilities. The whites can never live in such houses. Besides, the children of the Blacks attend second class schools, that is, schoolswith the poorest infrastructural facilities, and where teaching and learning are poorly carried out. The content of instruction insuch schools is designed to make the Blacks remain ever subservient to the Whites. Consequently, the persona complains:

You think us colored folks
Are second-class fools. (11-12).

The poet images the Blacks as subservient and inferior human beings who are aware of their predicaments and are dissatisfied about it, but are helpless to change it. Consequently, they carry the negative image around them.

The quality of the second class houses the Blacks live in are reinvented in the 'Cultural Exchange' (81) where Hughes paints a clear picture of impoverished living condition of the Blacks, where doors are made of paper, covered by 'dust of dingy atoms' and the 'doorknob lets in leider'. Consequently,

... the wind won't for midnight
For fun to blow doors down. (6-7).

This bears testimony to the level of dilapidation and neglect predominant in the Blacks'community, which can never be imagined in the Whites'environment. The poet complains and expresses his displeasure about this situation. He uses this medium to expose the hypocrisyof the U.S.A. government her white citizens, thereby revealingto the world that U.S.A. is not really a land of equality as it claims to be.

Besides, in the 'Little Song on Housing' (79), Hughes presents a pathetic image of the Blacks as a dispossessed, cultureless, homeless, detested and cheated race, who are perpetually in search of home and continuously look up to the Whites for survival. It is ironical that the

persona should save all his life time ‘to get a nice home’, which turned out to be a deserted, old, white house which the ‘prices are doubled’. Here, the poet projects the Whites as heartless people and cheats. He equally condemns the situation which makes the Blacks that have contributed significant human and natural resources towards the technological and economic emancipation of the U.S.A. to live in abject poverty, and at the same time detested and cheated simply because of the colour of their skin. He sees this as an unaccepted phenomenon.

Brutality, terror and coercion are characteristics of the nature of life the black are subjected to live in the New World. In the ‘Ku Klux’ (44) the persona is taken ‘To some lonesome place’, tortured and coerced to accept the superiority of the white race. The persona is forced to ‘believe in anything’ to save his life. Ku Klux symbolises the activities of the notorious Ku Klux Klan, a racist group in the South America, who used terrorism to deter blacks from voting, holding office and enforcing labour contracts following the withdrawal of the union troops, who ensured the implementation, in the region, of the 15th amendment of the U.S.A. constitution which was ratified in 1870. The amendment gave voting rights to the black males. So, the poet uses the poem to condemn the activities of the racist groups in the U.S.A. that took the helplessness of the blacks as advantage to maltreat them. The poet condemns the brutal treatment the Blacks receive on daily basis, the perpetrators of the inhuman act and the society that permitted such evil. He equally advocates for a redefinition of colour politics in the U.S.A.

In ‘Death in Yorkville’ (15) Hughes wonders when the brutality of the Backs will ever end. The Blacks are brutally killed and lynched at a slightest provocation, and even the children are not spared. He portrays the image of Africa as preys to the Whites. The poet subtly condemns such inhuman acts, using rhetorical questions such as:

How many bullets does it take
To kill a fifteen-year-old kid?

How many bullets does it take
To kill me? (1-4).

The images of 'bullets', 'kill', 'centuries', 'chain', 'feet', 'mind', 'rope', 'neck' and 'lynch'reveal a horrible, inhuman and cruel conditions the blacks have been subjected for ages (which have been going on daily basis) and in which they are helpless.

Besides, the poet uses memory as a tool to recollect the African Americans' past taking into consideration the various trials and tribulations theirancestors suffered when they were severely uprooted from their homeland in Africa, rendered hapless, helpless, leaderless, chained like brigands and transported under the most despicable condition into the New World and subjected to various forms of exploitation and brutality. He compares the past condition with the present condition and concludes that all has been the same – sufferings and all sorts of indignities – despite all the emancipation promulgation acts. The persona therefore laments that:

From the slave chain to the lynch rope
To the bullets of Yorkville,
Jamestown, 1619 to 1963;
Emancipation centennial-
100 years NOT free. (9-13).

The image of Jamestown and 1619 depict the most remarkable moment in the history of the African Americans: they mark the sight and the time, respectively the plights of the Blacks began in America following the landing of the twenty indentured slaves from Africa. The poem shows the poet's total displeasure with the situation and his utmost desire for full integration of the Blacks in the U.S.A.

Hughes makes an allusion to the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ to depict the brutal treatment of the Blacks in the U.S.A.in 'Christ in Alabama' (37).He compares Christ's trials, tribulations, agony and passion with those of the Blacks in U.S.A.He sees the way Christ was treated with scorn, rejection, hostilities and brutality and eventually murdered as similar, to some

extent, the way and the manner the Blacks are treated in U.S.A.. The only major difference between the two suffering figures is that Christ's death brought saving grace to his believers. His death is celebrated and commemorated, whereas that of the Blacks lacks such saving grace, and are treated with levity. The image of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, who made no effort to save her son is likened to that of Africa, the mother of black man in the world, who, though is partly responsible for the black man's woes in the U.S., did not make any concerted effort to help blacks regain their freedom. Similarly, the image of God that is generally believed by the Christians as owing the paternity of Jesus Christ is equally likened to that of the white man who owns the slaves. However, unlike God who allowed His son suffer all sorts of calumnies, indignities, persecutions and disgraceful death on the cross and later showed Him a surpassing love by resurrecting Him and made Him the saviour of His people, the white man allows his slaves to suffer without any reward, good care or show of love at the end. The persona remarks that:

> *Mary is His mother:*
> *Mammy of the south,*
> *Silence your mouth.*
> *God is His father:*
> *White Master above*
> *Grant him your love. (4-9)*

In this poem Hughes exposes the love lost that exists between the Whites and their black slaves and solicits the white masters to show love to the blacks. He equally indicts Africa that keeps quiet while the blacks suffer desperation in the U.S.A.

In 'Who But the Lord' (16), Hughes continues to depict how the harmless blacks are howled down in the streets and battered or even murdered by the agents of the law, particularly the police who should rather protect the harmless Blacks. He portrays the image of the Blacks as absolute helplessness, and even the church that preaches love, peace, equity, justice and respect

for human dignity, and which would have been a refuge for the Blacks does nothing to help the situation. The Christian faithful lives in the same society where these evil acts are perpetuated, yet they keep mute. The persona therefore questions the sincerity of the Christian doctrine that preaches love, peace, equity and justice.Hence, he mocks the efficacy of the saving power of Lord Jesus Christ that cannot save him from the police brutality, but, instead allows

The law raised up his stick
And beat the living hell
out of me! (13-15).

The use of exclamation mark suggests a psychological torture the persona receives from the brutal act, which is beyond his imagination that man could treat his fellow man with such wickedness. The poet therefore depicts that the Blacks suffer both physical and psychological torture. He equally criticises theU.S.A.government,which does not protect the harmless Blacks, but instead allows inhuman treatment of the Blacks to prevail on the land.

The poet, in the 'Third Degree' (18), paints a clearer picture of the nature of the brutality the Blacks pass through: it is a real physical torture, the type that can only be experienced on the enemy's camp, especially when a rival soldier is captured. The situation is explicated in the images such as 'hit', 'jab', 'blood', 'slug', 'kick', 'scream' and 'beat' all of which are directed at the persona. The height of the torture could be seen in the three kicks the persona received on his penis. He recounts:

Three kicks between the legs
That kill the kids
I'd make tomorrow. (10-12).

These kicks make the persona to faint and he has to be revived with 'cold water'. It is ironical that the major thrust of this despicable treatment is just to make him sign a document making him culpable to an offence which he did not commit, so that he could be tried and jailed. It is

equally ironical that this inhuman act takes place in the U.S.A. that acts as a human rights watchdog. The image of the Blacks is portrayed as pathetic and full of despair. In fact, they are reduced to a prey and beast of burden. The effect of this onslaught on the African Americans resulted to the subversion of their dreams of gaining freedom and to be fully integrated into the mainstream America.

