DIASPORA, CITIZENSHIP, AND GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY IN THE DRAMATURGY OF AMIRI BARAKA AND AUGUST WILSON

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This Dissertation Titled: *DIASPORA, CITIZENSHIP, AND GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY IN THE DRAMATURGY OF AMIRI BARAKA AND AUGUST WILSON* Meets The Regulations Governing The Award Of The Degree Of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** in DRAMA of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is approved for Its Contribution To Knowledge And Literary Presentation.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Dissertation has been written by me and that it is a correct record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree.

All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.

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ELIJAH PHILEMON OYIGBENU

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DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Pa Oyigbenu Omame; my mother, Azumi Onige Oyigbenu; my wife, Zipporah Oyigbenu; my children: Ajoza, Philemon, Jr., Owusonabi, Epawoza, and Oyigbenu, Jr.

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DIASPORA, CITIZENSHIP, AND GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY IN THE DRAMATURGY OF AMIRI BARAKA AND AUGUST WILSON

ABSTRACT

The question of reinventing African American citizenship and cultural identity is a historical process that situates him as a victim of forced diaspora that saw him unsolicitedly carted into the decks of slave ships and transported across the vast Atlantic ocean to the New World to serve as free labour for the economic exploitation of the new imperial and colonial powers and their capitalist collaborators.

The struggle for identity, citizenship, freedom, and recognition began with captivity which stripped the African slave of his hitherto freeman status. Subjugated as a slave, he is repudiated and consigned to lower caste status as a result of the endownement of his skin colour. Prior to the 1950s however, African Americans' effort centred on the drive for freedom, sometimes eliciting calls for integration and assimilation into the mainstream culture.

In what became unprecedented move, the 1950s Civil Rights Movement initiated the most organized and most formidable social movement in the history of the United States which boldly confronted the nagging issue of citizenship and political franchise for the African American. Hitherto, all cultural and literary productions dwelt largely on inklings towards assimilation and integration into the mainstream culture.

This study therefore sets out to explore the dramaturgy of Baraka and August Wilson in order to articulate how the issue of diaspora, citizenship, and identity are reinvented, and on what geographic locales and spaces. While Wilson concerns

himself with the intrigues of inter-racial and intra-racial relationship of black and white, Baraka dwells largely on the doctrines of both the Black Power and the Black Arts Movements in the construction of citizenship and identity.

This is an almost exclusively library research work. But because dearth of recent materials in the areas of study, the researchers also has to dwell largely on the internet.

Findings arising from this study show that for the African American to succeed in constructing acceptable citizenship and the reinventing of proud racial identity, he must develop communal and community consciousness that are ethically rooted as a trope for survival and the exercise of rights that ensure and guarantee broad base participation. Even this community consciousness has not been easy to formulate because of obstacles that have been placed by institutional racism. Yet, against all odds, the African American has made giant strides in asserting citizenship and befitting identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Until recently, the African diaspora was not given adequate scholarly attention because most scholars saw this diaspora as merely an antecedent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As more and more attention and studies are devoted to this area, findings prove that African migration (or diaspora or dispersal) predated the trans-Atlantic slave trade era. Although Africa had 'international' contacts with both the Old West and the Muslim World before the trans-Atlantic slave trade, this relation was at different levels other than commercial human trafficking for economic and capitalist exploitations.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade as an expansive transoceanic phenomenon gave rise to centripetal and centrifugal discourses which invariably shaped events across the Atlantic world, culminating in a web of oceanic interculture of intellectualism, creolisation, hybridity and religious interface. This diasporic spread of Africans across the Atlantic in contested spaces and locales, and juxtaposed against the antecedent cultural transmutations has far-reaching cultural, political, historical, literary, and religious consequences for the African in the New World (and the African on the homeland), as well as the cultures and peoples of the West (the United States in particular). Central to this intercultural synergy are the metaphors of the 'middle passage' and 'the ship'. Against the backdrop of Paul Gilroy's (1999) reading, the ship is personified as "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" that served as agency for the historic circum-Atlantic intercultural dialogue and the emerging culture of modernity.

This thesis examines the fundamental aspect of the transoceanic cultural and literary development arising from the loss of culture, history and identity of the African American in the United States; his sense of nostalgia, the loss of past history and how these concepts and emotional feelings are captured in his dramatic works. But in doing this, the circumstances of historical antecedents which created "the culture of modernity" for both the African homeland and the New World which developed from the creolisation and hybridity and the final loss of the African identity and personality are equally explored.

Central to this study therefore is the struggle of the African American dramatist to recreate and reinvent the lost personality, identity, culture and history in this alien but expansive world of Anglo-America. The idea is to reposition the Black aesthetics dramatists` efforts in the context of modern African American drama which flowered in the season of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s – 1970s, whose responsibility it is to advance the consciousness of identity and citizenship among African Americans regardless of social class. Notable among the frontline writers of this era are Ed Bullins, Ntozake Shange, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, etc. In the drama of the 1980s and 1990s, August Wilson is easily the most prominent and prolific, constituting himself into a cultural historian who sets out to re-write the history of the African American within the expanse of the twentieth century, decade by decade.

It is the view of Amiri Baraka that the duty of the African American writer is to chronicle the emotional history of the African American in the United States. This position is adopted against the background of the falsehood and misrepresentation

that have been orchestrated and peddled against African Americans by the white mainstream culture. The challenge therefore has been for the African American writer (and the dramatist) to "fill in many of the blanks of America's self-knowledge", (Stephen Butterfield, 1974:3). In addition, African American writers must "offer a model of the self which is different from white models; created in response to a different perception of history and revealing divergent, often completely opposite meanings to human actions" (Butterfield:3). No matter the cost, the African American writer should "repair the damage inflicted upon him by white racism, rend the veil of white definitions that misrepresent him to himself and the world, create a new identity, and turn the light of knowledge on the system that holds him down" (Butterfield: 2).

It is against the backdrop and the need to reposition the African American in his pride of place vis-a-vis the foregoing that Baraka; the icon, founder, and beacon of the Black Arts Movement, as well as August Wilson (a loyal and consummate disciple of the Black Arts Movement), have been selected for study. The play texts considered for exploration are Baraka`s *Dutchman* and *The Slave* to which James Smethurst sees as "crucial in shaping the form and direction that African American nationalist drama would take in the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Gates, Jr., and Appiah, 1999:240).

For the sake of generational dramatic artistic comparison, August Wilson's *Fences* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* though set in different decades reflect the struggles of African Americans for self-hood, self-assertion, freedom, identity and citizenship. Although both Baraka and Wilson have other equally seminal plays in their repertoire, the choices made is

underscored by their relevance to the exploration of the concept and practice of citizenship and identity construction and reinvention as central to the life, struggle , and existence of the African American.

Against the background of the foregoing, these plays are treated in relation to the phenomenon of African American diasporic citizenship and the plethora of identities that have been negotiated and constructed within the vast maze of America's muddy racist mainstream waters.

The diaspora concern in this study focuses on the African slaves that were captured, commoditised, purchased, and forcibly carted away in the decks of slave ships and taken away to the New World to provide free labour for the plantations of the Americas. These ex-slaves and their descendants constitute the thrust of this study because of their unique and peculiar status in 'the land of equal opportunity, liberty, and freedom, yet, ironically they are neither free nor granted liberty and opportunity to pursue happiness. As a diaspora, the African American, unlike his contemporary diaspora, has no domiciliary address anywhere on the African continent. He is therefore not a member of any hometown association. Neither has he a country, nor town, or village to identify with in Africa. Neither is he the modern-day visa lottery diaspora whose diasporic citizenship status is a contract between himself and the nation-state that is both negotiable and as occasioned, revocable. On the contrary, the African American diaspora status is neither negotiable nor revocable because he remains an American by right of origin. At the time of his captivity to the New World, Africa had not been balkanised into political nation-states. Today, Africa is fragmented into nation-states, so the African American lacks

what nation of Africa to call a home. His idea of home as time throws him centuries back into some fantasy or imaginary jungles of Africa, is a space he cannot conceptualize in concrete terms. Nothing is real about this concept of home as time.

Alex Haley, in his search for his identity and root, traced his ancestry to the Senegambia. This personal odyssey is documented in his epic novel, *Roots*. Haley's exploit is merely an isolated case. The Black Congressional Caucus in the United States Congress constitutes a political pressure on the American government, 'forcing' her to formulate policies and programmes that are Africa-centred. That is as far as it goes because most of these political leaders know little or nothing about realities in Africa. Most African Americans tend to denigrate Africa because of her backwardness, corruption, inept leadership, and technological underdevelopment. Infact, neither Baraka nor Wilson has visited Africa – therefore their idea and impression about Africa remain romanticised and imaginary. This therefore constitutes the difference between the African American diaspora and other diasporas.

Their peculiarity informs their deprivations and denials which arise solely from the difference in skin colour between them and the Caucasians who perceive black as inferior and evil, as well as the antecedents of the slave trade. With their personalities, history, cultural heritage, identity and citizenship destroyed and now subjected to contestation, the African American finds himself in counter-hegemonic struggles to redeem and reinvent his identity and citizenship.

1.2 Significance of the Trans-Atlantic Triangle

The transportation of African slaves which was considered as the most revolutionary commodity in the trans-Atlantic economy (Joseph Roach, 1996: 4) created an economic network linking Africa (human beings), Europe (manufactured goods), and the Americas (raw materials) in a web of relationship "that does not begin and end at national borders but charts its course along the dark currents of a world economy that slavery once propelled". In the words of Gilroy (*Union Jack*), "A new structure of cultural exchange has been built up across the imperial networks which once played host to the triangular trade in sugar, slaves and capital" (Roach: 5).

Although the slave trade which was the main dynamics of the African diaspora was seen from the perspective of Europeans and Americans as an insignificant "activity in itself than as an aspect of the history of the European maritime empires or of the United States" (Kilson and Rotberg, 1976:57), it is perhaps doubtful if without the trade in African slaves, there might not have been this diaspora on such a wholesale proportion. In this connection therefore, one could assert that the story of the African diaspora is the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade which initiated the gruesome and barbaric experiences of African slaves on the 'middle passage' that gave rise to oceanic interculture arising from the interplay of contacts with non-African societies. This contact resulted in the emergence of new social structures in the New World due largely to the collapse of the African family structure, the dissolution of African heritage and culture, the adoption and creation of new language forms; most importantly, the loss of identity and citizenship and the emerging crises of

reinventing new citizenship and identity. To buttress this point. Franklin E. Frazier (1957:3) argues that

> It was in the New World, particularly in what became the United States, that new conditions of life destroyed the significance of their African heritage and caused new habits and attitudes to develop to meet new situation.

Nothing can be more correct in summing up the extent of destruction of African personality and heritage in the face of this contact with foreign culture than Frazier's argument above.

The social geography of the slave plantation regime made synergetic cultural interplay possible, especially in the South United States because "slaves were scattered in relatively small numbers on plantations and farms over a large area" which sharply contrasted with the situation in Brazil and West Indies where slaves were concentrated on expansive plantations which facilitated the establishment and the flowering of African culture (Frazier: 7).

The social relationship that emerged from this arrangement in the United States did not only destroy African ways of life, but made it inevitable for slaves to take over the cultures of their masters, first by acquiring "some knowledge of the language of the whites for communication" (Frazier, 9). This language acquisition, being an expressive medium of cultural transmission, was a ready tool for assimilation and acculturation of slaves into the mainstream culture.

Quoting Olivella (1995), Jenks Okwori estimates that Africa lost between 40 – 60 million men and women as slaves within 500 years, i.e.

between 1400 and 1900 AD. This figure contrasts with Inikori's analysis of data presented by scholars like C. A. Palmer, E. Vila Vilar, P. D. Curtin *et al.,* which estimated that about 15.4 million Africans were exported across the Atlantic to the New World as slaves (Ogot, ed.,:80-83). While this figure corroborates Joseph Iyo's (1999) estimate of 15,400,000 slaves, Edward D. Dunbar (1861) gave a total figure of 13.8 slave import into the New World between the 16th and 19th centuries (Franklin and Moss, Jr., 1994:41).

However, figures arrived at are mere conjectures because Andah and Bolarinwa (ed, 1993:3) pose the following conundrum:

- Can one ever really quantify the number of Africans that died on the continent resisting being captured as slaves?

- Can anyone ever quantify the numbers of Africans that died in the infamous "middle passage" in slave ships on their journey into slavery in continental America and the Caribbean?

- How does one quantify the number of Africans and their descendants that died on plantations all over the world?

The following questions call to attention a thorough understanding of the scale of human involvement in both the trade including those that died in the course of slave raids as well as those that died through tortures in the "middle passage", on the slave plantations compared to those that survived in order to appreciate the volume of human loss to Africa and thereby the scale and scope of African diaspora which constitutes the thrust of this study.

In this regard, Sedar Senghor argued that the slave trade "ravaged black Africa like a bush fire, wiping out images and values in one vast carnage" (cited in Franklin and Moss, Jr., 41). The slave trade did not only commoditise the African slave but it also dehumanised and rendered him a being without history such that he came to be seen as mere phantom, an "invisible man", a beast not fit for habitation among humans.

The 'middle passage' provided the freeway for what Franklin and Moss, Jr., (1994) call "the expatriation of millions of Africans in less than four centuries" thereby constituting "one of the most far-reaching and drastic social revolutions in the annals of history" (41). The African slaves who were carted away from the West African coastline (including those that died in the "middle passage") constituted "the healthiest, the largest, the youngest, the ablest, and the most culturally advanced" (Franklin and Moss, Jr.,:42).

On account of the notorious and inhuman nature of treatment of slaves on the high seas, there were recorded cases of resistance and rebellion. One account gives a figure of more than 450 rebellions or slave-based attacks (Stephen Behrendt, in Appiah and Gates, Jr., 1999:1872). Among others, the unsanitary conditions in the slave ships, the crowded decks and the employment of physical torture provided ideal environment for illnesses and diseases such as dysentery, small pox and the deadly flux that led to high mortality rates among slaves, and even among the crew too.

The metaphor of the 'middle passage' provides a more in-depth analysis and appreciation of the transoceanic practices between Africa, Europe, and the

Americas because these circum-Atlantic practices took place within the circumference of the Atlantic ocean with the 'middle passage' as its epicentre. Therefore, the 'middle passage' represents the crucible for loss of identity, personality, and citizenship of the African slaves. At the same time, it provided the laboratory for the emergence of and a workshop for the reconstruction of new identities. It also fostered the fertilisation of new ideas and cultures which resulted in hybridisation and creolisation of cultures across metropolitan and national locales. These circum-Atlantic practices were made possible by the technology of the ship which made possible the plundering and carting away of African people and their abundant natural resources that went into the development of metropolitan Western capitals.

The development of the ship facilitated the trade in slaves and the transportation of materials and ideas through distant places across the Atlantic. In giving credit to this technological breakthrough, Alexander Crummell admitted the existence of "geographical obstacles" in time, distance, and oceans (cited in T. O. Ranger, ed., 1968:148), which the technology of the ship broke thus rendering distant lands accessible. Similarly, the trans-Atlantic dialogue facilitated by this technology enabled the cross- continental movements of people, goods and ideas along the triangular Atlantic perimeter, thus linking Africa, Europe, and the Americas along complex network of activities and processes.

Roach underscores this point when he argues that

> The concept of circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the

> centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity. In this sense, a New World was not discovered in the Caribbean, but one was truly invented there (1996:4).

To create something new presupposes the death of the old. However, this new creation, via the circum-Atlantic practices, took place amidst the intercultural synergy and practices of hitherto synergetic cultures. According to Gilroy (1993:1) the death of the old created a "surrogation within an ideal environment for the emergence of a 'newness' with distinct identity. Because of the 'genocidal' activities of Europeans which culminated in this creation, they hate to be reminded of the violence unleashed on Africans in the 'middle passage', on the plantations, and in the years preceding the American Civil War. Once again Gilroy (1993:1) sums up the dilemma and contradictions arising from the circum-Atlantic practices as

> The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations.

In order to understand Gilroy's symbolism of the ship, it is necessary to visionise it as it traversed and criss-crossed the great Atlantic, connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The ship is metaphorised as a "living, micro-

cultural, micro-political system in motion" that facilitated the circum-Atlantic intercultural dialogues. One would argue that without the ship, this synergic interrelationship, with its hitherto attendant syncretism might have been impossible. This is largely why

> Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts, books, gramophone records, and choirs (Gilroy, 1993:4).

This symbolism or metaphor immediately recreates the image of Baraka's title play, *Dutchman,* which evokes the image of the Dutch ship that brought the twenty African slaves to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. The successful voyage of the Dutch ship opened a new chapter in relation between and among people across the Atlantic world. This explains why till this day, the Atlantic continues to remain a signpost for cultural, political, and economic exchanges, facilitated by the technology of the ship.

In the dialogue of the diaspora, Africa continues to be the compass, oscillating between the past and present; becoming a metaphor for survival in the Americas, and in the context of modernity, "as a trope of racial unity" (Appiah and Gates, Jr., 36). Africa presents the link between the 'past' and the 'present' for the African American, and the "root and routes" (Gilroy:35) in the diaspora across the Atlantic world, creating hybridised personality and cultures in the diasporic world. In its manifest contemporary expression, Alex Haley's 1970s voyage back to the Senegambia in search for his ancestry underscores

the significance of Africa in the life of African Americans. The unfulfilled expectations and consequences of this dialogue is what Gilroy (1993:192) describes as:

> … the turbulent patterns of modern social life that have taken blacks from Africa via slavery into an incompletely reaslised democracy that racialises and thus frequently withholds the loudly proclaimed benefits of modern citizenship.

In the best tradition of what one might aptly describe as a dream deferred, Gilroy once again sees the circum-Atlantic practices as yielding "a course of lessons which are always unfinished always being remade" (xi). The extent of this instability and mutability of identities is encapsulated in the massive interculture of the black Atlantic and its little-known history whose scope is open-ended.

The most contentious fall-out of this black Atlantic dialogue is the creation and recreation, construction and reconstruction of geographies of contesting identities in different spaces and locales. The tragedy of the African diaspora is the irreversible fact that he is caught between two great cultural blocks - Africa and Euro-American -which constitute his "double consciousness" or his "striving to be both European and black" for which he is none. This oppositional interrelationship determined the current of the transoceanic dialogue, giving rise to contestation of national-cum-cultural identity and citizenship across the Atlantic world.

Following the interplay of forces arising from collision of cultures and ideas in the circum-Atlantic world, concepts such as "nationality, ethnicity,

authenticity, and cultural purity" have gained resonance in what has come to be termed as cultural politics of difference. Cultural politics of difference has been invented by diasporic citizens and their minority ethnic nationalities and groups (feminists, gay, race, sex, etc) seeking recognition of citizenship and rights.

Against the wide divide of racialised "black" and "white", there is the invention "of creolisation, metissage, mestisaje, and hybridity" which Gilroy (1993) describes as "a litany of pollution and impurity", from the standpoint of ethnic absolutists. This postulation arise mainly from the viewpoint of the pollution of the black race which obfuscate the issue of ethnic cultural identity and citizenship.

Within the expansive gamut of the black Atlantic world, black culture, identity, and history became the endangered species. This explains why the African American is caught up in the web of reinventing distinct cultural identity and the desire for full-citizenship in the United States. The politics of citizenship and identity construction is at the centre of a wide range of African American literatures, literary and political movements, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, and the Black Power/Black Arts Movements of the turbulent 1960s – 1970s.

In the process, the chief problematic created by the trans-Atlantic practices for the African American is the loss, and the need for reinventing new citizenship and identity. As Gilroy (1993:33) rightly asserts,

> where the archaeology of black critical knowledge enters the academy, it currently involves the construction of canons which seem to be proceeding on an exclusively national basis

- African American, Anglophone Caribbean and so on.

The fragmentation of the African diaspora created "differences of language, culture, and identity which divide the blacks of the diaspora from one another, let alone from Africa. As if these divisions were not enough, there were other differences and divisions along the consciousness of "gender, sexually, and male domination which have been made unavoidable by the struggles of black women and the voices of black gaymen and lesbians" (Gilroy:34 – 35). But within the wider context of the American society, the African American is perceived as an "Outsider", a status that denies the 'Insider' privileges of participation in political, economic, and social processes.

Arising from this process, the search for identity and its attendant crisis features prominently in the too-frequent changes in nomenclature. The endlessness for the search and construction of acceptable citizenship and identity manifest in the various geographies of space, locale, and time. It has been a long odyssey from 'Negro', 'Nigger', 'Afro-America', 'Black' to 'African American'; a term rooted in historical and cultural origin. These nomenclatural changes constitute a search for national definition of common ethnic group identity and consciousness. No ethnic group has suffered such incomplete nomenclatural identity metamorphoses as the African American.

The growing cultural consciousness of the 1920s, under the aegis of the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Power Movement of the 1960s opted for 'Black' as an African cultural identity. The physical manifestations of this

consciousness included the wearing of African dresses, Afro-hair, the adoption of African names, etc. In essence it was a consciousness that sought to create and assert positive self image and self-pride among blacks. Today, African American' is acceptable as an ethnic identity in line with minority groups like Jewish –American, Japanese- American, Irish – American, etc.

Significantly, these efforts at personality reconstruction and recreation arise from the depersonalisation, alienation, and estrangement of the African American as a result of his being uprooted from the African homeland However, what is more tragic is the rejection that blacks suffer as a result of being in America. Therefore, against the scenario of this painful experience, a cross-section of integrationist and assimilationist African Americans decided to jettison their African heritage as 'barbaric', 'primitive', and 'heathen'. Some even blame their ancestors for what they call entering American society 'culturally naked'. But this 'cultural nakedness' was an Anglo-Saxon racist strategy designed to annihilate the culture of their forebears in order to justify slavery, and inferiority status, through what Kilson and Rotberg (1976) call the "Invisible Man". Ingrained with a sense of inferiority, this group of African Americans intriguingly tended to admire the Jews as a people who "represent an appealing example of ethnic success without complete abandonment of ethnic traditions" (Szwed, ed, 1970: 312). This group seems oblivious of the fact that racism was not imported into the United States by African slaves, but as an instrument fashioned by Euro-Americans to balkanise and distort the psysche and culture of the African diaspora in order to justify slavery and all

forms of inhuman treatment of the black race. Meanwhile, slavery provided for loss of the personality, defining the slave in such a fashion that he is not a person, at least, not a person in all the senses that a free man is a person in the same society" (Szwed, 1973:34).

The dilemma of this group is captured by Nathan I. Huggins (1971:138–39):

> The Indian or the Greek or Serb could know of a village or a place to which he could return (to visit) where his family would still be remembered, where, indeed his family still lived…
>
> Negroes, on the other hand, have no such clear sense of the past; it was a general and abstract thing, slavery… Both the Negroes and the uprooted youth were cut off from a past to which they could not return, and which they could not identify (138-39).

Essentially what this group ought to do is to repudiate this oppressive ideology of self-pity, self-hate, and self-defeatism and arm itself with the tools for self-determination, economic empowerment, and unfettered access to genuine political participation through the recognition of citizenship and ethnic cultural identity.

1.3 Virginia and Maryland Legislations: Implication for African American Citizenship Status

The place of Virginia and Maryland in the study of the African diaspora within the context of loss of African American personality and the emergent loss of citizenship and identity is important in many ways. The legal seal

legitimising slavery in these colonies caused the African slave to loose his personality, with all the attendant natural rights accorded human begins in a land ironically founded on the ideals of freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is a fact of history that the first twenty African arrivals to the United States of America were not slaves, when considered from legal perspective. They were brought-off a Dutch man-of-war in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619; thereby ushering the influx of Africans into the colonies of the United States. This singular action precipitated a chain of complex economic and social relationships that came to define the moral and social status of the African American in the United States today.

The census of 1623 – 1624 listed these black comers as servants. As indentured servants, they were entitled to certain privileges of free men. This was why those who completed their indentured services were said to be allocated "land in much the same way as it was being assigned to whites who had completed their indenture" (John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., 1994: 56). This relationship was essentially servitude in nature.

However, neither servile relationship nor race differences encouraged institutionalisation or legalisation of slavery. Rather, it was the economic factor of a growing demand for " cheap and permanent labour supply" (Frazier, 1957:22) that finally nailed the fate of the African in Virginia, Maryland, and the entire South Untied States. Virginia and Maryland records between 1620 and 1660 did not categorically refer to Africans as "slaves" but euphemistically

as “Negroes”. Nevertheless, the notion of African as ‘slave’ was impugned in reference to him as ‘Negro’ which conveyed prejudicial connotations of subordination. This arrangement explains why between 1630s and 1640s Africans in Virginia and Maryland were singled out “for discriminatory treatment as compared with white indentured servants” (Degler, 1985:31-32). As a result, only Africans were denied the right to bear arms in Virginia (1640) and Maryland (1648). Since citizenship is defined within the framework of the law and politics, controversies about the status of Africans caused ripples from time to time. To rest these controversies, the African had to be declared a ‘slave’ by law. Thus, the process of separation of the races began when “in 1662 Virginia declared that the status of offspring would follow that of the mother in the event of a white man getting a Negro with child. In Maryland, the declaration placed the African’s service *durante vita* in 1664, which also included hereditary status through the *father* (Degler: 34). As a result of these separatist developments, even intermarriages between the races was outlawed in order that the white race does not get polluted.

The status of ‘slave’ was clamped down on the African in Virginia in 1669; by a law that defined Africans as ‘property’; and later as ‘real estate’ in 1705. Before now, a Maryland deed of 1649 declared slavery not only to be for a life-time, but also of inheritance (Degler:35). To anchor religious and moral rationalisation for legalizing slavery, the colony of Maryland declared that all slaves imported from Africa were “heathens”, as such, conversion to Christianity did not alter their slave status, but “justify the act of holding them

in slavery (Frazier:58). The economic conditions on the plantations in these colonies further polarised the social conditions that emerged, thereby foisting structures of segregation, discrimination, and racism on African slaves.

A brief examination of the internal diaspora resulting from the Virginia and Maryland legislations as a furtherance to the understanding of the search for freedom, identity and citizenship is pertinent. Segregation along colour line, deprivations and denials of access to public institutions and facilities, and above all, the denial of access to economic opportunities and ownership of landed property all of which informed the African American need to seek fortunes up North. Internal dispersal did not help matters, but rather aggravated the situation because the northward migration entailed a flee from agricultural poverty to industrial poverty. Therefore, it did not radically change the economic and social status of the African American, but rather ushered in radical social transformations.

Political exigencies arising from the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) granted freedom to the African slave. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments granted ex-slaves unfettered citizenship status and rights, while the Voting Rights Act (1965) ascribed the right to vote (political participation). Although these political instruments assigned the right of citizenship to the African American, nevertheless they still had to fight for its actualisation. Freedom gained, the legal exercise of that freedom became the problem.

Even before African American leaders began to initiate political actions towards achieving freedom, the white Southern political hegemony who were

returning to power in Washington began to pass discriminatory laws against blacks which created a condition of hopelessness for African Americans who "were fast losing their rights and were being thrown back into an arena from which they had fought so hard to escape" (Thompson, page 2 of 4). The State supported the lynching and murderous activities of Ku Klux Klan and the police in the South.

Ironically, blacks who fled North not only faced tougher competition from Irish immigrants but were engaged in "the hardest, dirtiest, and poorest paying jobs; and their economic positions were reinforced by a web of other racist institutions, such as housing, market and the schools" (Skolnick and Currie, 1976: 158). Those blacks that remained behind in the South ended up being more economically secure than their compatriots who moved up North.

However, one major landmark in the northward dispersal "was the development of a cohesive, racially homogenous black communities within the cities" (Kilson and Rotberg: 432), a development that led to the emergence of ghettoes which W. E. B. Du Bois described as "a world of itself, closed in from the outer world and almost unknown to it, with churches, clubs, hotels, saloons, and charities" (432). The ghettoes provided fertile grounds for the flowering of literary and political activities and the 'workshops' for the construction of identities and citizenship. While these ghettoes were mushrooming and providing the African American with a sense of his group identity, on another level, urbanisation and the privileges of education arising from association with the white mainstream created the black middle class which made itself willing

acolyte of white America. It tended toward embracing the integrationist values and manners of the dominant culture. To maintain the status quo, the black middle class "resented the relatively large influx of rural-born Southerners which threatened their integrationist orientation" (Du Bois: 434), thus alienating itself from the larger black community. The middle class failed to realise that access to genuine self-actualisation and the realisation of potentials were institutionally closed on all blacks.

Whatever the reasons that informed the internal dispersal - economic, social, political and educational notwithstanding, the bottom line was the desire to upturn colour as a yardstick for measuring black potentials and capabilities. In this regard the African American, regardless of social class, preferred to be judged as human and equal, a position that many white men were not ready to accept. It took the unfolding of events in the North and other major cities across the United States, as well as events preceding World War II to expose the African American to the realities of his rejection. These realities of economic inequalities arising from racism caused them to express their frustration in the race riots that engulfed the Untied States in the 1960s.

Drawing untenable comparison with political events in Africa at the time - the overthrow of governments in Upper Volta, the Central African Republic, Dahomey, Nigeria and the Congo - Carleton Putnam (1967) attributed these cross-continental happenings to what Dr. Kluckholm described as "differences in potentialities for achievements" between the Negro and the white man. The thinking behind Putnam's racist perception is that the African,

wherever he might be, lacks the natural endowment, potentialities, and capacity to achieve.

At this juncture what is important to note has to do with the consequences of the African diaspora, citizenship, and geographies of identity as "the counter-cultural aspirations towards freedom, citizenship, and autonomy…" (Gilroy, 1993:197). Therefore in the great debate and dilemma surrounding the identity and citizenship status of the African American, it is necessary to see the history of the black people in its totality as an extension of the study of African history precisely because in African lies the origin of the black race. The idea is that the African diaspora need not be a disconnected man but a continuum of a long stretch of history and tradition covering a period of thousands of years. Molefi Kete Asante argues that "one cannot study Africans in the United States or Brazil or Jamaica without some appreciation of the historical and cultural significance of Africa as a source and origin" (cited in Gilroy, 1993:189). He adds further that

> …if one concentrates on studying Africans in the inner cities of the Northern United States, which is reasonable, it must be done with the idea in the back of the mind that one is studying African people, not "made-in-American Negroes" without historical depth" (Gilroy, 1993:189).

In the same vein, the growing black consciousness has been summed up by Dr. Roy Bryce-Laporte (Lee Hooks *et al.,* 1976:8) as an unending phenomenon in which

> The world is witnessing the emergence of new levels of blackness, the universalisation of black ethnicity, a new meaning to the Black Diaspora.

1.4 The Abolition of Slave Trade and Its Implications for African Americans

Having recognised the illegitimacy, immorality, and the criminality in the obnoxious human traffic, national governments, societies, organisations and individuals all rose in unison against the slave trade to the New World. The expectation was that such a concern should have been conceived against the evil that the slave trade engendered, i.e. racism. Abolition of the slave trade without eliminating racism is like killing a poisonous snake without severing the head.

One might postulate that economic interest on the part of both slave merchants and planters made total abolition impossible because "they were in desperate need for a larger number of slaves to cultivate the cotton that was now in such great demand" (Franklin and Moss, Jr., :91). Even political leaders in most of the colonies were reluctant to enforce legislation against traffic in slaves. Not until March 2, 1807 was "the law prohibiting the African slave trade passed". With the legal abolition of the 'peculiar institution' in 1807, and the attendant "shifting of responsibility it is not surprising to find the law poorly enforced" because of the growing economic interests of traffickers which made the trade to be driven underground. Franklin and Moss, Jr., (1994:92) observe rightly that

> The first underground railroad was not that established by abolitionists to transport slaves to

> freedom but the one used by merchants and others to introduce more blacks into slavery.

Direct trade from Africa to Brazil and Cuba flourished way into the 1860s.

It took moral consideration which informed "some religious leaders to question the morality of enslaving and owning humans" (Appiah and Gates, Jr., 1999:1875). The understanding of the religious leaders along with the Quakers was that the only way to end slavery was to stop the trans-Atlantic slave trade entirely. However, the efforts at stopping the slave trade remained herculian because of resistance from both slave merchants and colonial planters who reaped enormous gains from procurement and sale of slaves and their labour.

Whites were not the only voice in the campaign for abolition. Blacks were more vociferous and more militant in the campaign because they were the victims. Prominent among these black abolitionists were Frederick Douglass, David Walker, William Lyod Garrison, Benjamin Benneker, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, etc. Several anti-slavery groups were organised by Negroes in the nineteenth century. In fact, right from the beginning of slavery, the struggles of the Negro had been for abolition and the need for America "to embark upon a program of general emancipation" (Franklin and Moss, Jr., 1988:164). Wealthy individual Negroes floated newspapers as potent instruments in the abolition campaign. These included David Walker's *Appeal,* Frederick Douglass' *North Star,* Henry Highland Garmer's *Mirror of Liberty;* and Garrison's *Liberator:* just to mention a few. The enthusiasm was so electrifying, and the public speeches so captivating and hypnotising that Franklin and Moss, Jr., (1988), for instance submit that "in their militant

bitterness the black abolitionists equaled and sometimes surpassed their white brethren" (167). David Walker, Nat Turner, and Lyod Garrison were quintessence of militant and bitter advocates of abolition campaign.

Significantly, the call for freedom presupposed a condition of oppression, injustice, and inequality. Thus, the history of slavery was a history of revolt and resistance. Against this backdrop, while the American Revolution sought to achieve freedom for whites, anti-slavery demanded freedom for slaves. The expectation was that abolition of slavery ought to have equally addressed the demolition of all racist structures of stereotyping, distinctions along colour line, segregation, discrimination, and the restoration of the lost slave personality and self-esteem.

Against these expectations the American Colonisation Society (ACS) came up with the proposal to resettle freed African slaves in Liberia. This colonisation scheme was in line with the position of Thomas Jefferson in response to the slave's prospect of marrying white women. Jefferson retorted, "When freed the black slave is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture" (Watson, 1979:52). The return- to-Liberia scheme was a ploy to reduce black population in the Untied States because, in the thinking of the mainstream Southern political leadership, blacks were not American citizens. This ideology of emigration found a staunch supporter in Alexander Crummell who saw "Liberia" as "the ideal base for a regeneration movement (Berghahn, 1977:476). He had followership in Edward Wilmot Blyden, Martin R. Delany,

Bishop McNeil Turner, etc. But Joseph Harris sees Crummell as an optimist who

> …sensed a historic relationship among all people of African ancestry and he foresaw the serious involvement of Negroes throughout the world in momentous developments in Africa (T. O. Ranger, ed., 1968:148).

The relationship which Crummell envisioned is akin to that established by the diasporic Jews with the homeland of Israel in their struggles for restoration. His vision also hinged on the fact that the African diaspora is first and foremost an African and his 'adopted-nation' citizenship secondary.

The American Colonisation Society (ACS), mainly a white American organisation saw the resettlement of free slaves in Liberia as a Christianising and civilising mission. But David Walker saw their activities as hypocrisy and vehemently denounced it. He however supported limited emigration to both England and Haiti because he saw England as "their greatest earthly friends and benefactors" and "to go to our brethren, the Haitians," for protection and comfort. Perhaps Walker preferred emigration to England and Haiti because England initiated the abolition against slave trade, while Haiti offered a model in resistance against oppression (Abu-Lughod: 39-40).

Walker's disagreement with emigration to Africa did not in any way diminish his attachment and concern for Africa. He profoundly believed "that America was more the black man's home than the white". He believed that the labour, sweat and suffering of African Americans which developed America had long settled the question of their citizenship. To be more poignant, excerpt

from his *Appeal* exposes his deep-seated belief in the citizenship of the African American in the United States:

> Let no man of us budge one step, and let slaveholders come to beat us from our country. America is more our country than it is the whites….The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears; and will they drive us from our property and homes, which we have earned with our blood (Abu-Lughod:40).