In 'Long View: Negro' (30) Hughes, through the memory faculty remembers the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation with its big hopes, which:

> *Sighted through the*
> *Telescope of dreams*
> *Looms larger. (2-4).*

But after about a century the persona looks around to see how far the dream has been realised. He amazingly discovers that the dream is almost dead, and he wonders how and why

> *What was so large*
> *Becomes so small*
> *Again. (11-13).*

The search for the factors responsible for this continues in the 'Dream Deferred' (14) where the persona laments the exclusion of the blacks from the American dream. He rhetorically asks, 'What happens to a dream deferred?' He optimistically observes that though the dream has been suppressed by too many burdens, it still lingers in the hearts of the Blacks. Hence, he remarks that 'Maybe it just sags / Like a heavy load'. The rhetorical question 'Or does it explode?' that concludes the poem invokes ambivalence about the struggle for freedom and decision to remain in captivity. But one thing is certain: African Americans are not in any way happy with the status quo. They believe that they are part of United States of America and should be integrated as free citizens.

The poem 'Still Here' (32) is a direct response by the poet on the factors responsible for

the dashed dreams: it is because the Blacks are 'scared and battered'. The images of the 'snow' and 'sun', which the persona observes have 'frozen' and 'baken' him, respectively symbolises the effects of nature on the Blacks in general, and the struggle in particular. It implies that nature - the 'sun' and the 'snow' has teamed up with the white man to torment the black man in the New World. The psychological onslaught this has on the Blacks makes them to "stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'-". Certainly, when one is oppressed and suppressed to a psychological state of depression, one loses the essence of living. However, the persona reaffirms his resolution to stand firm in the struggle and encourages other blacks to do so. He asserts: 'But I don't care' // 'I'm still here'. In this the poet goes beyond being optimistic, but shows a strong resolution to stay in U.S.A. to ensure that their dream of integration into American mainstream is realised.

In 'Words Like Freedom' (33) Hughes tacitly exposes the double standard the American government plays regarding the freedom of the Blacks. He makes it obvious that words like 'freedom' and 'liberty' as used in the U.S.A. are different from their literal meaning of setting people free from oppressions, hostilities and indignities.He expresses that U.S.A. government is hypocritical about it. He further states that the Blacks do not enjoy the freedom being talked about. It is ironical that the words ('freedom' and 'liberty'), which are supposed to make one happy and leap for joy, instead 'almost make me cry'. The persona moves on to state that he is not speaking merely to exaggerate, rather he is speaking out of personal experience, because he has heard the words several times in his milieu without its being put into practice. He further expresses that the condition can only be fully appreciated if only one has passed through the system as himself.Here, he indicts the American authority of playing double standard in their commitment towards the liberation of the Blacks.

Hughes explores the economic vibrancy and the profiteering of the New World in the

'Florida Road Workers' (41). He shows that although prosperity is quite common in U.S.A.,it is limited to the Whites,and the Blacks that have contributed immensely to the economic prospects are alienated. The vast majority of the Blacks are poor because the economy is concentrated in the hands of the Whites who hold the economic power. In other words the Blacks sweat to grow the economy while the Whites enjoy the economic prosperity. At this thepersona wonders why he should be 'makin' a road'

For the rich to sweep over
In their bog cars
And leave me standin' here. (10-12).

This is an indictment on the American philosophy which is elucidated in American Dream – justice, equity, freedom and pursuit of happiness. The poet argues that American Dream cannot be truly attained without carrying African Americans along as coheirs of U.S.A.

In 'Mississippi' (43) the poet, in a psychologically reminiscence, travels centuries back to Africa recounting the forcible removal of the Blacks from their root, during which they were rendered headless, leaderless and helpless and transported, in a most despicable condition, to the New World, where they were exposed to the worst human indignities, sorrow and the most pitiable situation. The persona recalls the most undignified manner these blacks were shipped into the New World: chained hands and legs (like thieves), beaten and flogged mercilessly, and terrorised such

That tears and blood
Should mix like rain. (18-19).

The persona also remembers the psychological onslaught these had on the Blacks. Upon return from the psychological journey into memory,he is confronted with the same maltreatment the Blacks have been subjected to for ages. He then wonders why the terrible situation still persist despite all the abolitionist campaigns and emancipation promulgations made in order to

restore peace and justice on the land. The images of 'sorrow', 'pity', 'pain', 'tears', 'rain', 'terror' and 'Mississippi' as contained in the poem depict the unimaginable level of suffering the Blacks passed through during the 'middle passage'. It is ironical that it is on the same water, river Mississippi, which is supposed to unite people together in love that one of the most heinous crimes in the history of human race was committed despite the widely held belief that water has no enemy. Besides, 'Mississippi' suggests the union of black souls with the New World, just as different rivers united to give Africa a passage to the New World. In this way Hughes portrays the duality of identity of black man in U.S.A. with its numerous woes: first, his African decent which he is psychologically attached to, and which he cannot return, and second American milieu which he lives in and is physically attached to, but is not accepted despite his numerous contributions. This shows that the extended period of slavery which the Blacks experienced in America did not annihilate their desire for re-union with Africa.

Hughes does not use his blues poetry to condemn the brutal treatment of the Blacks in the U.S. only; he equally uses the poetry to condemn racism, which he sees as the root of all woes bedevilling the Blacks in the world. He depicts racism as a serious issue, which could be found in every sector of the socio-economic, political and religious life in the country, including education.

Racism according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is a 'belief that some races of people are better than others'. It is on this belief that the Whites believe that they have special qualities and abilities which are inherently superior to the Blacks. They see the Blacks as unrefined, vulgar and beings that are created for the satisfaction of the Whites; hence they use the Blacks as beast of burden, worthy of no humane treatment. But this belief has been refuted earlier in this study considering the contributions of the early African American writers.

In ‘Bible Belt’ (38), Hughes creates a humour that even Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, would not be allowed to worship in some churches (the Whites designated churches) in the U.S.A. if He should come back to the world a black man. He says,

> *It would be too bad if Jesus*
> *Were to come back black.*
> *There are so many churches*
> *Where he could not pray*
> *In the U.S. (1-5).*

Here, the poet depicts that racism has so much entrenched into the American system that it has beclouded their senses; if not, one could wonder why the church which is supposed to be instrument of peace, justice and equity turned into an instrument of oppression. Typical of a racist critic, the poet criticises the insincerity of the U.S.A.Christians in the practice of Christian doctrine that preaches justice, peace and equality of all men, irrespective of one’s race. Unfortunately, open criticism to this hypocrisy and racial discrimination of the church is highly prohibited or else ‘you may be’ // ‘Crucified’.

In Christianity, it is believed that God created man in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). But through the sin of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman God created), man lost his glory, and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, man was sanctified and redeemed. Therefore, the sanctification of the soul, and not colour of one’s skin, is a fundamental requirement for admittance as brethren in the church. However, in U.S.A. ‘...race, not religion, // ‘Is glorified’. Hence, the Blacks are not allowed to worship in the churches where the whites worship however sanctified they are. This situation is also applicable in other sectors of the socio-political activities in the U.S.A. The poet frowns at this system and condemns it frantically. He advocates that the content of one’s character and not the colour of the skin should be considered in assessing one’s worth.

The problem of the Blackman is the colour of his body. Black is seen from the White perspective as bad omen, hence it is often associated with evil in the society and therefore used in signifying such detested images in the society like blackmail, blacklist, black out, Black Death, Black Maria, and so on. The Blackman in the Whiteman's imagination is absurd and should be detested; an act which the poet sees as disservice to humanity. Typical of the marginalised and oppressed people of the world to devise a defence mechanism and fashion out a new way of responding to their hostilities, the poet extols the undaunted attribute of the African Americans in not yielding to depression as a result of racism that is practiced in the U.S.A. Rather, they make themselves happy in the seemingly unhappy situation by turning the white man's candy stores into a bar.

The image of the blacks as an exploited and cheated race that is used to achieve impressive feats and is dumped and neglected is portrayed in 'Crown and Garlands' (6), where the poet laments that the only thing blacks receive for distinguishing themselves or accomplishing a notable act to honour for the country is just laurels – which does not add any notable values to their economic lives, families or the community. The laurels are appreciated the moment the 'hero' is decorated, the next moment, one 'watch them drop, wilt, fade// Away'. The persona observes on the laurels that,

> *Though worn in glory on my head,*
> *They do not last a day –*
> *Not one –*
> *Nor take the place of meat or bread*
> *Or rent that I must pay. (12-16)*

The poet makes allusion to the achievements of the African Americans like Sammy Baugh, Sammy Sosa, Leontyne Price, Lena Horne, Sidney Bechet, Cassius Clay, Jr. (Muhammad Ali) and Ralph Bunche. These black stars, through hardworking, distinguished

themselves in the areas of music, entertainment and sports, and brought lots of glory and fame to U.S.A. However, they were not rewarded like their white counterparts in the same field and other fields of life that distinguished themselves and made the country proud. The poet exposes and criticises the exploitative and discriminatory tendencies of the U.S.A. government, which encourages the Whites somehow to discriminate against the Blacks. He states that the Blacks have made outstanding contributions like their white counterparts in the U.S.A., which have brought the countryto the frontline in the global arena, and therefore deserves unconditional acceptance as full citizens of U.S.A. He also portrays America as a heterogeneous society and African Americans serve as a significant agent in the hybridisation process that is taking place in the country.

Besides, the poet extols the virtues and diligence of the black heroes, and equally appreciates the expression of love and solidarity shown to the African American heroes by the black community,which is expressed by making and wearing their garlands, crowns and laurels despite the fact that the whites attach no values to them. He says,

Make a garland of Leontynes and Lenas
And hang it about your neck
Like a lei.
Make a crown of Sammys, Sidneys, Harrys,
Plus Cassius Mohammed Ali Clay.
Put their laurel on your brow (1-6)

This action of communal identification by the Blacks could be seen as one of the glaring African heritage that sill survives in the African American community. Unlike the Whites that practice individualism, Africa practices communalism, a system that places emphasis on community ownership of things, including persons. So, personal accomplishment or failure is seen as belonging to the entire community. This accounts for why an elder in a community reprimands or even beats a child for misbehaviour and the child's parents will accept such in

good faith. This is responsible for the unflinching supports theblack communities give to their heroes.

However, Hughes advises the Blacks not to be too much entangled in such valueless recognitions; instead they should unite in their fight against their common enemies – slavery, racism, hunger, poverty and oppression. Liberation from these vices will add better values to their lives. On this note he says:

Great names for crowns and garlands!
Yeah!
I love Ralph Bunche-
But I can't eat him for lunch. (19-20)

Similarly, in 'Without a Benefit of Declaration' (54) the poet uses the memory capacity to bring afresh to mind the forceful induction of the African Americans into the American Civil War that united the North America and the South America, during which thousands of black soldiers died. Using rhetorical question, the poet shows his indignation to this forcible enlistment and the brutality of the war thus;

Listen here, Joe,
Don't you know
That tomorrow
You got to go
Out yonder where
The steel winds blow? (1-6)

The images of 'steel winds' and 'rain is lead' are the evidence of the mixture of the forces of nature and human forces to make the war very fatal and brutal, resulting to a significant toll on the environment.The war later achieved its purpose of uniting America (i.e. North and South) and granting U.S.A. citizens the fundamental right to freedom and liberty, and equity and justice in the country. The poet therefore argues that the history of the greatness witnessed in the U.S.A. today can never be complete without reference to the enormous contributions of the

Blacks to the country's economic vibrancy and political stability, and art and literature that made her a great nation and the envy of her contemporaries. Ironically, the blacks, having fought gallantly and sacrificed their blood to win the war, are discriminated against and denied full reward, compensation and rehabilitation (for the wounded soldiers).The Whitesoldiers that survived the wargot adequate rewards from the government; the injured among them got full government attention and rehabilitation.But the black soldiers were left to the mercy of the environment. Worst still, the families of the black soldiers that died in the war were given worthless medals (some) and abandoned to the harsh realities of the environment, unlike their white counterparts who were heavily compensated by the government. The persona expresses this sentiment thus:

Don't ask me why.
Just go ahead and die.
Hidden from the sky
Out yonder you'll lie:
A medal to your family-
In exchange for
A guy.

Mama, don't cry. (12-19)

The statement 'Mama don't cry' is ironical in the sense that the situation calls for 'mama' to cry. But, typical of a blues singer the persona uses the expression to soothe the oppressed. The poet expresses his community consciousness and absolute displeasure to this fundamental and structural error on the land and the desire for integration and participation.

The unalloyed resentment of the poet continues in 'Public notice' (55), as the poet criticises the U.S.A. government for not giving the deserved honour and compensation to the families of the African Americans that died in the American war as the government did to the white families. In most cases the dead (black) soldiers are given mass burial without notifying

their families. In such cases the families receive the news through the gazettes of the government's official notices, where such soldiers are honoured in death and their families too are honoured without recognition; a situation that is unheard of in the white community. The persona wonders why such a structural injusticeshould be done even to the dead. It is in this spirit of resentment that the persona, typical of a blues singer, complains:

Dear Death:
I got your message
That my son is dead.
The ink you used to
To write it
Is the blood he bled.
You say he died with honor
On the battlefield,
And that I am honoured, too,
By this bloody yield. (1-10)

Using the image of death, the poet in the poem 'Peace' (56) sees the graves and the quietness of the graveyards as an epitome of peace. The dead has nothing to do with the worries and troubles of everyday life: they do not care about their gains and losses or who gets what; instead they live as a united family. He therefore makes a case for a peaceful, united U.S.A. society, where everyone, irrespective of one's race, will be given a just treatment and equal opportunities. The poets opines that

We passed their graves:
The dead men there,
Winners or losers,
Did not care.(1-4).

According to the poet, absence of peace in the universe, especially in U.S.A., is as a result of insatiable urge for materialism, and absolute peace could only be attained when human beings stop selfishness and become less concerned about worldly possessions just as the dead do not care or struggle over material possession. The poet's catholic background comes into play

here. He sees the rat race in America as vanity since man will, one day, abandon all the accumulated wealth and leave this mother earth to the land where he will forget everything about his wealth, because,

In the dark
They could not see
Who had gained
The victory. (5-8).

This is an appeal on the conscience of the white community, by the poet, to have a rethink on the oppression of the Blacks and reverse the condition that permits it.

In Birmingham Sunday (September, 15, 1963) (46), Hughes presents the image of Africa as helpless victims and easy prey in the hands of the Whites. Birmingham, in the 1960s, was one of the South's most segregated cities. Hence, the city became a focal point of the civil rights movement. On September 15, 1963, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church at Birmingham, claiming the lives of four young black girls: Addie Mae Collins, Denise Mcnair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley. Four members of the Ku Klux Klan were accused of the crime. The poet probes into the repertoire of memory to present a vivid picture of four young black girls, who were brutally murdered as a result of racial injustice prevalent in United States of America. They left for Sunday school and were killed in the bomb explosion in the church. Their brutal death symbolises the helplessness and the insecurity of lives among the blacks: they are maimed, tortured and killed everyday in the U.S.A. This pitiful situation is presented by the poet thus;

Four little girls
Who went to Sunday School that day
And never came back home at all
But left instead
Their blood upon the
...
Torn to shreds by dynamite.(1-8).

The image of ‘Sunday School’ brings to mind the picture of little children learning the rudiments of their Christian faith. Also, the images of ‘blood upon the wall’, ‘spattered flesh’, ‘bloodied Sunday dresses’, ‘torn to shreds’ and ‘dynamite’ give a vivid representation of the type of death experienced by the little girls as well as other blacks. Here, the poet portrays the image of the blacks as harmless and helpless prey.