James Baldwin and Richard Wright cultivated this Walkerian ideology, believing that they have no other country than America, despite their various stints in Paris, France. Similarly, one of the growing hordes of this notion, a black man, writing in *Liberator* in 1859, openly declared that "we have no more claim on Africa than has (the white American); that country belongs to the Africans and not to us. We are Americans" (Berghahn: 40).

From the foregoing, abolition not only failed to restore the moral fabric and loss of personality, culture and history of the African American but rather it accentuated racism thereby widening the racial gulf between blacks and whites on a scale that is more despicable than slavery. Abolition got the African American sank deeper in a quagmire of hopelessness, deprivation and segregation along colour line.

In this circumstance, the dialectics of African diaspora, citizenship, and geographies of identity that emerged from the obnoxious slave trade and the circum-Atlantic practices caused loss of history, culture, and depersonalisation of the African American in the United States. Therefore the thrust of this study is to examine the crisis of deprivation, segregation and the suppression of

political rights of African Americans and its implication for the crisis of citizenship in the situation that they choose to continue to belong in America or to emigrate. The fact that from whatever position that this ideological polemic may be examined, its proponents dub their claims as nationalism.

The great promise of the American Dream and the ensuing crisis of citizenship inherent in this promise for African American is summed up in Dudley Randall's five-stanza poem, cited by Crosby in Szwed, ed., :303.

> Behold the magic melting pot,
> Where any girl or man
> Can step in Greek or Czech or Scot,
> Step out American
>
> *Johann* and *Jan* and *Jean* and *Juan,*
> *Giovanni* and *Ivan*
> Step in and then step out again,
> All freshly christened *John*
>
> Sam, watching, said, "I've been around
> Before they even came,"
> And stepped in too, but got tossed out
> Before he passed the brim.
>
> And every time he climbed the pot
> They threw him out again.
> "Keep out. This is our private pot.
> We don't want your black stain.
>
> At last, thrown out a thousand times,
> Sam said, "Don't give a damn.
> Stick your old pot. Like it or not,
> I'II be just what I am".

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The practice of reinventing African American citizenship and identity is an historical process which casts him as a victim of forced diaspora that saw

him unsolicited freighted into slave ships as cargo of international slave trade across the Atlantic ocean to the New World as free labour on the vast plantations of South United States and South America.

The struggle of this diaspora for identity, citizenship, and freedom however began at the point where his humanity was substituted with a new slave status. The great expectation of the ex-slave for integration during and after the Civil War, the Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction shattered his dream. Since then, the African American found that he must go it all alone if he must survive in this hostile environment. The realisation too is that the struggle must be collective and organised around the ethnic group consciousness. As a result, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and the Black Power Movement provided the enabling turf for the realisation of this aspiration.

The African cosmology or worldview is by extension also the African American worldview. This worldview lays emphasis on community survival. It establishes the unity of man, (tribe) and "Nature, and God", cooperation, and community interdependence (sharing and caring for one another), as well as shared responsibility and demonstration of "commonality". (Jones, ed, 1980:102). "The African self-concept was (is) by philosophical definition the "WE" instead of the "I" . The interdependence of Africans and Africans in the diaspora lays emphasis on the self leaning heavily on 'we', or in John Mbiti's words: "I am because We are, and because We are therefore I am" (Jones, ed, 103); which is a symbiotic relationship between the individual and his community.

Within the triad framework of citizenship models of liberal, communitarian, and civic republicanism, the African American, informed by the African cosmology of communitarianism, commonality, togetherness, and groupism, fits into a blend of the communitarian and civic republicanism because he is not a product of the barren individualism and separateness of the West. Communitarians believe that because individual's sense of self is relational to the fabric of his community existence, he inevitably derives strength, security, and identity from his group collective, and not as an independent entity. The individual, as a player is a pursuer and promoter of the common good to be enjoyed by all members of the community. The central values of communitarian citizenship are "respect for others and recognition for the importance of public service" (Smith, 1998; cited in Jones and Gaventa 2002:4). The group therefore becomes the defining self with members identifying with its values and ethos which are shared values among all members. The philosophical and social objectives of this arrangement are equality and the attainment of general group belonging.

Civic republicanism as a category of citizenship seeks to blend liberal and communitarian citizenships by emphasising those factors that bind citizens together in a society; such as individual's obligation to participate in community activities. The ideology of civic republicanism favours democratic practice that lays emphasis on deliberative democratic participation rather than representative political system which is the hallmark of liberal democracy.

Civic republicans uphold the dictum that whatever one's citizenship category, citizenship should enable an individual to see himself as active participant in the affairs that affect group life and welfare, rather than mere passive beneficiaries of policy and services. Scholars of the civic republican persuasions argue that "citizenship should be understood as a common civic identity shaped by a common public culture" (Jones and Gaventa, 2002). Citizenship therefore should have the capacity to unite citizens so long as this identity is stronger than their separate identities as members of different groups.

In the light of the foregoing, it is logical to conclude that African American sense of the 'self' is communalistic, therefore of group consciousness and not individualistic, while on the other hand Western values glorify individualism and materialism, with the individual constituting a dominant, independent, and separate entity. According to Butterfield (1970), the world of the African American does not look at the 'self' as "an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan". Grounding his submission on the imageries of slave narratives, Butterfield (1970:3) explains that

> The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group, giving back the iron of its endurance fashioned into armor and weapons for the use of the next generation of fighters …. The self belongs to the people, and the people find voice in the self.

On the contrary, the Western concept of the 'self' is the exploiter of his neighbour's resources, the individual who uses others to serve as the rungs of his ladder to success. He is the all-conquering 'Rambo', the invincible 'James Bond', or the 'Sylvester Stallone' of American popular culture. He is the conquering hero of the Wild, Wild West of the American frontier days whose philosophy revolves around the religiosity of "survival of the fittest"; one who tames nature, not one who identifies with the beauty and preservation of nature. In this unfolding scenario, one's driving motives are crude "competition, individual rights, independence, and separateness" (Jones ed,:102).

On the other hand, conscious of his history of slavery and the damage that slavery has inflicted on his collective heritage of language, identity, citizenship, culture, mythology, religion, humanity and self-pride, the African American seeks strength in his sense of ethnic belonging through collective groupism. Against this realisation, Berghahn (1977:25) proposed that "in order to wield group power a minority's group consciousness must be intact" while also noting that healthy group consciousness is practicable only "when the individual members of that group feel a certain pride in their cultural heritage". The group has to exhume its once glorious heritage from the tomb of slavery in order to regain self-esteem, respect, dignity, and freedom through appropriate citizenship that is recognised as participatory, collective, deliberative, and not representational, as well as the crafting of befitting identity that is not only acceptable but distinct and separate.

The African American must realise that he needs to cultivate positive black ego and pride in his cultural heritage in his struggle for citizenship and identity. He must identify with a national origin and imbibe in physical material terms those cultural attributes that stand him as culturally distinct and proud.

The bane of the African American which constitute roadblocks in his stride for political and social recognition are the failure to achieve both economic and political capital. This failure is due largely to the antecedents of slavery and official restrictions that are placed in his way, the psychological damage, the inability to secure economic and political capital which stand on the way to social advancement forced him into the "ghetto syndrome which isolated the black minority more than any other group from the American society" (Berghahn:25). All these yoke of the slave regime, accentuated by racism and discrimination contrive to make it impossible to rid himself of the status of a 'subordinate caste'.

Tools or signposts of analyses employed in this investigation include (i) setting and play titles, (ii) plot and characterisation, (iii) middle-class syndrome, (iv) the black language, (v) heritage of slavery and oppression, (vi) community/communal consciousness (vii) the black family structure, and (viii) the blues (African American musical forms). The import of this selection is that these themes are relevant to the treatment of the crises, conflicts and meanings in the epic struggle for full citizenship and the construction of identifies among African Americans.

1.5.1 Setting / Play Titles

The academic (textural) and visual (performance) understanding of a play is furnished by the twin-concepts of setting and the play title(s). The historical and metaphorical background of a given play is unfolded or dramatised within its setting because the setting helps to bring out the meaning invested in a play. This is even more so that a play story must begin and end within a definite historical time frame. It is in this same vein also that the choice of a play title is cautiously representational of the content and meaning inherent in it. As it were, the play title, just as the setting, offers the reader or viewer an insight into what to expect in the plot or dramatisation of the play.

For example, while Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are set in the 1960s (1964, to be precise), August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in the 1920s, while *Fences* is set in the 1950s. Despite historical time difference between the plays their geographical locale remains the same; i.e., the United States of America. Yet, discernible differences are established by both playwrights within the context of form and content

Dutchman conjures multiple meanings in the minds of audience or readers because the title can be subjected to myriad of interpretations ranging from the literal to the metaphysical, allegorical, and even symbolical. *Dutchman* could be credited with metaphysical oddities that conjure the motif of torture and death. It could as well be a painful re-enactment of the image of the slave ship experience that brought the first Africans to Jamestown in 1619.

On this level therefore, the 'subway' as incommodious as the slave ships is a bitter reminder of the slave trafficking days that engaged in the trans-Atlantic slave trade that carried slaves from Africa to the New World. As a metaphor, the title conjures oppression, death, subjugation, desire to flee to freedom and the namelessness and loss of humanity, identity and citizenship.The stage is therefore set for the drama of life which manifests in an encounter between Clay and Lula.

In very sharp contrast to *Dutchman, The Slave* is set in a well-furnished university professor's apartment. The expectation and nature of conflict (if any) cannot be imagined until the drama begins to unfold because the plush setting does not betray the plot of the play. However it establishes the isolationism between whites and blacks in housing accommodation. It brings out the sharp contrast between the suburban white dwellings and unsanitary jam-packed black ghettos. But an off-handed glimpse of the play title immediately invokes the slave status or experience of the African American and the obnoxious slave trade. The perception and expectation of the white man is to subjugate the African American to eternal condition of slavery and servitude. On the surface, what one expects arising from the title of *The Slave* is an enactment of slave-master relationship. Paradoxically, 'the slave' here is not only a victim, he is also a social reformer and a revolutionary protagonist who sets out to destroy "the white thing."

Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* on the other hand is set in the 1920s, the apogee of the Harlem Renaissance which witnessed the height of

literary and cultural production and political consciousness among African Americans and all people of African descent across the globe. It was therefore not only the age of cultural re-awakening, but political activism and black identity reinvention. The setting of this play is in two parts: a 'band room' and a 'recording studio' which establish the racial hierarchy between whites (Sturdyvant and Irvin) and blacks (Ma Rainey's musician sidemen) and the relationship of power over blacks.

As the scenes change from one acting area to another, we see the musical and recording instruments and the sets. The relationship between Ma Rainey, her African American musicians and white patrons is brought to the fore in a way that crisis of identity and citizenship, self-assertiveness, and self-determination are captured graphically in a compelling emotion. It also portrays the relationship of economic exploitation of Africans by whites who control economic power.

On yet another level, one could assert that *Ma Rainey's* is steeped in subtle conflict; dramatising whites' attractions to the economic exploitation of African Americans. It also reveals Ma Rainey's relationship with her music, and her sense of strong attachment to it. But an exploration into the play reveals the positive aspect of 'blackness' which manifests in Ma Rainey's positive self-assertiveness against the ravenous tendencies of her white patrons. The historical setting also brings to the fore the emerging crisis between practioners of the old blues tradition and the up coming 'swing' form; symbolised in Ma Rainey (old blues) and Levee (the 'swing').

Fences establishes a wider crisis of survival. Set in the 1950s, the period of the Civil Rights Movement, it recreates the economic 'fence' between African Americans and immigrant whites, while emphasising the African American's will and spirit for survival. The play establishes America as a nation divided by 'colour fences' with blacks on one side and whites on the other. The play title provides a picturesque motif of symbolic chasm that separates blacks from whites in economic pursuit, as well as blacks against blacks. This play metaphorises the passion of the middle class for protection and security from within and without.

Consequently, the African American struggle for freedom, citizenship, identity formation, self-determination, and equality can be situated within the ambience of these titles and settings as the drama unfolds. The metaphorical 'fences' must either be allowed to have many gates to enable all and sundry to pass through as equal citizens or be pulled down and be jointly reconstructed as equal citizens of America.

1.5.2 Plot and Characterisation

The plots of the four select plays can be summarised as the trajectory of the African American odyssey from "slave to ritual presence, to exotic participator, to socialist reformer, to revolutionary protagonist" (Cartey, back page: 1970). The plot, being the story-line in a play reveals the meaning, intrigues, conflicts, and in some instances the resolution of such conflicts. This

is achieved largely through the interaction and negotiation of characters who constitute the vehicle for this exposé.

Since characters or dramatis personae make stories, so also characters make drama. Characters' interaction on stage, what they say and do, and how they say it, bring out the meaning, tension, conflict, etc, in a play. The emotion, mood, and psychology in a play are given resonance through the agency of characters on stage. What is required to achieve this artistry is effective stage craftsmanship because meanings and messages are either gained or lost as a result of the type of craftsmanship. To this end therefore, characters inhabit the stage space and move the actions in the plot, thereby giving life to the plot. In their interaction on the stage, characters also engage the audience, depending on the form of the play. This is where relationships are also established between characters and audience in the theatre, especially in the case of 'a people or community theatre or what Krigwa Players call "our theater."

In all the four plays, the plot and characterisation as highlighted expose the unequal, unjust, and discriminatory relationship between African Americans and white America. The concern in this thesis is to explore how this unequal relationship, through the use of plot and characterisation, bring out the African American struggles for full-citizenship and the construction of befitting identity that are acceptable.

1.5.3 The Middle Class Syndrome

The African American middle class is a product of mainstream racism and discrimination against desire for survival and the attainment of social mobility. It is therefore one major and dominant locale of black identity construction because membership into this class confers distinction for hard work, informed by the instinct for economic and political empowerment.

However, race has continued to frustrate the emergence of distinct African American middle class. Charles U. Smith argues that race

> …has historically prevented many blacks from entering the occupations, obtaining education, and participating in diversified status-giving activities and associations; and the dominant white society has consistently refused to recognize achievements of blacks even when some of the above obstacles have been overcome (Szwed, 1970:253).

Contemporary accusation against African American middle class by the youth is that "middle-class blacks have not had and do not have concern for less fortunate blacks. Young militants also claim that throughout history their black forebears have done little or nothing to advance the struggle toward full equality" (Szwed:260). What cannot be contested is the fact that the educational attainment of the middle class, occupational status, income level, house type and location, morals and manners, family stability, and general achievements obviously alienate the African American middle class from the members of the lower socio-economic class.

The emergence of this class makes it impossible for community of African Americans to speak and act as one people with one voice and common

destiny. The middle class, in its flirtations with the white mainstream tends to ignore the aspirations and destiny of the majority of African Americans. In the struggle for a unified and common identity formation, the middle class constitutes itself not only into a separate class, but a separate identity. They constitute what Ronald Dorris in *"African American Discourse on Americanization"* qualifies as "unconscious of black barriers. In their happy ignorance, they would lead one into the traps of insult" (Grayson, ed., 2004:2). This issue is therefore central to the discourse on geographies of identity and full-citizenship construction among African Americans because the middle class, elitist and educated, insulated from the realities of economic, political, and social vagaries and deprivation that the masses of the lower class experience, tend to distance itself from the poor, deprived and highly segregated members of African American community. Yet they also suffer alienation from the dominant culture because of non-recognition. This crisis is clearly elucidated in Baraka's *Dutchman* and *The Slave.*

1.5.4 *Ebonics:* Black American Vernacular English

Ebonics or black dialect is categorised by rightists as "conceptually deprived", but William Stewards would rather see it as "linguistically different" and not deprived (Szwed, ed., 1970: 140). Because of the inherent cultural potency of language in the shaping of individual and group/ethnic identity, *Ebonics* is not spared racist categorisation of interiority or "trash" language. It became a victim of racist castigation, conceived as an expression

of the African American innate intellectual inferiority. Proponents of this school of thought need to refer to history in order to conceptualise how these Africans in the New World, having been severed from their linguistic cultures "acquired English, what that English was like, and how it gradually turned into the kind of English that one finds used today by lower socio-economic class of Negroes all over the United States" (Szwed, ed.,:132).

Discountenancing these unintellectual and unhistorical critique of *Ebonics*, one needs to situate it within the context of the dominant polemics of the growing debate around black cultural projection. The dialectics of hegemony and counter-hegemony (Merelman: 1995), that have continued to polarise blacks and whites in America .

Nevertheless, one of the major contributions of African Americans to civilisation and the development of American culture is the development of *Ebonics* as a distinct language. *Ebonics* language, as a distinct African American language identity could be asserted as a product of the circum-Atlantic intercultural syncretism of creolisation and hybridity that developed as a result of contact with New World language (English). Within the context of this assumption some scholars see *Ebonics* language as creole language (Borishade, cited in Mazruis, 1998:33). However, another school of thought posits that *Ebonics* is exclusively an American-grown medium of African Americans which, though essentially a form of American English, sets them apart from white America (Mazruis, 33). But a third view has it that "*Ebonics* falls into the African form of languages. It is not a dialect of English, even

though it uses English words". This line of argument credits "the pan-African stream of African American identity formation" (Mazruis:33).

It is our contention here that despite all controversies and debates surrounding the origin and development of *Ebonics* language, it captures the aura of the three arguments i.e.; *Ebonics* as a creolisation of native African languages and English on the plantations of the South, which invariably gives it the credibility of an American- home-grown language form. From whatever point of consideration, *Ebonics* gives the African American a distinct linguistic identity. This linguistic identity could be the first in the strides and struggles for identity formation among African Americans.

The use of *Ebonics* is dominant in the plays of August Wilson and Baraka. This language shall be explored as an aspect of separate identity construction, an idiom of expression of masses of African Americans; a medium which captures and expresses the emotion, mood, anger, and the conditions of their very existence.

1.5.5 Heritage of Slavery and Oppression (Paternalism)

The history of the African American is the history of slavery, struggle for freedom, rights, liberty and democracy. On the other hand, relational to the positions espoused above, the goals of the white man are to perpetuate the subjugation of the African American slave status through racism, discrimination, and segregation. This parallel relationship has continued to influence the lives of both whites and blacks alike. As a consequence all

literature, history, sociology, politics, anthropology, psychology, etc emerging from the United States revolve around this dominant theme. It is no mistake therefore that the four plays under analyses have this theme as central to the discourse on African American citizenship and identity formation.