In ‘Angola Question Mark’ (64) the poet sees Blackman all over the world as a suffering figure and unfortunate being who is confronted with so many troubles as a result of which he fightsfor survival. He identifies himself with the plight of other blacks in Africa and the Diaspora, who are rejected, killed, tortured, marauded and maimed every day, and subjected to live in fear in the land which they are no longer sojourners but co-heirs – considering the fact that blacks have contributed in no small measure to the world civilization. He therefore wonders why such unprovoked attacks on Blackman. He laments thus:

Don’t know why I,
Black,
Must still stand
With my back
To the last frontier
Of fear
In my own land. (1-7)

Also,the act of the poet referring to himself as a black and identifying with the African struggle for independence is a testimony that he has not forgotten his ancestry although he cannot return to it. It also bears testimony to the fact that slavery with its horrendous oppression did not erode the sense and images of Africa from the African Americans.

Moreover, more worrisome to the persona is the fact that the blacks continue to suffer, struggle, fight and kill to survive and gain freedom everywhere they are, even on the African continent. He wonders why things should be thus. He says:

Don't know why I
Must turn into
A Mau Mau
And lift my hand
Against my fellow man
To live on my land. (8-13)

Mau Mau is a rebellious organisation in Kenya, which mounted a violent campaign against European colonial and settler supremacy in Kenya following the economic and political discontent mounted, particularly among the Kikuyu. The campaign, which lasted for four years of fighting, saw the death of thousands of people, who were mostly Africans. The poet expresses his psychological and emotional attachment to Africa which he feels belonging to but cannot physically return to. He equally presents the whites as marauding beasts who is heartless, merciless and devourers with the same degree of insatiable lust for materialism everywhere they are - be it in America, Europe or Africa. Also, he sees the blacks as oppressed people of the world, especially by the whites whether in Africa or in the Diaspora. He there advocates for the unity of the Blackman all over the world to fight for the liberation of the Blacks.

In 'Question and Answer' (68), the poet psychologically transports the reader into the towns and cities in South Africa and U.S.A.:they represent the sites of black enslavement, brutality, struggling, fighting and dying, and where racism has got to its climax in the world arena. Here, the poet shows that plight of Blackman is the same everywhere, be it at home or in the Diaspora, and this is chiefly as a result of racism, capitalism and materialism. He therefore calls on the Diaspora to unite against their common enemy. He says,

Durban, Birmingham,
Cape Town, Atlanta,
Johannesburg, Watts,
The earth around
Struggling, fighting,
Dying-for what?

A world to gain. (1-7)

The use of run- in- lines or enjambment shows the interconnection between the Africa and America, and in which lays the dual identity of the African Americans. The poem shows that the interconnectedness is very strong and can no longer be disconnected as it has permeated their arts, social life, economy and politics and this has resulted into a hybrid culture in America, which made the society distinct and great.

Using the faculty of memory, the poet in 'History' (69) reminds the African Americans that their history has not been a glorious one right from their forcible removal from Africa into slavery in America , but a prolonged suffering, oppressions, suppressions, hopelessness, loneliness, helplessness and wanton violence and deaths. However, he is optimistic that one day the story would change for better. But typical of a blues writer, he does not proffer any solution on how the 'glorious' future would be actualised although the poem implies that they have to make it happen from 'today'. He says:

The past has been a mint
Of blood and sorrow.
That must not be
True of tomorrow. (1-4).

Langston Hughes treatment of African images using blues tradition shows his African American community rejection of the status quo in America that discriminates and segregates against them despite their numerous contributions towards the actualisation of American Dreams.He expresses their collective desire for integration. It also shows that African heritage has permeated American heritage thereby creating a platform for the hybrid culture that formed part of American greatness. It expresses that the presence of African elements in the African American is a way of asserting their African heritage and a deep longing for origin – Africa, and seeks to reconnect him with her, though he cannot return physically. The importance of the

Diasporas relation is also addressed. He probes into history to bring to memory the circumstantial influx of blacks into America, the untold hardship that surrounded it, slavery, racism, the civil rights movement and the struggle for black freedom. Through the poem, Hughes is able to capture the suffering of the blacks and calls on the whole world to revisit the issue of slavery and racism, especially as it is practiced in United States of America and other sites of the Blacks' predicament in the world.

WORKS CITED

'Birmingham (Alabama).' *Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation 2008.

Gates, L. H. (Jnr) and McKay, N. (1996), Eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. U.S.A. Norton and Co.

Hornby, A. S. (2004). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. (6th edition, special price edition, 7th impression). Oxford: University Press.

Hughes, L. (1964),*The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Times*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/hughes/aa-hughes-youth-3-e.html

www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes

www.poetryfoundation.org/journal

www.redhotjazz.com/hughes.html

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1. BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEMORY OF AFRICA AS INSPIRATION IN YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA'S *PLEASURE DOME*.

Consciousness is a psychological state of the mind that shows one's awareness of the self and the circumstances prevailing in the person's existence. It is an attribute of the mind (which is a source of awareness) and thoughts that lead one realise a shared feelings and group beliefs. Angmor (1987) sees consciousness as 'awareness a person has of himself both objectively (i.e., through his receptor senses) and subjectively (i.e., through such faculties as reason and reflection)'. He further states that 'it is the knowledge a person has of himself and of his place in life around him'. Black consciousness therefore is the awareness a black man (be him in Africa or in the Diaspora) has about himself. In other words, it is the mind of a black man and his thoughts as a black man.

Consciousness and memory cannot be separated from each other because memory is the foundation of consciousness and as a result the absence of it breeds distorted consciousness. Consequently, YusefKomunyakaa, in the *Pleasure Dome* uses memory of Africa as a source of

inspiration to express his black consciousness – an evidence of the poet's awareness of his African origin and a personal identification with African cultural heritage. He uses his poetry to assert his African heritage and root. This self-realisation makes him accept his dual cultural heritages: first as an African though he cannot return to her physically.Second as an American, which was brought to him through slavery and in which he is not accepted as a co-heir despite his tremendous economic and social contributions. Therefore, he expresses dislike for this situation and his desire for an unconditional integration.

In the poem 'Providence' (3)Komunyakaa, using the imagery of 'requited memory', goes back the memory lane to recollect the horrendous account of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade that saw the mass exodus of Africans into the New World, the sufferings, slavery, racism that the Blacks have experienced and the civil rights movement for the restoration of Blackman's dignity and freedom in the American society. He sees himself as having a dual heritage; one as an African (although he cannot return physically to her), and another as an American (an identity which he carries about with a mark of unacceptability). He equally portrays the image of Africa as a memory from which he draws inspiration, because Africa is in him and he is in Africa. Thus, he says:

I walked away with your face
stolen from a crowded room,
& the string of requited memory
lived beneath my skin. A name
raw on my tongue, in my brain, a glimpse
nestled years later like a red bird
among wet leaves on a dull day. (1-7)

The persona sees memory as a human capacity to encode, store and retrieve past events, experiences and pieces of information without which human beings cannot be distinguished from other animals. Hence, memory becomes a fundamental part of human existence and forms a

basic source of inspiration. Cut in this web, the poet sees memory as something 'not faint, shadowy and fragile pictures floating between the subconscious and forgetfulness, but real, palpable, sensual images that our experiences concretised into our conscience, immediately or 'nestled years later'.' (Daniel, 2008:6). The image of 'crowded room' symbolises the manner in which the African American ancestors were jam-packed in the ship cabin during their voyage from Africa into America, as a result of which many died of diseases, hunger and suffocation. Through the faculty of memory and number interplays among seven, five and three, the persona recalls how overbearing the suffering was and how difficult and bloody the struggle for survival has been. He blames these hardships and sufferings experienced by the blacks on Africa who sold their brothers into slavery. But after so many years of excommunication with Africa, a period in which it seemed that everything about Africa has been forgotten by the African Americans, the poet, typical of a black consciousness writer, identifies himself with Africa and her peoplewithout minding the negative tendencies attached to the continent. He affirms his belief and faith in Africa – as a descendant of the race. He says:

Now, you are on my skin, in my mouth
& hair as if you were always
woven in my walk, a rib
unearthed like a necklace of sand dollars
out of black hush. You are a call
& response going back to the first
Praise-lament, the old wish. (43-49)

Besides, the persona remembers and identifies with the African rituals, especially those of children playing in the moonlight. Here, the poet presents the image of Africa as a lover of nature. He therefore romanticises with the African life and longs for a return to Africa, though not a physical return because he is already strongly glued to the American milieu. In this he says:

...The two of us
a third voice, an incantation

sweet-talked& grunted out of The Hawk's
midnight horn. I have you inside
a hard question, & it won't let go,
hooked through the gills & strung up
to the western horizon. We are one. (50-56)

Using enjambment, the poet shows how interconnected African Americans are to Africa – their stories can never be complete without making reference to the other. It equally shows 'how memory weaves through experience interconnecting the past to the future and linking individuals, one to the other across racial and geographical distances and time lines' (Daniel, 2008).

This self-awareness continues in 'Never Land' (11) and inspires the poet to address the blacks who think that by denying their origin as Blackman they will be like the Whites and will be accepted thus– a situation the poet sees as erosion of racial memory and personal identity, growth and development. He advises his fellow blacks, especially those who bleach their skin in order to look like The whites to think twice and be rather proud of the colour of their skin, bearing in mind that:

Dracula was singled out
because of his dark hair
& olive skin? (9-11).

He further admonishes them to be proud of their Africa as their ancestry and shun the attitudes of the likes of lost, naked and lonely Michael Jackson, who '... So eager to // play The Other,' underwent series of plastic surgeries, lost his racial identity and become a mere 'cover' of himself, and is consequently tormented by loneliness. The poet sees the efforts made by Michael Jackson (and other blacks like him) to deny his racial identity as folly when he rightly knows that 'the vampire moonlight' of plastic surgeries can never change his real identity, because black blood runs in the African Americans' veins. Hence, the more he tries to imitate or

desire to look like the Whites, the less he succeeds.Unfortunately, he laments that some of the Blacks do not care about:

what the makeup
artist says, you know

your sperm will never
reproduce that face
in the oval mirror. (29-33)

The consciousness an individual has about himself/herself as a result of the memory of one's experiences (both past and present) could be both progressive and retrogressive. It becomes progressive when such consciousness positively influences the person into accepting the reality of his/her existence and works towards improving it. But in a situation whereby such consciousness and memory obscure reality, it becomes retrogressive. Based on this, 'Never Land' is a metaphorical indictment of all blacks (both those on the African continent and the Diaspora), who feel inferior at the colour of their skin and think that being white is a gateway to success and therefore undergo series of plastic and cosmetic surgeries. At the end, they live under pretence and imitated life.

In 'Pepper' (12) the poet continues his fascination with African heritage and abhors anything that does not portray this heritage on a positive note. Criticising the music of Art Pepper, Komunyakaa shows how a great art can be marred by racial injustice. He makes it explicit that the music of Art Pepper is lovely and he enjoys it, but regrets that such a great musician should involve himself in the act of racial prejudice in his later music by including some elements of racism. Consequently, he wounded the ego of the Blacks. In view of this, the poet expresses his resentment for the music thus: *'I'm angry for loving // your horn these years'.*

Komunyakaa's attachment to Africa and his acceptance of African origin is further explicated in his readiness to reject desecration of African heritage in whatever form. Using

faculty memory he imagines Art Pepper is still alive so that he could seize him the moment he *'stepped off the bandstand'*. The persona makes obvious the reason for his resentment of the music and the musician thus:

... Last notes
Of 'Softly as a Morning
Sunrise' fall between us,

a hint of Africa
still inside your alto.(4-8)

Typical of a racist singer, the musician has, in one of his albums, sung that:

...'If I
found out some white broad
was married to a black guy

I'd rave at her in games
& call her tramp, slut,
whore'. (10-15)

The poet sees this as an act of disrespect to the personality and integrity of the Blackman and calls on all blacks both in Africa and the Diaspora, and other anti-racial campaigners to fight the menace.

In the 'Keeper of the Vigil' (21), a tribute to Chinua Achebe, komunyakaa explores the roles of Achebe's*Things Fall Apart* in promoting black consciousness, especially among the blacks in the Diaspora. He praises Achebe's artistic mastery of the art of storytelling and his creative use of English language in redeeming the image of Blackman.He sees this as insightful and redeeming for its ability to bring back to life, and present to the world, the African nearly lost heritage and culture in a time Africa was seen as cultureless and homeless. He sees the text as one that helped restore African dignity and racial pride to the black man. Thus, he remarks that:

When the last song

was about to leave
dust in the mouth,

where termite-eaten
masks gazed down
in a broken repose, you

unearthed a language
ignited by horror
& joy.... (1-9)

Komunyakaa sees Achebe's ability to marry the past with the present and his insightful presentation of the future of African culture and heritage as a source of inspiration. Consequently,he says, '... Achebe, / you helped me steal / back myself'.

The poet emphasises the fact that he is in constant self-conflict as a result of his dual heritage, a situation whereby the American heritage suppresses the African heritage in him. However, the work of Achebe has inspired him to come to reality with his dual heritage and give each a deserved attention. Hence, the persona finds pride in his African ancestry and consequently,he explodes,

... Umuada and chi
Reclaimed my tongue

quick as palm wine
& kola nut, praisesongs
made of scar tissue. (29-33).

The imagery of 'Umuada', 'chi', 'palm wine', 'kola nut' and 'praisesongs', show the poet's awareness of himself as a black man, his identification and yearning for origin. He praises the role of Africa (through the work of Achebe in the *Things Fall Apart*) in redeeming the image of the Blacks and encourages the Diaspora to afford themselves the opportunity to assert their African heritage and origin.

'Ogoni' (18) is a continuation of Komunyakaa's personal identification with Africa. He

sees Africa as a home for all black man and is therefore concerned about whatever that affects the continent, especially in the area of leadership. The poem is a reminiscence of the poet which came about as a result of his conscious probe into the faculty of recollected memory. Ogoni is a town in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, precisely in Rivers State. The poem is a tribute to the late human rights activists in the region, especially late Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was murdered (by hanging) as a result of his roles in the campaign against human rights abuses in the oil rich region by late Gen. SaniAbacha, the then military head of state. The poet condemns the action of the military government and the role played by the military tribunal in the death of late Ken Saro-Wiwa.He sees the military government as well as the tribunal members as:

...Lowdow
Bastards, imbeciles
& infidels, a tribunal

of jackasses behind
mirrored sunglasses
with satchels of loot – (4-9)

The use of the images 'bastards', 'imbeciles', 'infidels', and 'satchels of loot' suggests that members of the tribunal lack integrity. He sees them as a stooge of the military government.He also reveals and condemnsthe bad leadership roles played by the military governmentsin Africa, which he observes has reduced the continent to a battleground of sorts. The poet identifies with the down-trodden and the structurally impoverished people of Africa who suffer untold hardship as a result of poor leadership and bad governance. He also wonders why Africa, with rich human and natural resources, is still living in poverty and hardships. Through this medium, he beckons on Africa to rise up to the leadership challenges facing her to liberate herself and other blacks in diaspora.

In Jasmine (5) the poet projects music as playing a unifying and entertaining roles in the life of the African Americans. It brings the blacks together, irrespective of one's social class or

gender, and its entertaining features relieve them of the harsh realities of their day to day life, and help bring out the humanity in them. Music in African context is mostly used for entertainment. In most communities, after farming and harvesting seasons the villagers would gather at the village square, beat drums and dance to entertain themselves. Therefore, the image of music as projected in the poem is a part of African rituals that is still sustainedin the African American community.