The origin of this heritage was the cultivated paternalistic social relationship that developed on the slave plantations where all slaves were treated by the master as children. Even after Emancipation this tradition of paternalism transcended the landscape of the slave plantation and served as configuration for subsequent relationship of white to coloured people in many parts of the world (Fryer, cited in E. Franklin Frazier, 1957:241). African Americans as victims of this paternalism hate being treated as children even when it represented the best of intentions.

This paternalism therefore is at the root of all social relationship between white and African Americans Berghahn's (1977:25 – 26) antidote to this is for African Americans

> to identify strongly with their own group" so that they don not get assimilated but should develop an ethnic group consciousness as a prerequisite because "The was no other way of overcoming the difficulties which stood on the way of an integration of the Afro-Americans into American society.

1.5.6 Community and Communal Consciousness

Institutional racism and segregation have compelled the African American to be ethnically and communally conscious. He desires a collective force of togetherness, commonality, and groupism to survive in a racially

hostile segregated society where he is daily denied access to economic, social, political, and educational opportunities.

Because every aspect of his life is dictated and determined by the colour of his skin, against the deliberate purity of bloodline doctrine of the Anglo-Saxon, integration into the mainstream is made impossible. This is more so that he is perceived as a hyphenated or abridged human being. Even the so-called privileged middle class who seeks integration finds himself locked out of the mainstream. As such, the African American, including the middle class, is daily bruised psychically, emotionally, and psychologically. He therefore finds solace, acceptability, and self-hood in his immediate ethnic community. He needs to cultivate very strong group consciousness in order to gain group power and recognition. To achieve this, African Americans must feel certain pride in their cultural heritage (Berghahn:25).

The African American, being daily bruised and tormented emotionally and psychologically develops hatred for his 'black-ego', or is even ashamed of it and ashamed of himself and his fellow black kinsmen. Consequently he gets driven into isolation and prevents the emergence of a group consciousness . He therefore needs 'positive black-ego' as *sine qua non* for the development of strong group consciousness and group power which will crystallize action that will usher in social and political advancement of the group.

1.5.7 The Black Family Structure

The African family structure is extended and largely polygamous. Infact, it is largely patriarchal in nature where the man is the head of the family, comprising the wives and children, his biological children and dependents. This therefore ascribes upon him the status of the bread-winner and head of household.

Unfortunately this family structure was not allowed to develop and flourish on the Southern slave plantations of America. Despite the slave regime's effort to obliterate the African family system, Herskovits argues that "A diluted form of the African family may be recognized" (Frazier, 1957: 12). Because the white society is predominantly monogamous, the African slave was therefore confronted with the problem of adjustment in the New World.

The synthesis of this adjustment is the development of the African American family similar to the American family setup. Infact, African American family system is adjudged against the parameters existing in the white society. Before now, the thinking was that the African American family was matriarchal because of the visible place of the mother in the home. As such one of the specialised features of the role of the Africa American women in America is the sentiment that projects the psychological coherence of the family unit, and its place in ensuring economic stability that is essential to its survival (Frazier:12).

The significant role of the mother in the African American family evolved from the exigencies of life in the new environment of the New World. Frazier (1957:14) therefore argues that

> In the absence of institutional controls, the relationship between mother and child has become the essential social bond in the family and women's economic position has developed in her those qualities which are associated with a "matriarchal" organization.

On the other hand, and in recent times, the Africa American family has assumed an identity as a patriarchal organisation similar to the average American family structure. The economic enhancement of the male enables him to acquire property and interest in the well-being and security of his family members.

The construction of patriarchal family structure, not matriarchal, is one of the identities that African Americans are striving to develop and sustain. They wish for a family structure akin to the African extended family structure where everyone is his brother's keeper. Adducing reason for this new interest, Pereira (1995:51 – 52) develops the analogy that

> … the destruction of families and forced separations engendered among black people a sense of community that extended its sheltering embrace to every destitute-person of the community …everyone belonged to the community.

1.5.8 The Blues: An African American Musical Form

A distinctively African American folk musical form, the blues has its roots in the Deep South; the property of the black folk community of ex-slaves.

It offers voice to the poor people. David Evans in his essay, *"Blues and Modern Sound: Past, Present, and Future",* submits that through the blues music, many indigent African Americans "have been able to find a vehicle of self-expression and raise themselves temporarily or even permanently out of the rut of poverty and isolation" (Ferris and Hart, 1982:164).

Blues is generally defined by its performers as "a feeling or an attitude toward life" that dramatises and celebrates

> the ups and downs of life, enabling singers and their audience to externalize some of their strongest feelings particularly those dealing with interpersonal relationship between the sexes (Ferris and Hart:165).

Blues therefore has the alchemist portency for catharsis and exorcism.

Ferry and Hort (1982:166) further argue that one of the significant attributes of the blues is its earthly nature; the musical form for the lowest class of black society who are the poorest people in the rural areas of the Deep South, "the landless sharecroppers and tenant farmers… and those who streamed into the urban slums of the South and the North seeking relief from oppressive rural social and economic conditions".

Amiri Baraka, in his titled essay, "*Black Music: It Roots, Its Popularity. Its Commercial Prostitution"* provides a historical grounding into the understanding of the roots of the blues music. According to Baraka, while the Civil War provided America the opportunity to integrate ex-slaves into the American democratic space, the opportunity was lost with the post-Reconstruction social restrictions that completely isolated blacks, especially in

the South which transformed blacks into an oppressed nation. Neither the Freedmen's Bureau nor the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments gave hope to the ex-slaves as these structures and pronouncements remained statute declarations without political backup. Consequently,

> The Black Code, Jim Crow laws, segregation and discrimination…the antidemocratic practices ' that were legalized and made into law "made the possibility of blacks melting into the America melting pot impossible (Ferris and Hart: 180-181).

These antecedents crystallised, giving the basis for black separation from the American 'melting pot'. It is within this vortex that distinct African American musical form, the blues, emerged as separate culture that resides inside yet outside of American culture.

The blues is a signifier for black culture, black art, and separate identity that is African in character and form. Baraka's reading is that Blues carries with it Africa and Afro-America, shaped in a land of white domination. It carries slavery and degradation, and both the memory of Africa, and the reality of the African-American developing a further variation of African culture (Ferris and Hart: 177 – 178).

Be this as it may, and despite the naivety that associates with the blues, it remains a geography for black identity and heritage. Just as Alex Haley's *Roots* is a symbolic reassessment of the past in the discovery of his missing historical and cultural roots, so also the blues constitutes this linkage for the entire African American nation. Just as "Young members of regional and ethnic groups everywhere are seeking their identity is their "roots" and

attempting to restore their ties with the past", so also "Black people too are increasingly looking upon themselves as members of an ethnic group with a distinct history and cultural tradition, just like other American ethnic groups" (Ferris and Hart: 172).

The blues therefore constitutes the framework for this "roots" identity for African Americans. As well, it is an important component of the black heritage that should not be allowed to die.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores and positions some of the dominant and relevant issues and discourses that have been advanced and articulated by scholars in the areas of the relationship between race, discrimination and thoughts on the African diaspora in relation to the focus of this study.

The question of African American citizenship and identity is an issue that touches on the very foundation of the United States as a nation-state. It is not only of historical significance but one which questions the moral conscience of the founding fathers of America and their descendants. In the light of this therefore, the credo of race, especially as an ideology of the Anglo-Saxon racial superiority and purity of the bloodline, supplanted the personality and identity of the African as inferior. As such, that which is 'inferior' and 'impure' ought to be discarded in order to maintain the superior. The banality of this thesis of racial superiority as oppositional to the 'other's' inferiority sets the stage for bipolar dialectics: white on the one hand, determined to maintain racial domination and superiority status-quo; while blacks and other ethnic minorities, fearing perpetual domination determine to exhume their cultural/ ethnic identities from the graveyard of white racism. Invariably, this structure establishes the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic dialectics resulting in resistance by African Americans on the turf of political spaces and cultural domain What emerges from this cultural consciousness is a vast cornucopia

of critical writings, plays, novels, and essays; both from the point of view of whites and blacks.

Imperialism, capitalism, and racism; necessary catalysts for the dehumanisation of the African American, introduced grave citizenship and identity dilemma for the African American. The citizenship dilemma of the African American should be understood as causational within the parameter of the trans-Atlantic slave trade which crystallised into circum-Atlantic interculture whose consequence is the emergence of "the culture of modernity", which metamorphosed into creolisation and hybridity of cultures with the attendant loss of original culture, identity, history, and personality of the African in the Americas. Resulting from this interplay of culture, a new persona (neither African nor American) was not only created, but was also lost in the vast expanse of the New World. He lost his name and had a strange name forced on him, lost his natal tongue and assumed a strange tongue, and a strange new land. The lesson therefore is

> To accept this new land, these new people, you would have to accept your servitude. If you were an American, then you were a slave, hardly human ….To be a tribesman of America was thus hateful. That identity would deprive you of all human dignity and eliminate all hope for the future (quoted in *Freedom Over Me;* unauthored internet material).

The greatest threat against the African American has always been that of citizenship; complete acceptance and recognition of rights and obligations of the African American in the United States, and the construction of positive identity. Age-long debates continue to rage over the definition of this 'being' in

the light of whether he is an American, an African, a hybridised American, or in the words of Gibson "What is a Negro?" (Shuman, 1970:90). Or is he W. E. B. Du Bois' painful 'double-consciousness', or Richard Wright's 'double vision', or all definitions put together?

Liberal democracy as a regime of government not only encouraged imperialism and capitalism, but engendered slavery and racism as practices that entrenched and advanced the economic interests of the dominant class and race. In the light of this institutional racism, discrimination and segregation deny the African American the status of full-citizenship. In the words of Melissa Bass *et al.,* (1995), the only way to secure this citizenship was "through the movements for freedom, civil rights, and Black Power which began in the 1950s and '60s". What is more, the desire to attain first class citizenship involved "decades long struggle to be able to participate fully in public life" (page 1 of 3; internet material). In a nutshell therefore, the locus of the struggle was the desire to construct a citizenship that guarantees recognition and full participation in the political, economic, cultural, and social life of America.

This review therefore as a necessity covers the practice of race as a regime of government which prevents the African American from popular participation in national life; the contributions of African Americans to America and world development and civilization; the constitutional framework for United States citizenship and conceptual framework for citizenship, focusing on diasporic citizenship and geographies of identity (treated from a theoretical perspective); and the conflation of the interrelationship of

citizenship reconstruction and identity reinvention in the United States of America.

2.2 Race, Discrimination, and the African Diaspora

Mainstream American psychologists, scientists, anthropologists, and even statesmen propagate the doctrine of black mental inferiority as something that is biologically innate and immutable. These doctrines gained ground and acceptability as empirical truths. This lopsided thinking tends to relegate African American scientific, technological, cultural and literary contributions to America, and world civilization to the dustbin of history.

This position suits Count Joseph de Gobineau's assertion which is conveyed in his multivolume *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races,* "that the white race was innately superior to the darker ones" (Vincent P. Franklin, quoted in Reginald L. Jones, ed, 1980: 202). Even Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) cited in Jones (ed., 2003) espouses the theory of survival of the fittest in which the Anglo-Saxon race was divinely positioned to win in "the struggle for survival, while other groups were obviously doomed to extinction". Within the ambience of anthropology and religiosity, advocates of racial sanctimoniousness created representational symbols and mysticism which greatly influenced Western cultural tradition and philosophy in its relation with other societies and cultures. Playing out this racial superiority script, the Rev. Stringfellow argued that "the institution of slavery has received the sanction of the Almighty" (J. Wreford Watson, 1979:52). This thinking is tacitly in line

with the Protestant assumption that slavery was a civilizing mission intended to convert African 'heathens' to Christianity. Maryland legislation of 1671 supports this position when it declared that converting slaves to Christianity did not affect their slave status. Against this understanding therefore, "Masters felt that they could import African heathens, convert them to Christianity" and thus justify the act of holding them in slavery (Franklin and Moss, Jr., 1994:98).

Dr. Cartwright, another intellectual and a scientist declared that "the danger of questioning slavery 'lies in the ignorance of scripture, and of the Natural History of the negro'" (Wilson: 52). Since at this level the aim was to provide a safe moral pad for the enslavement of Africans, who then could he be referring to as being ignorant of the scripture and the natural history of the negro? It was obvious that Dr. Cartwright was referring to those his kinsmen who held this ideology of racial sanctity. Two polemical issues are raised in this thesis: those ignorant of the provision of the scripture in relation to the eternal condition of negroes, and those equally ignorant of the natural history of negroes. Dr. Cartwright failed to advance cogent argument from the scripture where succinct reference is made to the eternal damnation of the negro to enslavement on account of biological condition(s) of inferiority and intellectual incapacity. Secondly, he made reference to the natural history of the negro without elaborating authoritatively what this natural history of the negro says about the condition of the negro, and by whose authorship and authority. Both the statement of scripture and history are misrepresentations

emanating from the mindset of Eurocentrist apologists of racial superiority, and not empirically tested assumptions.

The extent to which racism was elevated to a state regime is reflected in the Old South racial creed. One of the articles of the creed states that "The Negro is inferior and will remain so" (Frazier, 1957: 262). Could this be a reference to Dr. Cartwright's natural history of the negro? Among the horde of Anglo-Americans who held this ideology was Thomas Jefferson; a re-known drafter of the American Articles of Independence and a beacon of the Enlightenment Age, a highly revered politician and statesman, was quoted as having made the statement that "'the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are made inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind'" (Watson, 1979:52). In an unmistakable tenor, citing *Notes on the State of Virginia,* (1781), Jones (ed., 1980) maintains that Jefferson purveyed the view that blacks were equal to whites in memory, but inferior in reasoning and imagination. As if that was not enough, he further postulates " that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (202). If people as enlightened as Jefferson who believed in the ideals of freedom, liberty and the rights of men for which America fought a war with England to liberate itself held such views, the African American must understand that he needs to struggle to remain African and in doing so, must create new African identity as safeguard for identity, survival, and recognition In his contributing article, *"White Racism: Its Root, Form, and Function"* Comer provided an indepth examination and analysis of racism as derivative

from psychological insecurity and inadequacy on the part of the Anglo-Saxon Protestants:

> Racism is a low-level defense and adjustment mechanism utilized by groups to deal with psychological and social insecurities similar to the manner in which individuals utilize defenses and adjustment mechanisms to deal with anxiety (Jones, ed., 1980:361).

The reasoning here is that Anglo-America invented and propagated racism to facilitate a sense of bountiful personal "adequacy and security at the expense of the group with less control", i.e. the victimised African American minority. The sustenance of racism, like the chain of human continuity as represented through procreation, is transmitted from generation to generation "seen as a positive social value similar to patriotism, religion, and good manners" (Jones, ed.,:361). This arrangement makes the tradition and chain of racism seemingly unbreakable.

Comer attempts tracing the historical origin of racism to the age of the Protestant Reformation in Europe when he argues that before the Protestant Reformation, it was commonplace and justifiable to enslave persons, for as long as it served the "economic, social and psychological security" of the slaving group. It must be realised that this form of slavery was exclusively servile where slaves had rights and obligations. Infact, they could rise on the social hierarchy to become property owners and even freemen. This was different from the enslavement of the African where human beings were not only 'thingified' and commoditised; but stripped of all human values, rights and humanity.

With the advent of the Reformation, emphases were laid on the dignity of man, freedom, "direct accountability to God, implying personal dignity and rights unrecognized before" (Jones, ed., 362). The resultant consequences of this open declaration that people are directly accountable to God and the restoration of personal dignity and human rights engendered a deluge of capitalist activities which generated wealth and the need for European expansion and exploit overseas. This therefore triggered the conquest of colonies in the New World and even beyond. Rich land was discovered that needed vast labour to cultivate. Since most of these people who ventured overseas were Protestants, and since Protestant precepts defended the rights and dignity of man, then how were they to recruit such massive labour?

The first option was to recruit the poor whites of Europe. Then the "landless, penniless, whites" were brought in the first half of the sixteenth century to provide labour. When it was obvious that indentured labour proved grossly inadequate, "the English resorted to more desperate means….kidnapping children, women, prisoners, and drunken men" (Franklin and Moss, Jr., 1994:32). Yet, these strategies did not provide the desired result of providing commensurate labour need for the vast fields.

It "was necessary to devalue the man who would be used to exploit the new land" (Jones, ed,: 362). Corroborating Comer, Franklin and Moss, Jr,(1994:32) submit that

> Blacks from a pagan land and without exposure to the ethical ideals of Christianity could be handled with more rigid methods of discipline

> and could be morally and spiritually degraded
> for the sake of stability on the plantation.

This reduction in the human value of the African stripped him of his freedom and rights of citizenship and humanity. To achieve this justificatory agenda, Anglo-Saxon Protestants had to embark on aggressive and prolonged propaganda campaign "in the press, by the politician, from the pulpit, and among the populace" (Jones, ed, 362) in order to obtain mass approval that will give them clean moral conscience; thereby legitimising the illegitimate, and moralising the immoral. The propaganda also sought to rationalise slavery as just and beneficial to the slave from a pagan land because these slavers and slave holders, seeing themselves as agents of God, were seen to bring "religion, light, and civilisation to the black heathen" (Jones, ed.,: 392).

According to Comer, this rationalisation 'poisoned' the social atmosphere of America toward blacks and firmly established the notion of white superiority and black inferiority which got institutionalised in the United States (the Old South) with the Virginia and Maryland legislations which officially legalised slavery as an institution (Jones, ed., 1980:362).

In his contribution to the debate on racism, Giroux, in his essay *"Living Dangerously: Identity Politics and the New Cultural Racism",* (Giroux and Mc Laren, 1994:36) maintains that racism as a development within the historical confluence of "colonialism and modern slavery are rested on a blatant ideological appeal to pseudobiological and scientific theories of racism to justify inequality, hierarchies, and exploitation as part of the universal order". In doing this, the identity of the OTHER, i.e. the supposed inferior caste, and

the 'Outsider' must be destroyed because it is perceived as "impure, evil, and inferior". The biracial divide of "white" and "black" is constructed with white as pure and civilized while black portends evil, "fear, madness, and degeneration" (Giroux and Mc Laren: 36).

It is however relevant, against the trope of the foregoing arguments to point out that racism was transplanted to America against the background of conflictual vicissitudes that justified African slavery, but not directly or exclusively linked to social condition of slavery as American home-grown. Racial bigotry and prejudice as practices that separate races had existed in Europe long before the official American slavery. Infact, it is obvious that racism had its roots in the Bible. Therefore, social conditions in the colonies only nurtured it against the political and economic interests of whites.

Scholars who assume antipolar position against white racial superiority believe that race is socially and culturally constructed; a product of white pseudobiological and paranoid pathology. Cox (1959) advanced a Marxist explanation for race. His argument provides that "without capitalism … the world might never have experienced race prejudice" (Billlington *et al.,* 1991:93). He sees racism as relational to production and capital where capital engenders need for labour. In a nutshell, his argument provides that

> …economic forces and conflicts are the main causes of racism, which performs vital functions for the capitalist systems, in which the all-powerful state represents the economic interest of the dominant class, regulates the migration of labor and manipulates popular racism according to the needs of the system.

Cox's Marxist analysis of racism as entwined in economic determinism underscores the role played by the Anglo-Saxon hegemony between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in dehumanising the African for the purpose of enslaving him so as to provide ready, cheap, and free labour for the new world economy. Against this duality of racism and capitalism, production and capital, Cox's hypothesis which states that without capitalism the world might never have experienced race prejudice becomes plausible and logical.

Looking at the European terrain before the official declaration of African slavery, Franklin and Moss, Jr. (1994) argue that Africans were in Europe in great number before the seventeenth century, just as they had been in the New World since at least 1501. At this point in time they were either servants, domestics, stevedores, households, gardeners, etc. The relationship was that of servitude and not chattel slavery. While repositioning Africans in the sixteenth century Europe, Franklin and Moss, Jr. (1994:32) articulate the view that

> To be sure, Africans were being employed, but Colonists and their Old World sponsors were extremely slow in recognizing them as the best possible labor for the tasks in the New World.

As a result of the slowness in recognising Africans as the best possible labour option, the Colonists and their Old World sponsors "resorted to the poor whites of Europe."

However, subduing black Africans to servitude in Europe of the 1500s and 1600s arose from the existing racial prejudice and bigotry of difference in skin colour. Nowhere has this prejudice been demonstrated as in Shakespeare's

Othello and *Titus Andronicus*. But racism that commoditised the African to a level lower than humans resulted from the grave desire and drive for labour on the plantations of the New World. To achieve this human devolution the Church was largely responsible.

Ultimately there is no gainsaying the fact that the Church facilitated slavery through its "ecclesiastical license to capture and sell human beings" (Abu-Lughod, ed, 1976:6). On a general perspective, the Church, driven by the urge for capital and wealth, "set the ideological tone by declaring piously that members of savage and infidel nations were fair objects for slaughter, captivity, and slavery" (Abu-Lughod:12). Carew, in his illuminating essay, *"The Origins of Racism in the Americas",* advances the thesis that Columbus' voyage to the Americas in 1492 introduced a new racial ethic, the capitalist ideology which subsumed the ideology of the church, "which turned human beings into commodities, chattels, so many faceless entities in a juggernaut of production" (Abu-Lughod: 6).

It was easier for the state not only to support enslavement of Africans, but doubly became accomplice because with the Protestant Reformation, the powers of the Church became syncretically ensconced within the ambience of the state. As a consequence of this new relationship between the State and the Church, "Usury, a practice condemned by the church for centuries, was transformed, expanded, legitimized and, in its new guise as capitalism became a respectable way of life" (Abu-Lughod: 6).

Dealing with racism, discrimination, and discourse on the diaspora as oppositional practices and concepts is to miss the point because they are germane and organically intercoursed. It was the desire to discriminate against the African by debasing their humanity for the purpose of enslavement that resulted in the diaspora at the level of coercive conscription to the New World (the United States, especially). Why must colour be the signpost for defining the parameter of social interrelationship between white Anglo-Saxons and African Americans in the United States? Briggs (1989:878) proffered the answer when be exposed the paucity of race as a notion which "has been and still is used to justify many discriminating practices on grounds that the natural characteristics of such groups make them unsuitable or particularly appropriate, for certain activities". White Anglo-American discrimination and segregation against the African American places on them the label of paucity of mental acuity which Hastings (ed, 1971:163) justified by saying that

> The Negro left to himself remains a Negro in every sense of the term, and without miscegenation is incapable of making any advance beyond a low social and intellectual level. For this arrest of progress seen everywhere in Africa and the New World (West Indies, Southern United States), a physiological explanation has been sought in the early closing of the cranial structures, preventing any further expansion of the brain after puberty….

Quoting the Rev. Smith in his essay, *"Black Social Scientists and the Mental Testing Movement, 1920-1940"*, Franklin disagrees with Hastings because

> the abject servitude of the negro in America, condemned to the drudgery of perpetual labor, cut off from every means of improvement, conscious of his degraded state in the midst of freemen who regard him with contempt, and in every word and look make him feel his inferiority; and hopeless of ever enjoying any great amelioration of his condition, must condemn him, while these circumstances remain to perpetual sterility of genius (Jones, ed.,: 203).

Tilton is more blunt and poignant in his condemnation of racist discrimination against the African American. In his words,

> we put a stigma upon the black man's color, and then plead that prejudice against the commonest fair dealing; we shut him out of schools, and then bitterly inveigh against the ignorance of his kind (Jones, ed,: 203).

While mortifying his countrymen for the evil and immorality inherent in discriminating against the African America, Tilton again pleads that

> We shut all the learned professions from his reach, and withhold the motives for ordinary enterprise, and then declare that he is an inferior being, fitted only for menial services (Jones, ed.,: 203).

Tilton's treatise attempts to remove the façade associated with black inferiority and mental aridity. On the strength of his belief in the capacity of the African American, Tilton dismisses the naïve claim of black " childlike and dependent nature."

The African diaspora in the United States and elsewhere in Europe and South America is as ubiquitous as he is creative and intelligent. In the language of William Faulkner's character, Dilsey, the African American has

"endured" oppression, deprivation, segregation and discrimination, hard labour, and all manners of cruelty and evil. Despite his disadvantaged position, the African American has consistently made significant contributions to America and the world. Though varied and numerous, much of these contributions are seldom but passingly acknowledged. A few examples will suffice: the magnificent wrought-iron work that characterises much of Southern architecture, the construction of the railroads, bridges, wharves, and ditches; while in the Old South, African Americans maintained and sustained the cotton economy (Butcher, 1973: viii). In W.E.B. Du Bois' view, the African American's single most substantial contribution to America was his labor, while Edwin Embree argues that the wealth of the New World resulted from the sweat and labor of the African American (Butcher:10). This point, axiomatic and incontrovertible as it is, holds sway even for the argument proffered by Cox.

From the primal slave labour which transformed the jungles of the South United States which created wealth for both planters and slave merchants, to the undisputable contributions of Garret A. Morgan (1877 – 1963), who invented the gas mask and the traffic light, there was also Fred Jones (1893 – 1961) who invented the truck refrigeration system and the race car. Others included Jan E. Mutzelinger (1852-1889), the inventor of the shoe lasting machine that revolutionised shoemaking in America. There was also Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928), who proudly declared that "… I was one of the pioneers

of the electric lighting industry from its creation until it had become worldwide in its influence…" (Hayden, 1972:10).

It is necessary to painstakingly roll out these Africans who contributed to both American and world civilisation in order to expose the fallacy patented by Anglo – American racist bigots. In this assemblage of scientists was Elijah Mc Coy who pioneered and popularised the lubricating machine which eventually "eliminated costly and time consuming stoppages for lubrication." The significance of this invention is underscored by the fact that it is widely used on stationary engines and locomotives of steamships, on trans-Atlantic liners, and on machinery in factories. Granville T. Woods, also known as the "Black Edison" invented the electro-mechanical brake, tunnel construction for an electric railway, and the electric railway conduit. Woods was acclaimed by the "Catholic Tribune" of Cincinnati, Ohio, of January 14, 1886, as "the greatest colored inventor in the history of the race, and equal, if not superior to any inventor in the country…" (Hayden: 122).

The list is endless as there are over 500 inventions credited to the African diaspora in the United States alone. Infact, such inventions as the traffic light and the electric elevator (lift) make the list of these inventions. Even the cotton gin which was credited to Elis Whitney, the white school teacher could well have been invented by some unknown black slave. As Hayden (1972:8) rightly captured the intrigue, "We will never know the whole truth about the cotton gin, or for that matter, about many inventions by black people. Their ideas were stolen by their white masters".

Benjamin Benneker is very relevant in this discourse because of the special position that he occupied and the significant part that he played in the emergence of modern Washington DC. A renown mathematician, inventor and astronomer Benneker was credited with the design of Washington, DC (Ogot, B. A. ed, 1992:125). In summary therefore, the centuries long history of the African American's

> Physical and intellectual participation in the struggle for his own freedom, as slave fugitive, slave insurrectionist, anti-slavery writer and orator, Union soldier in the Civil War, and civil rights contestant thereafter, we might well add that the Negro is best identified as proud collaborator in the advance of American democracy (Butcher: 7).

Contributions of African diaspora cut across various fields of endeavour. For instance, as an explorer, Estevanico was credited with the founding of New Mexico and Arizona, while "the only living human being who has stood at the North Pole is an American Negro" (Du Bois, 1975:11). African Americans emerged top-class warriors and soldiers (Crispus Attucks) in all American wars from the emancipation, Civil war, the World Wars, Vietnam, the Gulf wars (a la Colin Powell), etc. While African Americans were fighting that their country might be free from the British Crown, they were also fighting for their own freedom. Their dream for freedom, liberty, and equality, borne out of optimism was wont to be because what they got in return for their blood and sweat, tears and valor, were discrimination and segregation on the basis of their skin colour.

Despite their attainments, the mainstream belief is that the poorest white man is better than the richest African American. Politically, blacks have been

institutionally rendered powerless as whites tended to make their political decisions for them. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:160) assert that this is achieved through

> manipulation of political boundaries, indirect rule, and terrorism". Even in areas where African Americans were in the majority, whites always had their way "through cooperation of elected blacks, who operate in the best interest of the whites.

African Americans have also been economically exploited as only menial jobs were reserved for them: jobs, which attract very low pay. Aggravating the situation was that profits derived from these menial jobs are siphoned through the exploitative housing policies of the ghettoes which are "owned by white absentees who drain the profits back to white communities" (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967:160).

Racist discrimination engendered in the African American alienation on four levels; cultural alienation, alienation from his own people, alienation via self –denial, and alienation from his own country where he is denied a sense of acceptance and belonging (Pratt, 1979). The psychological effects of discrimination through the aegis of racism, in Pratt's argument, is that it often and always leads to self-condemnation and perversion of the total personality. Inextricably, alienation also leads to a feeling of hostility, hate and rage; a grave sense of isolationism and unwantedness which consequently might lead to crime, narcotics, schizophrenia, delirium, and other forms of antisocial behaviours (Pratt:42).

2.3 Citizenship Debates

Modern citizenship debate is a recent development that made headlines across the globe with the collapse of the old Soviet Union, the Eastern block and the legendary Berlin Wall. Therefore, as citizens of other nations and ethnic nationalities criss-cross the globe to other nations, especially to the United States in search for new abodes and the proverbial 'green pastures', there came a need for negotiating a new meaning of citizenship. This modern global phenomenon does not overshadow ancient migrations because history is replete with human migrations–infact, the history of mankind is the history of migration.

Although migration result from war, famine, flood, tourism (voluntary or coercive), that which concerns this study is the forceful migration of African Americans to the New World which culminated in loss of identity, personality, history and citizenship. By the implication of this unsolicited migration, they have not only become diasporic citizens, but because of loss of identity, have been forced to reconstruct identities that are fragmented instead of a striving for a single culturally unifying identity that is rooted in an historical heritage of common ancestral origin. This inability to forge common ancestral cultural identity exposes African Americans as the most diverse ethnic group in the United States.

Paradoxically however, America's norms and cultural institutions have retained their essentially Anglo-Saxon identity because this was precisely how European immigrants and their descendants wanted (Berghahn, 1977).

2.3.1 Constitutional Framework for United States Citizenship

The constitution of the United States of America, Article XIV (1868) provides for the status of American citizen, rights and obligations of citizenship. It recognises that "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction therefore, are citizens of the United States and of the State where they reside" (Hammond, ed, 1964:77; Quint *et al.,* 1974:9). Moreover, the same provision recognises that "privileges and immunities of citizens shall not be circumscribed either by the enactment or enforcement of law. Therefore, no state shall "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (Hammoud, 77; Quint *et al.,* 9).

This perception of citizenship is the liberal notion which does not only situate the concept and practice of citizenship within the nation- state, but lays emphasis on the individual. In this arrangement also, the state defines membership roles in terms of bestowal of rights and duties where social relationships are constructed within the territorial boundary of each society. The same state is empowered to protect these rights of citizens on the basis of equality before the law.

In dealing with the citizenship status of the African American, attention is given to the legalistic provisions of the American Constitution as a document

that not only provides for but defines qualification of American citizenship, as well as privileges and duties that attain to these rights.

2.3.2 Theoretical Framework for Citizenship

Citizenship is a definable entity existing within the confines of political and legal framework. It is therefore a product of the nation-state. Hitherto, the French Revolution of 1789 provided a defining ground for the concept and practice of modern citizenship when sovereignty was divested of its exclusive rights in favour of ordinary citizens (Faulks, 2000).

The failure of liberal citizenship to accommodate and incorporate national citizens, to allow to be all-inclusive in the recognition of groups and difference necessitated the emergence of alterative citizenship models. The recognition of individualism, the granting of individual rights "to pursue their interests free from interference" (Fauks:1) informed the emergence of communitarianism and civic republicanism as alternative framework that address the rights of groups and the recognition of difference. Minorities see liberal citizenship and its attributes as infringement of their basic rights. According to Faulks (2000:3),

> Campaigns for the extension of citizenship have ranged from the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the eighteenth century, women's movements demanding the vote in the early twentieth century, African Americans in the 1960s campaigning for black civil rights, to gay activist in the 1990s protesting that the age of consent be equalized with homosexual.

Liberal thought on citizenship as espoused by T.H. Marshall (1949), provides that "citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community". This position is the same as the United States Constitutional provision. In addition, Marshall states that "All those who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (Lister, 1977:14). This assertion of full members of a community, rights and duties, carry with it a qualifier; i.e. 'equality of status'. What this statement raises are two posers; the assumption that there are those that are not full members of a nation-state; and the untenability of equality in the exercise of rights and duties.

Although the position cited above seems faulty, George Orwell's parody of the Communist Soviet Union in his epic novel, *Animal Farm,* acknowledges that though all animals are equal, some are more equal than others. In the United States for example, African Americans especially, have their exercise of rights and duties circumscribed because racism does not allow for the bestowal of equal status on them due largely to their distinctive physical features and historical antecedents of slavery. So, while in principle the U.S. Constitution provides for equality, in practice there is no such equality. Within legal framework, "citizenship is a matter of law, and nationality a matter of race, of being" (Kanneh, 1998:145). The law has the capacity to change the holder of a nation's passport from citizen to incurable alien.

Liberalism provides that the State should order and direct the duties and rights of citizens, while ensuring protection and security of individuals. To

achieve this, citizens are expected to submit to the authority of the State. The philosophy underlying this arrangement is that society is a protective cocoon for members therein to feel safe. But the African American does not enjoy protection of the law because he is the most vulnerable ethnic group in the U.S by the very nature of his color.

According to Marshall, inequality of "social class can co-exist with formal equalities of citizenship" (Urry, 2000: 164). As a liberal philosopher and scholar, Marshall's postulation seeks to maintain the hegemonic status quo of oppression, domination, and class inequality. In any case, if "citizenship is a status bestowed on those who fully participate in their society" as Marshall would want us to accept, how does he explain the exclusion of African Americans in the United States from full participation in their own affairs? The position here is that African Americans are not full members of the American society.

What appears intriguing is Marshall's obvious emphasis on the individual as citizen, to the exclusion of groups, ethnic nationalities, gender, class and sexuality (Urry, 2000: 165). Marshall advances the supremacy of the state as the sole authority in the construction and bestowal of citizenship with disregard to multi-layered citizenship emanating from varied interests and persuations.

There is need to put into perspective Marshall's thesis on citizenship rights: civil rights, political rights, and social rights. Civil rights are considered as those rights that are necessary for individual freedom, e.g. freedom from

want, freedom from fear, freedom of speech, and freedom of religious worship. Together these make up the legendary 4-freedoms. According to Oldfield (1990) the four-freedoms constitute "negative notion of freedom" (Jones and Gaventa, 2002:8) because "such negative freedoms do not enable citizen to claim rights, since claiming rights requires the resources, power and knowledge to do so" (Lister, 1997; Isin and Wood, 1999; cited in Jones and Gaventa, 2002:8). From the foregoing, African Americans are victims of these negative freedom because despite the fact that their entire life struggle is dictated by need for rights, recognition, and freedom, they daily face denials of these rights. Their entire life struggle is to regain freedom and to be able to fully exercise it as full members of their community.

On the other hand, social right emphasises the right to unfettered economic production, welfare and personal security of citizens (Marshall, cited in Lister, 1997: 15-16). Jones and Gaventa (2002) see this as positive notion of liberty, while Gould (1998) argues that these positive social rights will "enable self-development through entitling all citizens to the social and economic conditions necessary for the achievement of their personal goals" (Jones and Gaventa, 2002:9). In her contribution, Lister (1997) argues that "Entitling all citizens to a bundle of social rights helps to address social and economic equalities" (16 – 17). Lister's assertion sounds a novelty in principle. But in practice, granting this bundle of social rights which guarantee social and economic equality is only tenable for whites and not African Americans or any ethnic minority for that matter. This is manifested in the failure of white power

structure to deliver on promises of equality which denies participation in educational and job opportunities.