While watching Elvin perform on the stage, the persona observes with utmost surprise that he could,

> *'sit beside two women, kitty-corner'*
> *to the stage, as Elvin's sticks blur*
> *the club into a blue fantasia. (1-3).*

This is a situation that would have been seen as risking one's life in a typical black setting, as the persona rightly notes his grandmother's likely objection to his position or closeness to the women telling him that '... the devil never sleeps'. But it is this closeness to the women that makes the persona discover that one of them is wearing a type of perfume called jasmine.

Jasmine is a type of perfume that is processed from flower plant grown mostly in the tropical regions. The poet's reference to flower field in Egypt where jasmine is grown, and referring the gatherers as boys and girls suggests the ancestral link between Africa and America which is rooted in slavery. It equally suggests that though structural slavery has been abolished, it is still practiced in the modern form of exploitative, forceful child labour in Africa. He calls on Africa to be careful about this so that another form of slavery would not emerge from Africa again. On this note the persona states:

> *... the jasmine*
> *rising from a valley somewhere*
> *in Egypt, a white moon*
> *opening countless false mouths*

of laughter. The midnight
gatherers are boys and girls
with headlights of trucks
aimed at their backs, because
their small hands refuse to wound
the knowing scent hidden in each bloom.(34-43)

The consciousness the persona has about his African root is further intensified by the faculty of memory. Through series of recollected memories that are interconnected the persona is inspired to accept his dual heritage, and shows how music and other cultural arts could be used to further strengthen the Diasporas' relations among the blacks.

In 'Once the Dream Begins' (17), Komunyakaa cautions the Diaspora who have achieved a feat in the world arena to be very cautious of their position to know when they are at their prime and when they start losing grip so as to know the ripe time to leave the stage, because nothing could be done to stop it. The poet uses a rhetorical question to express this:

Once the dream begins
to erase itself, can the
dissolve be stopped? (17-19).

He uses the case of an African American boxer of all ages, Muhammed Ali, who got to the peak of his career, retired and after a few years he staged a comeback as a result of ill advice and thought. Later, he left the ring defeated. Talking about his awful defeat the poet observes that he has lost his skills which he describes as 'Float like a butterfly / & sting like a bee'. The poet therefore laments that it is:

Too bad you didn't
learn to disappear
before a left jab. (4-6).

And,

Fighting your way out of clench,
you counter-punched & bicycled
but it was too late- (7-9).

Because,

gray weather had started
shoving the sun into a corner. (10-11).
Consequently,
Now we strain to hear you. (16).

Komunyakaa therefore makes a passionate appeal to the boxer and the memory of Africa to 'Please come back to us'. He equally admonishes the Diaspora and the world in general to use good counsel, full of love, to bring back those who stray in the journey of life. He succinctly puts it thus:

word for word
we beat the love
out of each other. (28-30).

In 'Rendezvous' (14) unlike in the 'Never Land' where it is the erosion of memory or racial

past that is the bane of contention, the poet shows how excessive obsession to memory can be inimical to the appreciation of the present. In the poem the lady in question is so fascinated with Paul, her past lover, who is a symbol of her past experiences that she reminisces about him right in the presence of her new date. The memory of her past relationship with Paul beclouded her memory that she could not think of something else than their outings, especially in the restaurant. She says:

... "I used to come
Here last year. Every Friday.

The place hasn't changed.
We used to sit right here
in this same booth. Paul

& me." (65-70).

Efforts that are made by her new Igbo date to make her realise that she is with a new date and that Paul, who is now going out with a new lover, has become a past memory that needs to be forgotten about, and for her to understand the realities of the present and forge ahead for a better tomorrow proves abortive. Rather, she continues to recall her past experiences with Paul, and imagines what his reactions would be should he come to the restaurant and meet her with her new found love. She says:

> *"They come here all the time,*
> *& I bet he'd just die*
> *if he saw us together." (82-84).*

The imagery of the Igbo date is a representation of African culture and heritage. The poem is the poet's attempt to show the reality of the dual heritage of the African Americans. The girl's inability to erase the memory of her love escapades with Paul is the poet's expression of the extent to which the African Americans are tied to the American milieu. On the other hand, her acceptance of the Igbo lover and agrees to go out with him to a restaurant is an evidence of the African Americans' acceptance of African ancestry, but they cannot return wholly to it. Here, memory becomes a balm that heals and reconciles the past and the present for a better future. In this therefore Komunyakaa expresses that slavery does not have the capacity to annihilate African image in African Americans and the impossibility of physical return of the Blacks back to Africa. In view of this he advocates for a continuous blend of African and American heritages to fashion out a hybrid culture that would make a super heritage.

In 'Tenebrae' (23), a tribute in memory of Richard Johnson who used his music to teach African history, Komunyakaa explores the roles of music of Richard Johnson in redeeming the black image and how he used his music to unite and cement the African Diaspora relationships taking into consideration the 'enduring memory of racial past'. He sees the musician, his music

and the memory of Africa as a potent force that reminds the Diaspora of the 'wounded paradise' they 'stumbled out of'. By addressing Africa as a *'wounded paradise// we stumbled out of'*, the poet expresses his admiration and acceptance of Africa as his ancestrydespite the evil associated with her and the wickedness done to her by the Whites. He expresses that his ancestors left the continent (Africa) out of their wish.By this, he clearly shows his deep attachment and longing for Africa.

Using the music as a conduit of memory, the poet expresses how the Diaspora is bound in the African musical patterns, rhythms and instruments, especially the drum. Through the image of a *'... doule-headed// drumskin with a spasm// of fingertips'*, Komunyakaa links the Diaspora back to Africa. Therefore, the music of Richard Johnson performs a significant role of:

> *weaving a part of songs*
> *to bring you back,*
> *to heal our future*
> *with the cold voices*
> *we breathe. (8-12).*

Besides, the poet uses the poem to call for a stronger African Diaspora tie, love and mutual cooperation that can foster a viable socio-economic relationship among the Blacks. This he believes will help alleviate the suffering of the Blacks and restore the dignity of the black man worldwide.

Tenebrae service is celebrated in Roman Catholic Church as an integral part of the Easter Triduum(which comprise Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday). It is the period in which the church recreates the passion story – the agony, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the entire congregation are expected to meditate on the significance of the death to the redemption of man. Making reference to this biblical allusion, Komunyakaa in 'Tenebrae' attempts a recreation of Richard Johnson's death to afford the African Diaspora the opportunity

to reflect and understand his efforts, commitment and sacrifices paid in using his music to teach African history, the aim of which was to take the Diaspora:

> *to Africa on a note*
> *transfigured into a tribe*
> *of silhouettes in a field*
> *of reeds, & circling the Cape*
> *of Good Hope you find*
> *yourself in Paris*
> *backing The Hot Five. (16-22)*

Komunyakaa uses the poem to condemn the evil of slavery and to bring to the world knowledge the plight of the slaves as the music '*rattles slavechains*// *on the sea floor'*. He sees the treatment given to the slaves as inhuman and likens it to the crucifixion and death story of Jesus Christ, which took place in between two thieves. He says:

> *... Yes,*
> *this kind of solitude*
> *can lift you up*
> *between two thieves. (44-47).*

This is equally an indictment of the Africans who sole their brothers into slavery and the rest of the world who encouraged it by buying the slaves, especially the United States. On this plight of the African Diaspora, the poet pleads with his fellow blacks to promote the music as it has the capacity to remind the world of evils of slavery and appeal to the senses of the perpetrators of the wicked act as well as for the whole world to look more inward into the issue, including in its modern way in form of human trafficking and child labour, which is still predominant in Africa. He says:

> *As you ascend*
> *the crescendo,*
> *please help us touch what remains*
> *most human. Your absence*
> *brings us one step closer*

to the whole cloth
& full measure.
We're under the orange trees again,... (25-32).

Komunyakaa portrays the pathetic image of the Blackman as a hapless wanderer, homeless and pursued by loneliness; hence, he becomes an easy prey to the vagaries of the society and the blood thirsty whites. In 'Somewhere' (9), the poet presents the image of a black man who met his waterloo stealing a white woman's purse containing some money and was beaten to coma by the white community. The persona could not escape because,

Women & kids
multiplied before me.
At least thirty or fourty.
Everywhere. Kicking and biting. (12-15)

Also,

a throng of boys swooped
like a cloud of birds
& devoured a man. (22-24).