Political rights on the other hand underpin citizen's rights to political participation, either to acquire or to influence political action and its processes. It also encompasses the right to vote and be voted for. Against the scenario that "The bearer of rights is the individual and the granter is the nation-state", it places limits on the exercise of citizenship rights and political participation. But in principle, it is the fundamental right of a citizen to fully participate in the development of his community or country. In practice, citizenship, as it pertains to the African American is both hollow and meaningless for reasons of exclusion.

Another level of citizenship is the communitarian. Communitarians hold the view that "an individual's sense of identity is produced only through relations with others in the community of which he or she is a part" (Sandal, 1998; cited in Jones and Gaventa, 2002:4). The thinking here is that an individual's life is socially relational to the fabric of his community existence. Central to this thought is the place of public service as civic responsibility of a citizen where the individual is a player in the pursuit of "common good" as against "the pursuit of individual interests" (4). The main values of communitarian citizenship are "respect for others and recognition for the importance of public service" (Smith, 1998; cited in Jones and Gaventa, 2002:4). The group therefore becomes "the defining centre of identity and that all individuals imagine themselves only in relation to the larger community as

the basis of common ground" (Isin and Wood, 1999:2). The philosophical goals of communitarian citizenship is the attainment of a sense of and feeling of equality and general community belonging.

Another level of citizenship categorisation is civic republicanism which seeks to blend the notions of the liberal and communitarian citizenship because it emphasises the factors that bind citizens together in a society/community, .i.e. individual's obligations to participate in community activities. Civic republicans such as Oldfield (1990), Kymlicka and Norman (1994), and Heater (1999), argue in favor of "deliberative forms of democracy, in contrast to the liberal emphasis an representative political systems" (Jones and Gaventa, 2002:4).

Civic republican scholars like Miller, Habermas, and Bainer argue that "citizenship should be understood as a common civic identity, shaped by a common public culture" with the capacity "to unite citizens so long as this identity is stronger than their separate identities as members of different groups (ethnic, religious, etc)" (4--5). Of paramount importance is the need for citizens to see themselves as active participants in the affairs that affect their lives and welfare, rather than mere passive beneficiaries of policy and services. This passivity seeks to exclude rather than include/incorporate citizens in the business of governance. Nevertheless, this proposition captures the notion of citizenship as obligations where participation is "understood as the civic duty of all citizens and the expression of their citizenship and social membership" (Lister, 1997:14).

While liberal thought on citizenship seeks to protect the rights of the individual in a community/nation-state, group rights, as propounded by civic republicanism provides for the protection of group rights – women, ethnic nationalities, or religious minorities. Moreover, recognition for group rights is synonymous with recognition of and respect for difference. Since one-group rights may differ from another group rights, there is differentiated rights which recognizes different sets of rights. In granting pre-eminence to group differentiated rights, the group, according to Jones and Gaventa (2002) "is the defining centre of identity, and the integration of rights into this framework centres on the idea that the group is the logical focus of rights definitions and claim-making processes" (12).

The kernel of this argument is that citizenship is a creation of modern nation-state; a structured arrangement that labels people as either citizens or aliens. This citizenship categorisation invariably places citizens on a hierarchy of 'belonging' (inclusion) and 'not belonging' (exclusion), where those that belong enjoy rights of citizenship and those that do not belong are denied same rights. Central to this discourse are the question of rights, belonging, obligations, and participation in activities within one's community. However, since the state is the granter of such rights, those citizens that are excluded seek their rights in group formation as dictated by their divergent interests and persuasions.

2.4 Citizenship and Geographies of Identity

Discourse on citizenship is intrinsically entwined in the notion of identity because when an individual or group defines 'self', it is an action tended toward identity construction. As such, discourse on citizenship cannot be treated in isolation of identity. Moreover, relationship between citizenship and identity focuses on people's perception of themselves as citizens while playing out such roles in relation to others and situations in which they find themselves. For instance, "the issue of identity is central to the contemporary discussion around group belonging and struggles for rights" (Jones and Gaventa, 2002:13). As it were, without identity, the concept and practice of citizenship becomes irrelevant.

Nevertheless, it would appear that the question of an individual assuming common national belonging would become problematic as long as "the formulations of state policy often exclude the needs and experiences of popular groups". It has been asserted that civic republicanism recognises differentiated rights of groups. In the light of this recognition therefore, feminists, racial and ethnic minorities, as well as other social movements demand that "the reality of the citizen often conceived as 'male-white-able-bodies'" should be unmasked in order to enable "minority groups to participate in social, political and civic life, defining and claiming their rights to become equal, active citizens" (Jones and Gaventa: 15-16).

Kabeer (2000), analogises that where exclusion "is largely economic, people are likely to mobilise around their interests and formulate demands in terms of redistribution". On the other hand, where exclusion "is largely based on value systems, mobilisation is more likely to be around question of identity, and demands formulated in terms of recognition" cited in Jones and Gaventa (2002:16).

Indeed, it is against this background that we can understand the struggles of marginalised people and groups whose concern is to "demand a society that incorporates rather than accommodates their voices" (Jacobs, 1996; cited in Isin and Wood, 1999:69) as active members of their community. Being active members of their community, they have rights to question "the basis of social membership, the principles informing resource allocation and the means of access to resources themselves'" (Ellison, 1999:70-71).

The deliberate hegemonic strategy that hamstrings African American economically, politically, and socially is constructed around the racist notion that the African American is an 'Outsider'. This exclusion as dictated by racism, discrimination, and segregation imbues in the African American the spirit for a striving for survival, freedom, citizenship, and cultural identity which culminated in the civil rights and the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the 1950s-early 1970s. To be able to achieve these goals, the African American casted his citizenship within the context of the Communitarian/ Civic Republican mould that guarantee him group rights and active participation in the affairs of his community.

On whether this struggle for inclusion has the capacity to stem injustice, inequality, and domination of oppressed people, some scholars argue that the struggle (cultural politics) "is too fragmented, incoherent and 'merely cultural', too far removed from the economic realm" to constitute any serious force. Yet others see the necessity for the struggle as potent political force because, as Isin and Wood, (1999:2) argue,

> They believe that groups suffer injustices and inequalities on the basis of unequal and unfair distribution not only of economic capital but also of symbolic, social and cultural capital.

Against the backdrop of cultural politics of difference, groups and individuals, conscious of their rights, are not only concerned about how resources are appropriated and distributed, but are also interested in their recognition as equal players in the collective production process therefore, a consciously realistic agenda setting that is backed up with concrete and deliberate action could usher in some measure of economic, social, and political gains for minorities.

2.4.1 Diaspora, Citizenship, and Geographies of Identity

The Diaspora in the context of this study are the descendants of African slaves that were forcibly taken to the Americas in shackles "as the cargo of the international slave trade" (Degler, 1985:31). The problematic of this diaspora is the loss of identity, name, natal tongue, forceful adoption of strange names and 'tribe' in a strange new land. Worst still was and still is the problem of uninhibited acceptance as citizen of the new land.

On the other hand however, European immigrants to the New World also constituted diaspora of some sort, although with the modification that informs identification with their home countries of origin. Having set foot on American soil, the Founding Fathers decreed that white "immigrants could become members of the polity on a basis of equal rights with native-born citizens regardless of the country they came from or the religion they believed in". Paradoxically however, this same franchise was never extended to "native-born Afro-Americans, who, therefore found themselves uniquely subordinated politically" (Merelman, 1995:39).

Diasporic citizenship is contested in spaces; a dialectical claim between authochtonousness and the diasporic, or alien citizenship whose contestation faces the problematic of acceptability and recognition. This section therefore treats this dialectics in line with the various debates around citizenship question and status of the African American within the contested space known as the United States of America.

Urry (2000) defines the African American as "victim diaspora" whose citizenship status developed from an unsought association with America With the exception of the native American Indian, would one not be correct to define all Americans as diasporas? This question could elicit interesting academic exercise this thesis were grounded in sociology, history, or political science. However, as a literary contribution to the debate on African American citizenship status, emphasis here is restricted to the genre of drama and its practices. Hitherto, poets, novelists, and essayists; as well as sociologists,

political scientists, and historians, concerned with the issue made contributions that continue to incite controversies.

Historically speaking, the citizenship question of the African is as old as 1619 when the first Africans arrived in Virginia, several years ahead of the New England Plymouth Fathers. As the oldest and largest "immigrant" ethnic nationality in the United States, should the African American be perceived as a diaspora after nearly 400 years of sojourn when most recent diasporas, especially whites from continental Europe are accepted and accorded rights of citizenship?

Gibson, in his essay titled *"The Negro: An Essay On Defintion",* argues that "Among Negroes there does not exist, nor has there ever existed, a common language, religion, or mythology, nor a common habit of social interaction" (Shuman, ed., 1970:19). What this argument seeks to espouse is the difficulty that diasporic citizenship status as a political instrument rests within the nation-state, but is incapable of influencing policies and political actions because of absence of unity arising from incohesiveness. Gibson's assertion of African American absence of common language, religion, or mythology might not be altogether correct because African Americans, like other ethnic nationalities, have their cultural institutions which they consider as Africa-derived.

Corroborating Gibson, the African American needs to develop a strong African cultural heritage or the African 'link', because without identification with a nation of origin or ancestral homeland, acceptability and recognition in

the American landscape becomes impossible. Cruse (quoted in Berghahn, 1977:23) is more blunt when he argues that:

> As long as the Negro's cultural identity is in question, or open to self-doubts, then there can be no positive identification with the real demands of his political and economic existence. Further than that, without a cultural identity that defines oneself, the Negro cannot even identify with the American nation as a whole. He is left in the limbo of social marginality, alienated and directionless on the landscape of America.

In addition to this theory of African cultural heritage linkage, most importantly the African American needs strong group power which can only be attained through equally strong group consciousness, economic and political capital to be able to survive in the competitive waters of American racist and capitalist waters.

As if this was not enough, Gibson further argues that the incapacity of the African American to become culturally cohesive stemmed from the deliberate decimation of his cultural heritage as an ethnic group by slave traders and slave masters on the plantations as a deliberate imperialist / capitalist policy. This is a statement of historical correctness as rationalised by Just Butcher (1968:10) who asserts that "Slavery, moreover, planted the Negro deep in the subsoil of American life and made him culturally a basic American". This development made it easier for the African American to rapidly assimilate "the white man's civilization, language, religion, and folkways".

Corroborating Gibson, Isin and Wood (1999) share the view that African Americans as ethnic category do not "merit recognition under the term 'ethnicity'" because they do not have "historically shared norms and customs, lived, and celebrated and died together", the same way as Irish-American, Jewish-American and other well-known ethnic minorities in the United States (490 who carried their native cultures with them to the New World. Pursuing this line of argument further, citing A. D. Smith (1986) and Wood (1995), Isin and Wood (1999:49) observe that "Most ethnic categories today are derived from nation-state of origin with little regard for or knowledge of actual history and culture". However, what is significant for the African American as an ethnic category is that ramifications of difference are definable in favour of ethnic origin, i.e. African ancestry which readily provides the insignia of common cultural identity.

Moreover, the various citizenship constructions and the ensuing identity formations resulted largely from practices of colonialism and capitalism which invariably created "unequal distribution of capital", thereby foisting differences in levels of participation, rights, and the general discrimination of minority groups. The consequent backlash arising from these discrimination were resistance from minority groups. These resistance movements established group symbols, narratives, and icons which inculcated in members "relatively durable dispositions' (Isin and Wood, 1999:50).

Without disputation, it is obvious that the African American citizenship status and rights are inextricably linked to the notion of belonging and full

participation in matters that affect their lives and well-being as members of their various communities. As such it was this philosophy of the need for belonging and participation that fired the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Among the achievements recorded in this direction were the restoration of the voting rights, citizenship rights, and "curriculum changes in education at all levels". These changes did not go down well with mainstream-melting-pot apologists like Schlesinger, Jr., (1992) who denounced this recognition, warning "of the consequences for a nation whose citizens focused on their divergent pasts, instead of on their common present and purpose". Schlesinger sees cultural movement as tearing apart the ostensible solid block of the American nation. He therefore casts aspersion on those he calls "ethnic ideologues" whom he claims "set themselves against the old American ideal of assimilation" (Seyler, 1994:361). Again, Schlesinger asserts that those "ethnic ideologues"

> …have encouraged minorities to see themselves as victims and to live by alibis rather than to claim the opportunities opened for them by the potent combination of Black Protest and white guilt. They have… remarkably advanced the fragmentation of American life (Seyler:361).

Against the background of Schlesinger's reasoning, it becomes necessary to raise the following questions: is it not true that minorities, especially African Americans, are victims of vicious racial discrimination and segregation on the basis of their slave heritage? Is it not also true that windows of opportunities are securely closed on African Americans? Or, is it not equally true that America "turned from a city of borders into a city of barricades, a city

which could no longer bridge its divisions" (Merelman, 1995:xii)? All these unequal conditions flared the embers of frustration and discontent that finally galvanized into the urban riots that raged across the United States in the roaring 1960s.

Liberal democratic thought on citizenship is constructed around the assumption that "modern nations were founded by and for certain social classes", so also " have they been established by and for certain 'races' and ethnic groups" (cited in Isin and Wood, 199:56). This assumption establishes a hierarchal colonial division which naturally excludes ethnic minorities from belonging and participation in affairs that concern them. This obligation is therefore assigned to the state, being the granter of rights and the protector of same. What this arrangement intends to achieve on the part of the oppressor class is the perpetuation of racial and class hegemony.

If it is placed in perspective that the failure of political and economic struggles of ethnic minorities to secure equality, justice, and recognition resulted in the new wave of cultural politics of difference, then, African Americans and other ethnic poor minority groups are propelled by the desire to expose and demystify the long held notion about the homogeneity and monolithic nature of American society. This movement aims at rights claim, recognition and participation, which does not constitute a threat to the nation-state and its protectionist assumptions. It is the desire of these groups to construct multiple citizenship identities rather than being constructed solely as

national citizens of a political entity where their group rights are recognized and protected.

On another level, diasporic citizenship which resulted from unsolicited intercourse between the marauding imperialists, the slave merchants, and the African continent, gave birth to a hybrid identity; the mulattoes, who are the product of mixed racial parentage. This creation is largely the outcome of the erotic imperial exploits of the imperial grand master. The background which these exploits took root was the slave plantation. These products of interracial relationship often see themselves as superior to their darker kinsmen. Because of their fairer skin complexion, they are more privileged and favoured by the dominant culture. For example, Frazier (1957:246) asserts that "in the United States it was generally the son of a mulatto household servant who was apprenticed to learn some skilled trade". Mulattoes further complicate the dilemma in terms of African American ethnic identity fixation, considering their mixed racial parentage and dual ethnic origins. The mulatto factor, according to Isin and Wood (1999:57), "complicate and even prevents neat categorisation of people", as well as "it reasserts the fluidity and contingency of identity" because they tend to repudiate their darker skin kinsmen while identifying more with whites although they remain black by the 1/16 drop of blood.

Another feature that arises from the diasporic citizenship and fragmentation of identities is the emergence of groups as a space of citizenship identity. The historical antecedents of the African American made it inevitable

for the emergence of ethnic collective or groupism as against individualism of the Western world. Within the concept of African humanism, individualism renders a person invisible, and powerless. Therefore, for African Americans to adopt groupism is an affirmation of their innate African spirit. Beiner (1995); Kymlicka (1995); and Schlesinger (1992) believe that 'groupism' is a threat to the idea of citizenship because promoting groupism will render citizens to have less in common; thereby, rendering the polity ineffective in assuming authority and maintenance of cultural homogeneity. However, in their argument, Isin and Wood (1999:63) opine that "Diversity must be understood as a social reality, not an option". So also, it is to be highlighted that diversity is not a modern phenomenon, but ancient, a phenomenon which dates back to the days of empire building. According to Smith (1986), quoted in Isin and Wood (1999:54), "… a state of multiculralism to some degree has been the norm, not the exception, in the Western world for a long time".

Having appreciated that cultural unity seeks to establish group political, social, and economic hegemony, Isin and Wood (1999:63) put it poignantly that

> Those who fear the 'ghettoization' of the nation, a fragmentation of ethnic and racial identities that undermines the collective, ignore the role of the dominant classes in creating such ghettoes – economic and social as well as rhetorical – in the first place .

The position established by Isin and Wood on group fragmentation is not only crystal clear but altruistic because fragmentation is a product of non-recognition of groups that seek to render them powerless and voiceless in the

scheme of things. Therefore, African Americans demand the right to identification with a group and to have this right legally recognised, and have a political capacity to influence the way in which such recognition manifests itself materially. In their summation, Isin and Wood (1999:66 – 67) rationalise that various groups are seeking "neither to dismantle the nation nor to be accommodated nor recognized but to reinvent it as a postnational state" .

Another dimension to the diasporic citizenship and babel of identities constructed around the African American by Gibson is that he lacks "his own institutions" and those indigenous cultural attributes that shaped other ethnic nationalities firmly with imbued group identity. Gibson further claims that the Negro forms a far more diverse element of the population than any other group (Shuman ed, 1970: 92). Furthermore, the dilemma of the African American as diasporic citizen is complicated by what Gibson refers to as Negroes are Negroes primarily because of the definitions applied by the society; therefore, any cohesiveness which the group has or can have is the result of defense against the white aggressor. Nonetheless, where other ethnic groups feel an internalised sense of group identity and values, Gibson insists, "Negroes … only feel a defensive, externally motivated sense of group identity" (Shuman: 92).

This notion of seeming absence of internalized system of cultural values, according to Gibson arose not only from the regime and heritage of slavery and capitalism, but also because these Negroes as slaves came from different areas, spoke different languages, had different mythologies and system of pantheon.

What resulted from the plantation social order is an amalgam of different black people now called Africans who were not only decapitated from their past, but had the past almost entirely erased from their memory.