Consequently, he felt dizzy as'The sky tumbled' and fell on the ground and fainted. The number of persons giving him the mass beating and the type of beating he is receiving – *'Kicking and biting'* and *'aiming at my balls'* leaves one with the conclusion that there is a vendetta the mass beaters has against the persona and not really because he stole the white woman's purse. The persona's disclosure of his identity that *'I was a' // star in a late-night movie'* with a high hope that such will save him a bit of the torture yielded no result. The beating is therefore an evidence of the rejection of the blacks in the American society which they help build. The location of the event tells much about the homelessness of the blacks and equally portrays them as dispossessed and suffering specie. The poet equally sees the suffering of the blacks as coming from both human forces and the nature. The persona recounts that he is

on a lonely beach

in Mexico, & somewhere
outside Acapulco that damn

squad of sunflowers
blazed up around me. (25-9).

Yusuf Komunyakaa in the *Pleasure Dome* explores the issues of race relations and politics as prevailed in the American society. He sees memory as a very important aspect of human endowment without which man may lose focus in life. He therefore uses the memory of Africa as an insight in the poem. He sees Africa as a home for all blacks and identifies himself with her and the suffering blacks both in Africa and the Diaspora. He uses his versatility of themes and universality of subject matter to address the predicaments of Blackman and calls on the whole world to look inward into the race politics and address the situation. He equally calls on the Diaspora to unite and look at Africa as a source of inspiration for emancipation.

WORKS CITED

Angmor, C. (1987). 'Black Consciousness in the Poetry of Edward Brathwaite' in Ikonne, C., Eko, E., and Oku, J. (Eds),*Black Culture and Black Consciousness in Literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd.

Aubert, A. (1993). 'YusefKomunyakaa: the unified vision – canonization and humanity – section 3: Sayings, Sermons, Tales, and Lies' – Contemporary Black Poetry American Review: retrieved from;

www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_nl_v27/ai_13193073

Daniel, F. (2008).*The Image of Africa as Memory and Insight in African-American Poetry: An Appraisal of YusefKomunyakaa's New Poems*. A paper presented at the 25th Nigerian English Studies Association (NESA) annual conference held at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria between 24th – 27th Sept, 2008.

Komunyakaa, Y. (2001).*Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poem.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

'Muhammed Ali.'*Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation 2008.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Poetry has been used as a vital tool to subtly expose the ills of the society and appeal to the conscience of the public on the need to rise up to the challenges. This thesis presents the image of Africa as the other in the U.S.A. with its attendant predicaments. The study shows that poetry has been the first and the earliest form of literary creation in African American society. It traced the development of this form of literature to its root – slavery and folk tradition, which predate 18th century to contemporary tradition.

The contemporary African American poetry, which emerged in the 18th century and which lays the thematic base of this study, is characterised by a quest for socio-economic and psychological emancipation campaigned through a distinctive literary voice. The study shows that the plantation tradition of the 18th century popularised by such poets as Lucy Terry, Jupiter Hammon and Philis Wheatley indicted slavery as evil and dehumanising, although they did not show any definite agenda to stop it. They also attested to the blacks possession of the same mental and intellectual acumen with Whites, especially for artistic creation.

The 19th century African American poetry witnessed a great influx of both the black and white anti-slavery or abolitionist poets like George Horton, Elymas Rogers, James Whitefield, Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, among others. The poets denounced slavery and used their arts to mediate for Black freedom.

The ideological shift in the American society in the early 20th century in which although structural slavery has been abolished, blacks were not integrated into the mainstream American society posed a question of 'who am I?' in the African American communities. So, the poets shifted emphasis and devised a new voice to address their predicaments. Consequently, Harlem Renaissance also known as Negro Renaissance emerged in the 1920's as a way of self-assertion by the African Americans. They divested their poetry of the older apology and self-pity tradition and, for the first time, reflected a race consciousness and found pride in their body pigmentation. They presented more dignified images of Africa than Wheatley's prejudiced view of Africa as 'The land of errors and Egyptian gloom'. In addition to adding protest in their poetry, they also idealised and celebrated African images. Prominent among these poets are Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and Gwendolyn Brooks.

The two World Wars and Great Depression of the 1950's contributed significantly to the

demise of Harlem Renaissance. Consequently, in the 1960's, New Black Poetry sprang up in reaction to the racial chaos in America occasioned by the racist minded activities like the 1960's bombings and the violent confrontation between blacks and the white police. Besides, Broadside Press Poet emerged during this era. Using caustic, bitter, and sometimes cynical tone, they shifted from protest literature into defining a new black nationalism that was set to elate the African Americans from the despondent and pessimism which characterised the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. Their major mandate was to realise a social change and moral and political revolution in America. Notable poets of this period include Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Sonia Sanchez, Don Lee and Nikki Giovanni.

The study illustrates that from the 1970's till date, African American poetry has shown a more articulation in terms of its ability to drive home socio-cultural, political and moral revolution in the U.S.A. with the aim to bring about total emancipation of blacks. The poets in this era are more versatile in their themes and also more universal in their subject matters than the poets in the previous eras. Also, they operate within the totality of American mainstream unlike the earlier poets. These notwithstanding, they still projected African heritage in their poetry, an indication that they are aware and proud of their root and are psychologically and emotionally attached and disposed to Africa although they cannot return physically to her. Prominent among the poets of this era are YusefKomunyakaa, Cyrus Cassels, Thylias Moss and Natasha Trethewey.

In the context of this thesis, the study defines African image as a mental picture of Africa produced by the poets some of which could be real or imaginary. On the other hand, Africa in this context is seen from a broad perspective to include Africans, who are on the African continent and those in Diaspora, especially those in the U.S.A. Therefore, the image as discussed

in this study encompasses the both categories of Africa taking into cognisance slave trade and slavery, racism and identity crisis, estrangement, struggle for freedom and integration. This poetic mouthpiece bore testimonies to race politics not just between the black and white relationships but also between the superior and the subordinate people, the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups in the global arena, most especially in the multicultural and multilingual societies.

Using New Historicism as a theoretical framework, the study presents the role of African American poetry and the poets in highlighting the difficulties experienced by the oppressed blacks as a result of the long period of slavery and racism in America. It argues that the fact that the Blacks were exposed to a new environment with its attendant predicaments was not enough reason to believe that African heritage was annihilated in them. Rather, it submits that the condition created in them a dual heritage which resulted into a hybrid culture that helped make American art great. It also afforded them the opportunity of creating an authentic poetic voice to assert their African root and express their displeasure with the American society and their desire for integration. In doing this, the poets equally expressthe need for the African Diaspora mutual cooperation to liberate the Blackman from so many challenges facing him across the globe.

The study reveals that the portrayal of African elements by the poets goes beyond Black Nationalism and invocation of pity and sympathy;it is rather a display of racial maturity and sensitivity to their African heritage and root, which may not really be glorious but they are proud of it. Besides, it is also a mouthpiece fashioned out by the African Americans to reach out to the world and express their displeasure and aspiration for integration in American mainstream. African American poetry therefore is an advocate for a total re-evaluation of the issues of racial prejudice, slavery and socio-political and economic marginalisation of the minority groups in our

society, and the need for a total integration of such groups in order to fashion out a liberal society, especially in this era of globalisation. Therefore, the two poets – Langston Hughes and YusefKomunyakaa have successfully used their arts to assert their African heritage and a deep longing for origin, an indication that a long period of slavery the Blacks were subjected to in the U.S.A. did not exterminate the African elements in them. They equally show a deep displeasure for the awful condition of the Blacks in the U.S.A. and the desire for unconditional integration. The ability of the African Americans to accept their dual identity and use it in hybridising American art and literature to make them great, even in the midst of difficulties, is a challenge to human race to look inward and emphasise more on what unites than what divides human race for a sustainable growth and development in our societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. H. (1981). *Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fourth edition. Canada: Dan S. Norton and Peters Rushton.

Acholonu, R. C. (1987). 'The West Indian Novelist and Cultural Assertion:SamuelSelvon's Artistic Vision' in Emenyonu, E. (Ed), *Black Culture andBlack Consciousness in Literature*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

‘African American Literature’. *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American_Literature* . Retrieved 14/01/2009.

‘African American Literature’, (2009). Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Ultimate Reference Suite.* Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Akuso, E. S. (2005).*Africa in the Caribbean Imagination: A Study of the Poetry of Edward, K. Braithwaite, Nicolas, B. Guilen and Derek Walcott.*APh.D dissertation submitted to the Department of English and LiteraryStudies, ABU, Zaria. Unpublished.

Aliu, M. (2003). “Marxism and Literature” in Aliu, M.(Ed), *Linguistics andLiterature in Language Arts: An Introduction.* Kano: Rainbow Royale.

Andrews, W. F. and Harris, T. (Eds). (1997).*The Oxford Companion ofAfrican American Literature*. Oxford: University Press.

Angmor, C. (1987). ‘Black Consciousness in the Poetry of Edward Brathwaite’ inIkonne, C., Eko, E., and Oku, J. (Eds),*Black Culture and BlackConsciousness in Literature.* Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books(Nig) Ltd.

Aubert, A. (1993). ‘YusefKomunyakaa: the unified vision – canonization andhumanity – section 3: Sayings, Sermons, Tales, and Lies’ – Contemporary BlackPoetry American Review: *www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2838/is_nl_v27/ai_13193073.*

Barksdale, R. K. and Kinnamon K. (1972).*Black Writers in America:A Comprehensive Anthology*. New York: Macmillan.

Bastide, R. (1971).*African Civilizations in the New World*. London: C. Hurst and Company.

‘Birmingham (Alabama).’ *Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation 2008.

Brawley, B. (1970). *A Social History of the American Negro*. New York andLondon: Collier and

Macmillan Ltd.

Bressler, C.E. (2004).*Literary Criticism: an Introduction to Theory and Practice.*New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Brown, L. W. (1978). 'The African Heritage and the Harlem Renaissance: ARe-evaluation' in Jones Eldred D. (Ed),*African Literature Today. No.9: Africa,America and the Caribbean*. London and New York: Heinemann and Africana Publishing Company.

Brown, S. (1969).*The Negro in American Fiction, Negro Poetry and Drama*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times.

Butcher, M. Just (1971).*Negro in American Culture*. Second edition. New York and Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House of Canada Ltd.

Clarence, M.(1969).*The New Black Poetry*. New York: InternationalPublishers.

Dabydeen, D. And Wilson-Tagoa N. (1987), *A Readers' Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature*. London: Rutherford Press.

Dash, J. M. (1975). 'The Example of AimeCesaire' in King B. and Ogungbesan K. (1975). *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*. Zaria: AhmaduBello Uni. Press and Oxford: University Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1939).*Black Folk, Then and Now*. New York: Holt.

Du Bois, W. E. B.(1969).*The Souls of the Black Folk.*New York: Holt.

Eagleton, T. (1983).*Literary theory: an Introduction.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston-Hughes. (12/02/2011)

Frazier, E. F. (1963).*The Negro Church in America.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Daniel, F. (2008). 'The Image of Africa as Memory and Insight inAfrican-American Poetry: An Appraisal of YusefKomunyakaa's NewPoems'. A paper presented at the 25th

Nigerian English StudiesAssociation (NESA) annual conference held at Ahmadu Bello University, Zariabetween 24th – 27th Sept, 2008.

Daniel, F. (2006).*From Folk Tradition to Global Concern in African-American Poetry: The New Focus in Rita Dove's AmericanSmooth and YusefKomunyakaa'sDienCaiDau.* AnUnpublished Master's Thesis submitted to the Postgraduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Gates, L. H. (Jnr) and McKay, N.(Eds). (1996).*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. U.S.A. Norton and Co.

Goring, P., Hawthorn, J., Mitchell, D. (2001).*Studying Literature the Essential Companion.* London: Hodder Arnold.

Harris, L. M. (2008). 'African Americans'. *Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]*.Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Herskovits, M. J. (1958).*The Myth of Negro Past*. (New ed). Boston: BeaconPress.

Holloway, E. J.(Ed). (1990).*Africanism in American Culture*. U.S.A.: Indiana University Press.

Hornby, A. S. (2004). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. (6th edition, special price edition, 7th impression). Oxford: University Press.

Horton, J. O. And Horton, L. E. (2008). 'African American History.'*Microsoft Encarta(R) 2009[DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.

Hughes, L. (1959).*Selected Poems*. New York: Knopf.

Hughes, L. (1964).*The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Times*. NewYork: Alfred A Knopf.

Jackson, R. (Ed.). (1963).*Black American Writers: Bibliographical Essays.* Volume 1.New York: St. Martin's Press.

Jahn, J. (1968).*A History of Neo-African Literature: Writing in TwoContinents.* London: Faber

and Faber Ltd.

Joans, T. (1971).*A Black Manifest in Jazz Poetry and Prose*. London: Calder and Boyars Ltd.

Kent, G. (1972).*Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*. Chicago:Third World Press.

Keyes, L. C. (2004).*Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Urbana and Chicago:University of Illinois Press.

Klinkowitz, J. (1978). 'Early Writers: Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, andBenjamin Banneker' in Inge, M. Thomas, Duke, Maurice and Bryer,

Komunyakaa, Y. (2001).*Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems*.Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Luga, C. A. I. (2008).*Literary Space and the Print Media in Northern Nigeria: A Case Study of The Guardian and New Nigerian Newspapers*. A Seminar paper presented as a Ph.D proposal in the Department of English and Literary Studies, A.B.U. Zaria. Dec., 2008.

'MuhammedAli.'Microsoft Encarta (R)2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation 2008.

Mphahlele, E. (1962).*The African Image.* New York: Praeger.

Neal, L. (1982). 'Langston Hughes: Black America's Poet Laureate' in RichardKostclanetz (Ed),*American Writing Today*. Forum Series Vol. 1.

Okwori, Z. J. (2001). 'Echoes in the Bone: Africanism and PerformingReligion in the America'. A paper presented at the viii annual conference of theAmerican Studies Association of Nig. (ASAN) at Hill Station Hotel, Jos from 13th –16th August, 2001.

Ploski, H. et. al.(Eds). (1989).*The Negro Almanac: A Reference Works on theAfrican American*. USA: Gale Research.

Richard, L. J. (1976).*The Black Image in Latin American Literature*. USA: Uni. Of New

Mexico Press.

Richard, L. J.(1979).*Black Writers in Latin America.* USA:Uni. Of New Mexico Press.

Salas, A. M. (2003).'Race, Human Empathy, and Negative Capability: the Poetryof Yusef Komunyaka'. West Chester University Fall 2003. Muse.jhu.edu/journals/college_literature/v030/30.4salas.html.

Storey, J. (1994).*An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture.* London:Harvester Wheatsleaf.

Taylor, R. (Ed.). (1977).*Background Lectures in English Literature*. Benin-City:Ethiope Publishing Corporation.

The Holy Bible. (NKJV) (1985). Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Wagner, J. (1973).*Black Poets of the United States: From Paul LaurenceDunbar to Langston Hughes*. Urbana, Chicago and London: Uni. ofIllinois Press.

Webster, R. (1990).*Studying Literature Theory: An Introduction*. London:Arnold.

Wood, P. H. (1978). 'It was a Negro Taught Them: A New Look at African Labour in Early South Carolina' in Frazier, T. (Ed). Third edition. *The Underside of American History*. Vol. 1 to 1877. USA:Jovanovich, Inc.

Woodson, C. G. (1968).*The African Background Outlined*. New York: NegroUni. Press.

www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/hughes/aa-hughes-youth-3-e.html

www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes

www.poetryfoundation.org/journal

www.redhotjazz.com/hughes.html