The problematic surrounding such hypothetical or unsubstantiated claims rests entirely on such scholars' lack of first-hand study of African heritage and its survivals in the United States. Vestigials of African survivals in the United States manifest in variety of behaviors and attitudes. Herskovits (1941) debunks Gibson's claim that African Americans lack ethnic institutions that are akin to those of other ethnic nationalities in America. Herskovit's study both in Africa and America confirm the existence of African survivals among African Americans which constitute their cultural heritage and institutions. He qualities the African American as "largely an ethnic and cultural unit". Herskovit (1941:145) further positions the African American as.

> … this group, like all other folk who have maintained a group identity in this country, have retained something of their cultural heritage, while at the same time accommodating themselves, in whatever measure the exigencies of the historical situation have permitted, to the custom of the country as a whole.

Unlike the dominance of African survivals in the West Indies and the Caribbean, African vestigials in the United States are fused and synergised into the dominant culture in such a way that only conscious studies can identify them. They prevail in behaviours, habits and manners, dance and walking styles, speech pattern, styles of hair do, religion, and even in the family system.

A factor which has remained a source of worry to most African Americans because of its divisive nature is the dichotomy between the middle-class and the lower class. According to Gibson, this dichotomy arises because the African American as a group is not culturally monolithic. The middle class, having attained that status, tends to repudiate the lower class since there is absence of feeling of shared responsibility that binds them together as members of an ethnic group. This is so because, as Gibson once again puts it, the middle-class "has no cultural basis for feeling united to the lower class", except where there is "mutual need for defense against a threatening white society". As such, as long as the need for this defence ceases, the middle class will continue to be a separate group. But the construction of the middle class as an 'elite corps of the lumpen masses of African Americans emanates from the dominant mainstream strategy to break and infiltrate the ranks of the ethnic block. This is achieved through the placement of 'educational road blocks' that makes it difficult for the attainment of quality college education that guarantee vertical social mobility for the African American. Similarly, this tendency toward breaking the ranks of African Americans arises from white people's fear of black ethnic cohesion which might threaten their hegemony and eliminate racial domination.

What is more, the so-called prevalence of diversity and lack of ethnic cohesion "has resulted in severe problems of social identity" which leads some African Americans who are Muslims to establish the Black Muslim Brotherhood as a domain of identity. This identity is steeped in the religion of

Islam, which is a reaction not only to the absence of ethnic unity among blacks, but a reaction to the claim of perceived ambivalence of black civil rights leaders as well as the corrupt, decadent, and murderous white culture. In order to ensure cohesion, unity, and loyalty among members, Black Muslims created separate mythology, philosophy, icons, and code of behavioural etiquettes for adherents. Gibson believes that such fragmentation of identities through such movements would not have occurred had African Americans maintained their cultural cohesiveness and unity against the 'balkanization' strategies of the white dominant culture. But the Black Muslims constitute a spiritual and political geographic locales for reinventing identity among African Americans and other minorities with far-reaching consequences for the growth of Islam in the United States. Easily the best known names are Mullah Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, Mohammed Ali, just to mention a few. These leaders drew the attention of America and the world not only to themselves, but also to the plight of minorities in the United States.

The objectification of absence of black cohesion is also explicable from an understanding of the American slave regime which deliberately destroyed those structures and institutions that would have forged unity among African Americans. In addition to this is the deliberate failure of the mainstream to consciously design policies that would guarantee the African American equality of citizenship as active player in the economic, social, and political decision making processes.

Further movement toward identity creation has taken the form of identification with Africa. Hitherto Africa was sneered at as a dark continent whose citizens lived on trees like monkeys; a land of 'King-Kong' and 'Tarzans'. But today, the drive for ethnic and cultural identity has brought African Americans face to face with their historical origin; a recognition of Africa as their primal beginning. Today African Americans see Africa as representing the origin and the soul of black people (Langston Hughes Colloquy, Vol. 5; 2004:4). Following their rejection and non-recognition by the mainstream culture, the African diaspora tends to direct his energy toward a desire for a return 'home', "regardless of whether the home is real or imaginary, temporary, syncretised, or simulated…" (Rath: Page 9 of 13). This is also a recognition of the emergence of Global Africa in world politics and a link between Africa and its Diaspora (Mazrui, 2002: p 2 of 15). African history, literature, etc, are today being studied by African Americans as never before as a measure of inculcating nationalist and ethnic pride in the youth. In this regard therefore, African Americans demanded the introduction of black history and literature courses in educational curriculum in addition to their desire to control all educational institutions in their communities (Franklin and Moss, Jr., 1988). In addition to this identity striving, African art works have become commonplace motifs in the homes of African Americans.

"Black is beautiful" as a slogan was adopted as an expression of hope, pride, self-sufficiency, and black cultural nationalism. As a cultural movement, some African Americans began to discard Western mode of dressing in

preference for African dresses, Afro-hairstyle; and even African names became fashionable. In assuming this consciousness, they were re-establishing themselves with their lost identities and heritage. By reinventing African symbols, values, history, and culture they may be internalised in the long run. It is also a craving to "seek their strength from within their ranks rather than to rely upon whites" (Solberg and Morris, 1975:235).

Undoubtedly, the most far-reaching search for distinct identity construction is in the area of language. The significance of this language construction as an identity is conveyed in the statement made by Ali and Alamin Mazrui (1998) that "the restricted genetic (or 'racial') boundaries of the English language … have made it impossible for African Americans to become fully a part of the American 'mainstream'. On why African Americans have not been recognised as fully American, the Mazruis (1998:31) argue that

> No matter how extensively 'assimilated' African Americans were, in cultural and linguistic terms, the system ensured that they would remain 'black', that they would remain American with qualification.

This realisation informed the need, consciously or unconsciously for African Americans to develop 'the *Ebonics,* Black English, African American Vernacular English… as a language that many African American students brought to the classroom". In ordinary parlance, *Ebonics* is called a slang language that developed on the plantation as a result of intercultural synergy of the African languages and a corruption of the English language (Mazrui: 31-32).

In conclusion therefore, one must go back to Gibson's titled essay; *"The Negro: An Essay in Definition"* to search for who the African American is. Who then is the African American? On one level, this question appears metaphysical and ambiguous. But on another level, it is socio-historical. The African American tries and is still trying to proffer a socio-historical definition of his 'being'. The journey began on the plantations of the South, where he was called a 'Negro' (then a slave). However, Malcolm X sees a 'Negro' as "one who identifies himself on the white man's terms, one who accepts the definition of himself given to him by white civilization" (Butterfield, 1970:219).

In line with Malcoml X's thinking, Wade W. Nobles sees 'Negro' as referring to the African person who attempts to deny or is forced to, or convinced to deny the philosophical basis of his Africanity" (Jones, ed., 1980:105). Being a 'Negro' assumes a perpetual state of philosophic confusion; neither African (black) nor American (white). In short, the term 'Negro', like 'Nigger', connote pejorative assumptions of condescension and eternal slavery; of featurelessness and invisibility.

The term 'Black' took form in the heydays of the Harlem Renaissance, as part of Pan-African consciousness through to the Civil Rights Movement decades to the peak-period of the Black Power Movement (1960 – 1970). According to Malcolm X, black identity became essential because "white cultural oppression robbed the black man of human identity" (Butterfield: 219). The identity 'black' connotes resistance to oppression, and it is a term that

qualifies the African American to enter the world alliance with other colored people all over the world. However, between the decades of the 1980s – 1990s, 'black' transformed into 'African American', a nomenclature (identity) that is still in use. Nevertheless, these nomenclatural (identity) changes constitute a search for an acceptable definition of citizenship and common group identity. No ethnic nationality has undergone such incomplete metamorphosis in identity search like the African American, who as a people wear "the mask" in order to survive in a hostile society, yet removes that mask to challenge discrimination and to achieve social change (Grayson, 2004:1).

Fundamentally, America is the most culturally diverse nation on earth today. African American diversity is therefore a microcosm of the larger American society. Their diversity should rather be perceived as their strength rather than weakness. Against the backdrop of reinventing citizenship identity which enables them to reach out to reinvent their identity along the geographic locales and spaces that the American social, political, and economic landscape provide.

Afterall, every ethnic nationality in America today seeks to perceive itself as a cultural identity that is separate from others, but remains loyal to the authority of the nation-state. Therefore, arguments advanced against the perceived diversity and incohesiveness of the African American as responsible for lack of cultural unity remains untenable. What remains central to this apparent difference is the constancy in the difference of skin colour between all white nationalities against the singular identity of the African American.

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CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Amiri Baraka and the Revolutionary Theatre; *Dutchman and The Slave*

3.1 Introduction

Allan Morrison (1967) argues that the African American dramatist should set an agenda "to discard the undignified identities and stereotypes and to demand and assert his own humanity"(Patterson, ed.,:10). In the light of this reasoning therefore the dramatist should also set the goal of "affirmation of manhood and citizenship" (10).

In the pursuance of both agenda and goal therefore, the African American dramatist should present realistic plays that appeal to their community because such plays have no difficulty appealing to community-base audience. This position is advocated because according to Patterson (1990), "Plays have always reflected the social and political struggles in society; and black plays, certainly, been no exception" (349). Plays as living texts must reflect the reality of an age with the dramatist as both a chronicler and a mirror to his community.

Within the content of the gruesome history of the African American, should black theatre be integrationist or culturally distinct and separate in order to serve the peculiarities of black history? The consensus obviously is for African American dramatists to write "for Negro audience, which related to the problems within the Negro himself and within the Negro community" (Neal, cited in Hill, ed., 1990:295). Simply put, black theatre should be functional and capable of employing itself as "instrument for the raising of political, ethnical,

and aesthetic consciousness" (296) of his audiences as well as serving as a true voice and vision of African Americans. Such a theatre can only be accepted in the community, not on Broadway.

Baraka, in a 1962 address to the American Society for African Culture argued that the goal of the African American writer was to portray "the emotional history of the black man in this country: as its victim and its chronicler" (Gibson, ed., 1970:206). In his advocacy. he believes that any drama that is not capable of changing life is no drama at all, but a mere entertainment which blacks can hardly afford in their present condition.

This chapter is therefore an examination of Amiri Baraka as a person, as a revolutionary dramatist, and a luminary icon of the Black Arts Movement whose political and literary works seek to change the condition of the masses of African Americans. An exploration of how Baraka has been able to situate the debate on citizenship and geographies of identity in two of his plays, *Dutchman* and *The Slave* is also considered. These analyses dwell extensively within the broad gamut of the communitarian/civic republican citizenship mould that has been adopted in constructing the African American personality.

The contention or otherwise of whether Baraka succeeded in arousing the consciousness and altering the attitude of the masses of African Americans must be understood against the background of the political relevance of his plays which conform with the political and social mood of the Black Power age. It was an age that was charged with social and political agitations for equality, political franchise, militarism, and radicalism. Baraka provided these

in his Harlem community theatre – he gave the masses of the people what they wanted.

Among the tools of analysis are: setting/play titles, plot and characterisation, the middle class syndrome, language, community/communal consciousness, heritage of slavery and oppression (Paternalism), and the blues music, among others as spaces/ locales for identity and citizenship.

3.2 Amiri Baraka: The Man and His Ideology

As the restive spirit and founder of the Black Arts Movement which was considered as the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Davis, 1974: 224), Baraka is credited with the founding of the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre / School (BARTS) in Harlem in 1965.

Black Arts Movement established a clear-cut breakaway from the social realism of the 1940s and 1950s as it addressed itself to the "radical sector of black socio-political consciousness" (Hill, ed., 1990:296). It sought to conscientise black audience by sensitising them about the reality of their being in America, especially with regard to their relationship with the white mainstream. The movement also propagated the ideology of 'blackness' as a counteraction to a racist language and imagery that had made blackness a thing of "evil" (Hill ed.,:296). It was a reawakening, a reorientation which sought to stimulate and stir African Americans to move and forge a sense of proud cultural identity.

Black Arts Movement or the Black aesthetics, provided an operational identity to black artists and a search for a "black" form. Also encapsulated in the movement was a rejection of Euro-American value system "as an instrument of political and cultural oppression" while projecting African American cultural tradition as viable alternative. Another thrust of the movement was to unmask the "repressed cultural contradictions and the lost of possibilities of what had once seemed a unfied culture" of America (Gidley, ed., 1993: 373-374).

As a literary movement the Black Arts imbibed the political ideology of African American citizenship and identity, enthronement of and respect for the African American personality, equality, culture and history. It also stimulated the emergence of national and ethnic consciousness not only in African Americans, but other ethnic minorities, as well as feminists.

This movement does not only propagate cultural separatism, but it also castigated African American middle-class liberal artists who tended to flirt with the Western literary canon in order to gain acceptance of the mainstream. What is more, these middle class liberals are perceived as renegades who betray the consciences and spirit of the African American people.

In his fiery essay, Larry Neal presents the manifesto of the Black Arts Movement as

> … radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America….The Black Arts and the Black

> Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-America's desire for self-determination and nationhood (Gates and McKay, 1997:1797; Davis,1974:227).

However, for these objectives to be achieved, the Black Arts Movement proposed a radical re-ordering of Western cultural aesthetic through the institutionalisation of "separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and ideology" (Davis:227). In addition, there is also a call on African Americans for a united action against whites "as the only means of obtaining recognition for the black man's identity and dignity" (Osofisan, trans., 1983:34). The Black Arts Movement and the revolutionary theatre repudiate integration and compromise as conditions for acceptance into the mainstream culture. Another concern was the need "to transform the manner in which black people in the United States of America were defined and treated" (Gates and McKay: 1796), or what Larry Neal in his revolutionary theatre treatise calls "the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas and ways of looking at the world." Worthy of mention is the fact that the movement was a direct reaction to Western critical literary and scholarly assumptions that African Americans do not have history, origin, and culture to qualify them to be called African Americans.

Nevertheless, to be able to accomplish their set agenda of projecting their history, culture, identity and civilisations to the world, it was necessary for black aesthetic literary production to appeal to the masses of African Americans through being "functional, collective, and committing" (Karenga, cited in Gates Jr., and McKay: 1796). As if this was not enough, literary aesthetic should also seek "to be of the community and for the folk. It was to

speak to the people in their own language, without supplication to the white man" (Neal, cited in Gates Jr., and McKay,1997) because "integration was neurosis and death, not psychic wholeness" (Weisgram, 1972). The success or otherwise of this mission statement depended almost exclusively on the ability of the movement to be truly collective, collaborative, and non-individualistic so as to be able to restore the lost glory and dignity of the African American.

Baraka's name change from LeRoi Jones to Imamu Amiri Baraka was a symbolic rejection of white establishment values. Although Baraka's name change might not have changed his attitude, it was a symbolic rebirth which relates to the dominant identity concept. He gained inspiration from diverse sources. First, the works of white avant-garde artists, Allen Ginsberg and Frank O' Hara among others. Then his 1960 Cuban trip which according to him "split me open" and became "a turning point in any life" (Gates Jr., and McKay:1878). James Baldwin also left an indelible impression on Baraka. He admitted that Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964) "was one of the great theater experiences of my life" (Hay, 1994:95). He saw in *Blues* a repudiation of the non-violent ideology of Martin Luther King. Jr., while embracing the militancy and radicalism of Malcolm X. Nevertheless, the extent to which Baldwin's literary influence held Baraka spell bound is captured by Hay (1994); "Baraka was so influenced by Baldwin, in fact, that Baraka trumpeted Baldwin's theme in all of his own protest plays" (95).

Moreover, Baraka's brand of revolutionary theatre also derived from Maulana Ron Karenga's cultural ideology of *Kawaida*, an ideology which proposed to build a nation on a common value system. Baraka was also an admirer of Mullah Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Chicago-based Nation of Islam. His encounter with Muhammad inspired him to study the Nation of Islam as the only credible alternative to the 'decayed' white Christian religion. It was this encounter with Islam and its seeming redeeming values that caused Baraka to drop LeRoi Jones in preference for Imamu Amiri Baraka in 1968. In the light of his belief in the purity of Islam, and his best allies in the construction of national identity, he once

proclaimed that: "In my view the Nation of Islam is the only black American group that can survive the collapse of America" (Osofisan: 146).

Thereon, the story of Baraka is that of a restless human spirit in transition, seeking fulfillment. His ideological baptism is manifested in the totality of his personage, his works, and his thought processes. As a politically committed artist that is grounded in the ideals of the revolutionary theatre that sought to project distinct cultural identity of the African American, Baraka preoccupied himself with the politics of an emerging self-identity and "oppositionally focused racial unity" (Demastes, ed., 1996:219). Characteristically, in his effort at constructing separate and distinct black identity and manhood, Baraka distances his plays from white audience. This distancing culminated in his separation from his white Jewish wife, while his name-change marked a turning point in his rejection of 'everything' white.

Amiri Baraka's identification with the 'beat' movement was demonstration of his anger and annoyance with the society that sought to oppress and exclude African Americans from participation and exercise of their rights as citizens. He is therefore a product of the restless spirit of the 1960s and 1970s which ushered in a new wave of minority group, gender, gay, and counter-culture movements that advocated recognition and identity.

Baraka's perception of the revolutionary theatre is that it must

> Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must Accuse and Attack because it is a theatre of victims (Gates, Jr., and McKay: 1900).

In addition, the revolutionary theatre should exchange dreams for reality as a political weapon which is fashioned to educate the masses of African

Americans about their oppression by people " who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on". This theatre should be corrective, not deceptive; a mirror reflecting the decay and stark reality in the criminal unequal social relationship between white and black in America. Nonetheless, it must not imitate Broadway theatre which is reactionary, whose aesthetic is self-serving and "reflect the spiritual values of this unholy society" (Gates, Jr., and Mc Kay: 1900).

As representative of the oppressed and the downtrodden, this is the theatre of victims of oppression and peopled with victims as casualties of oppression which should create heroes out of these victims. It underscores the need to assault the establishment in the belief that racism can only be eliminated when racists are eliminated.

As non-integrationist theatre, it should be able to unmask the façade of stereotypes through presenting characters as real, or in allegorical tradition of the epic struggles of African Americans for full-citizenship, separate identity, self-affirmation, and self-esteem. According to Baldwin (1965),

> To be born in a free society and not to be born free is to be born into a lie. To be told by co-citizens and co-Christians that you have no value, no history, have never done anything that is worthy of human respect destroys you because in the beginning you believe it. Many Negroes die because they believe it (Chapman, ed, 1968:665).

The thrust of Baraka's theatre therefore is to destroy the myth propagated by whites against the personality and history of the African American. In doing this, he must be mobilised and galvanised to reject the lies

that white mainstream has written and told about and against him. Therefore, the mass of African American, conscientised through the medium of the revolutionary theatre, should assert his citizenship, value, history, and human worth.

On the question of the African American middle class, Baraka argues that for as long as the middle class clings to the passion of being accepted by the mainstream, he will continue to find it difficult to ""tell it like it is"" . And having failed to tell it as it is, he becomes a veritable failure and a betrayer of his own people. It was therefore not surprising that Baraka parted ways with those he christens bourgeois nationalists who aligned themselves with Black Aesthetics because of their lack of focus and commitment to the cause of African American struggle for unconditional emancipation and self-actualisation. He unapologetically declares that his aim was to "demythologise and exhort" the hypocricy of the Anglo-American establishment

Citing Addison Gayle, Baraka believes that "aesthetic based upon economic and class determinism is one which has minimal value for Black people" (Reginald Martin, 1995; p.8 of 10; Internet material). Against this backdrop, he dismisses liberal middle-class bourgeois aestheticians as people who are not only lost in the labyrinth of American literary and political waters, but are pitilessly portrayed as castrated and sterile. They constitute victims of their gullibility; a people who refuse to embrace the notion of black struggle and identity construction through political and literary separatism as the only strategem for recognition. This affront explains why Krigwa Players,

uncompromisingly advanced that black theatre must be 'by us', 'for us', 'about us', and 'near us' (Oliver and Sills, ed, 1971:20).

In his characteristic gusto, Baraka advocated unabashedly that black aesthetic must subsume itself within the greater matrix of the Black Arts Movement "so that its ideas will be in concert with those black ideas from drama, dance, and graphic arts" (Martin, P.9 of 10), and make itself socially functional. Black Arts practitioners believe that "art should be toward a political and humanistic end that would elevate all people… but especially black people … to a higher consciousness and a better life" while rejecting a call for a racially syncretic literary production.

According to this school of thought, "the only way to artistic purity was through separation from the mainstream" because, in Baraka's belief, "at the root of any authentic art endeavor must be the love of black people and the love of self-affirmation" (Martin. P. 9 of 10)).

Inevitably, as an icon of the Black Arts Movement and apostle of the revolutionary theatre manifesto, Baraka's corpus of artistic production, coupled with his literary and political influence on the Black Arts Movement, altogether stand him as unrivaled in the firmament of his literary peers.

3.3 Analysis of *Dutchman* and *The Slave*

In order to fully appraise and understand both plays, readers, audiences, and even critics should appreciate that *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are casted as Black Power plays that are steeped in the socio-political and cultural milieu of

the time. The audience and reader as well as critic must understand the growing racial dialectics between blacks and whites, must understand the murder, the lynching, and the oppression of black people in the wake of the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements.

Therefore, the exposition and analyses of the plays are treated against the parameters already identified. But because these parameters develop from the search for responsible citizenship and befitting African American identity, rigid compartmentalisation of these parameters become difficult because in some or more instances, they flow into one another in an organic fusion. This in-flow on its own constitutes part of the problematic in carving acceptable, dominant, and enduring identity for the African American.

What makes both plays peculiarly Black Power plays is the fact that they constitute a living experimental axis to the Black Aesthetic. In this light they criticise what Lee (1995) describes as "racist spiral" and any tendency for accommodation (Bloom:103).

3.3.1 Setting / Play Titles

Dutchman is set in 1964, in a New York subway, "In the flying underbelly of the city. Steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth" (*Dutchman,* 215; Oliver and Sills, 1971). The "flying underbelly of the city" invokes a picture and a metaphor for speed. The season and temperature condition are highlighted as "steaming hot and summer on top" outside this underbelly of the city. "The

subway heaped in modern myth" could mean the technological and scientific wonders of invention that created a transportation system that runs under the ground (the tunnel), as well as the subway car itself with all its 'efficiency'.

But the horrific impression of a moving vehicle underbelly also conjures the image of the 'middle passage' where "slaves were shackled together and packed "into dark dungeons, squeezed together between the decks of stinking ships" (O. E. Uya, 1987:71 – 72). It symbolises the capture and 'confinement' in the slave vessel of the African by the white slave merchant. The incommodious temperature is equally reminiscent of the intolerable conditions in the slave ships on the 'middle passage' across the Atlantic.

The objectivisation of this scenario is that the subway, symbolic of the slave ship marks the loss of freedom, citizenship and identity, humanity and self-esteem, as well as the history and culture of the African. It was here that the African lost his erstwhile paradise. Paradoxically, it was here too that the African struggle to regain his lost paradise began.

On a related level, the setting, especially the subway car transports blacks (Clay) and whites (Lula) "rushing headlong through darkness, literally and symbolically seeing nothing on the way to vague destinations" (Theodore R. Hudson, 1973). They both present images of "captives aboard a slave ship" (151).

The setting is symbiotically aligned to the play title because both cannot be treated as separate parts. In this light, from the foregoing analysis, *Dutchman* invokes the picture of the Dutch East Indian Company, "the best

known slave ship company of the seventeenth century whose flagship for the voyages between West Africa and America, tradition says, was named flying Dutchman" (Hudson: 152). On yet another level, it metaphorizes the 'Underground Railroad' which was African America's earlier Freedom trail. Ironically however, contrary to the historical escape provided by the Underground Railroad, the drama does not provide Clay on escape because in his encounter with Lula he settles for less (Bloom, ed., 1995: 104).

The setting in *The Slave* establishes the comfort and suave isolationism that whites savour when they decided to retreat to the suburb as a process of distancing themselves from black communities. In its symbolism of seeming protectionism, Walker's 'violation' of this serene environment punctures the myth of its assumed 'impenetrability'. It exposes whites as vulnerable in the face of racial and social schism. On the level of identity and citizenship, the prologue, and the middle of the play establish the difficulty associated with negotiating defined identity and citizenship. This difficulty is manifested in the transformation of Walker from 'slave' in the Prologue to a revolutionary. This non-definable identity captures Walker's "uncertainty about himself", and by and large, the "indefiniteness" about the identity of the African American in general (Hudson, 1973:154).

Oppositional to the allegorical and symbolic setting of *Dutchman*, the setting for *The Slave* is uncomplicated and simple. The play takes place in a well-furnished university professor's apartment, ostensibly within a university campus or some suburban location. We catch a glimpse of the setting from the

stage direction: "The action takes place in a large living room, tastefully furnished the way an intelligent university professor and his wife could furnish it" (*Dutchman* and *The Slave,* Two plays by LeRoi Jones, 1964:42). The environment portends the mood of intellectualism and elitism in the occupants of the apartment. The simplicity of the setting denies it any metaphorical or symbolic interpretation. It only established the class and caste difference in housing – whites living well while blacks live in squalour.

There is yet another level to the interpretation of *Dutchman*–the psychoanalytical. The underbelly subway car could represent the inner workings of Clay's mind – the intense conflict and tension that go on within his mind. The conflict of capitulation of his blackness and manhood and the acceptance of the 'white thing'; or the rejection of both. The forces tilting toward acquiesce and beholding onto the 'white thing' as represented by the character of Lula is all-too-powerful. It was this rejection of the 'self' and the lure of the white flesh and all it stands for that finally kills Clay. Because of his middle class predilection and romance with the white man's ways he gets killed unfulfilled.

Clay along with all black middle class is the subject of the crisis, while Lula (white America) is the object of the crisis. Clay is the victim and he remains a victim till his death His failure to extricate himself of the trappings of the white world, especially the desire for a white woman destroys him. This drama therefore is reflective of the absurdist tradition of Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Franz Kafka, etc. What the audience sees outside is a mirror of the

intense internal conflict that is more damaging than what is externally dramatised.

Clay's crisis epitomises the conflict in the minds of all African American intellectual middle class who betray their common ethnic and community consciousness and identity.

3.3.2 Plot and Characterisation

The plots of both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are short but horrifyingly gripping and electric. Both plays are acted in very quick succession; lasting not more than forty minutes each.

Dutchman, a one-act play, is divided into two short scenes. The drama introduces two clear-cut protagonists: Clay, a twenty-year old Negro middleclass intellectual, and Lula, a thirty-year old white bohemian liberal; but coquettishly flirtatious. It is at the end of the play that the divide of protagonist and antagonist are established. To the black members of the audience, Clay is the protagonist (the victim), while Lula is the antagonist (the villain). However, it is plausible that to the white members of the audience Lula could be the protagonist representing the 'virtues' and 'values' of white mainstream culture, while Clay the antagonist becomes the damnable non-conformist.

The plot unveils an encounter between Clay and Lula on a New York subway train. Eating her apples unceasingly, Lula engages Clay in erotic sexual talks:

LULA: Weren't you staring at me through the window? At the last stop?

CLAY: Staring at you? What do you mean?

LULA:…. But only after I'd turned around and saw you staring through that window down in the vicinity of my ass and legs (*Oliver and Sills,* ed.,:216 – 217).

As their talks continue, Lula asks Clay" You think I want to pick you up, get you to take me somewhere and screw me, huh?" But Clay does not take her serious as her efforts at seducing him seem to fail. Following Lula's insistence, Clay agrees to take her to a party that he plans to attend that night. Lula's claim of knowing Clay ends up in a confession, which exposes the traditional white society's stereotyping of all blacks as archetypes. According to Lula, " I told you I didn't know anything about you - - - you're a well-known type." Clay retorts, "Really?" Then Lula admits, "Or at least I know the type very well." (*Oliver and Sills,* ed.,: 219).

While Lula expresses the age-long stereotype and attitude of all white people toward blacks, as an individual, she confesses not knowing Clay as a person. In her own words, "I lie a lot. (smiling.) It helps me control the world". She is not only a liar and flirtatious, Lula is dangerously predatory:

LULA: And with my apple-eating hand, I push open the door and lead you, my tender big-eyed prey, into my … God, what can I call it… into my hovel (*Oliver and S*ills, ed.,:224)..

Clay rejects Lula's overtures and tantrums, as a result she castigates him and calls him: **"**You middle-class black bastard…. Clay, you liver-lipped white man…. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me, Clay" (*Oliver and Sills,* ed.,: 227).

But disgusted and frustrated, Lula writes off Clay as an "Uncle Tom. Thomas Woolly-head" who is "afraid of white people. And your father was. Uncle Tom Big Lip!" However, Lula succeeds in welling up the anger and hatred in Clay. He reacts emotionally and viciously as he:

> (slaps her as hard as he can, across the mouth. Lula's head bangs against the back of the seat. When she raises it again, Clay slaps her again). Now shut up and let me talk…. Shit, you don't have any sense, Lula, nor feelings either. I could murder you now…. Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device (*Oliver and Sills, ed.*,: 229).

After Clay's tirade, Lula tells him: (Her voice takes on a different, more business-like quality). "I've heard enough". Then Clay,

> (Reaching for his books.) "I bet you have. I guess I better collect my stuff and get off this train. Looks like we won't be acting out that little pageant you outlined before" Angrily, Lula replies, "No. We won't. You're right about that, at least (*Oliver and Sills, ed*.,:230).

Unfortunately, however, as Clay bends over to collect his books, Lula stabs him twice in the chest and he *"slumps across her knees";* while other passengers look on passively. Lula directs these hapless passengers to throw

out Clay's body. Then, a young Negro passenger walks into the train. Lula glances at him seductively with the intention of re-enacting the Clay saga over again.

The plot of *The Slave* is slightly structured differently from *Dutchman* in the sense that, although equally a short play, it is constructed as a two-act play with a Prologue. *The Slave* is set in Bradford Easley's home; a former professor and teacher to Walker Vessels, presently the husband to Grace. Walker is a "tall, thin Negro about forty", a middle-class intellectual, a literary artist and a revolutionary. Grace on the other hand is Walker's ex-wife, "a blonde woman …. Small, thin, beautiful." Both Easley and Grace are white. Grace has two daughters from her marriage with Walker.

The Prologue is a long monologue rendered by Walker Vessels as it sets the mood and expectations in the play. According to Theodore Hudson (1973) the Prologue establishes Walker's "uncertainty about himself" while at the same time it creates leverage of opinion among members of the audience. Walker's uncertainty is captured in the following lines of the play text:

> WALKER: I am much older than I look - - - or may be much younger. Whatever I am or seem - - - to you, then let that rest. But figure, still, that you might not be right. Figure, still, that you might be lying - - - to save yourself. Or myself's image, which might get you crawling like a thirsty dog, for the meanest of drying streams. The meanest of ideas (44).

All through the Prologue Walker fails to adopt a definite position, but the atmosphere so created is encapsulated in frustration, anger, feeling of vengeance, and death. He articulates his feelings further:

WALKER: Whatever the core of our lives. Whatever the deceit. We live where we are, and seek nothing but ourselves. We are liars, and we are murderers. We invent death for others. Stop their pulse publicly (43).

Act one of the play transports the audience to the home of the Easley's. The time is night. Walker finds himself in the home uninvited because according to him, he stopped by to "see how the other half lives", referring to his two daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth. But the Easley's are not comfortable with his presence in their home because he has transformed into a "maniac murderer" and revolutionary who set for himself and his fellow black brothers the agenda of killing all white people. The argument that ensues exposes the Easley's as antagonistic and non-supportive of the on-going revolution. While the exchanges go on, Walker continues to 'drown' himself in alcoholic drinks until he gets drunk. Both sides rationalize their positions on the goings-on: the Easleys condemn the revolution because it can never usher any changes; while Walker supports it as the only sane thing that can usher in changes. Walker explains that himself and others like him are "crying out against three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals".

Grace tells Walker that she left him and took away the two children because he had become crazy and engaged in "stupid ugly killing." The philosophical kernel and idealism associated with the liberation movement continue to occupy the three characters. In Act two, the argument gets to a crescendo that finally culminates into a scuffle between Easley and Walker. In the end, Easley is killed by Walker. The explosion continues, and gets closer to the house. At last, the explosion hits the house and knocks down both Grace and Walker. Grace dies having been hit by a beam across the chest. Though Walker gets badly hurt, he survives the explosion. At the end

of the play, having thought the children dead, "A sudden aggravated silence, and then there is a child heard crying and screaming as loud as it can" (*The Slave*:88).

The explosion in the play is very significant on metaphorical level because it signifies a departure from the past; a symbolic obliteration of the past and its legacy of oppression which the Black Arts sought to destroy. It is only by destroying and repudiating the white idea that African Americans can establish that proud cultural identity and manhood. The symbolism goes further that despite the explosion that kills Grace, her two daughters and Walker survive. The survival of the children portends a new generation and construction of new identity arising from the severance of linkage with the white world which "will soon begin to be peopled with new kinds of heroes" (LeRoi Jones, "The Revolutionary Theatre", 1965).

The relationship of character and plot is entwined in the sense that it is characters that unfold the plot of a play. Characters that we watch in both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are not ordinary individuals acting out the stories of their lives and experiences. They represent their race. This artistic construct by Baraka differs because of its aesthetic functionality which serves as a weapon for social change and is radically different from the Western concept of art as an individualist pursuit serving the purpose of "art for art sake". This proviso demonstrates the ideology of Baraka's theatre which according to him, is a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre. The African America character is endowed with the consciousness of his group and community survival, and not just the 'self' The 'self' exists because the 'we' is the fulcrum upon which the 'self' stands.

Be this as it may, neither Clay nor Walker are mere individuals. Both symbolise their race and community. They also epitomise the struggle for self-

determination, self – assertiveness, freedom and democracy which construct their distinct identity and citizenship.

If, as Baraka opines that the artist should be the chronicler of his emotional history, then Clay and Walker succeed in chronicling the collective emotional history of the struggles of all African Americans, and not individual struggles. In doing this the theatre must be taken to the community because it belongs to them, more so that it mirrors their collective vision, struggles, dreams and aspirations, etc.

Amiri Baraka does not accept the view that *Dutchman* is casted in symbolism, but he is quick to admit that the play is about hatred and about the difficulty of becoming a man in America (Gibson, 1970:208). It is not possible not to ascribe symbolic interpretation or analysis to *Dutchman.* On the surface or literal plane, Clay and Lula are ordinary characters, though black (Clay) and white (Lula), they find themselves entangled in the enactment of deep-seated passion of mutual race-hate. To this end they are symbolic of the world-view shared by each racial group – they represent the grave racial divide that plagues America.

Both characters, in espousing the plot of the play, expose the hypocrisy and contradictions that exist in America. Clay relives the struggle for identity and citizenship, and the struggle for the restoration of his manhood which had been castrated. The restoration of this manhood and identity is achieved in Clay's final denouncement of his long-standing romance with white America, especially his obsession with the white woman. According to Clay,

> I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would begin to understand me … if Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain

> about the world. No metaphors. No grunts….Money, Power Luxury. Crazy Niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane (*Oliver and* Sills, ed.,:230).

This monologue ushers in a rejuvenated Clay who finally assumes his full identity through his recognition of who he is and the overthrow of the yoke of oppression. Not comfortable that Clay is rejuvenated, Lula kills him. A tragedy of a youngman being exhumed from the graveyard of oppression to become himself, but gets killed in the twilight of his age. By this singular act, Clay remains a victim who is yet to realise himself. In this role, Clay is the African American middle class who finds it difficult to repudiate the white world and its values.

Clay and Lula are presented in the play as racial archetypes who transform into prototypes at the end of the play. Significantly, Clay's tirade is the only serious dramatic action precipitated by tension which culminated in his death. It was this tragic action of the death of Clay that transform both Clay and Lula into racial prototypes, with Clay emerging both as the protagonist and the victim while Lula, now the antagonist becomes the oppressor, murderer, and a villain.

Dutchman therefore establishes the scenario of the African American middle class intellectual, having betrayed himself and his people for too long vents the deep- seated rage, anger and the hatred of the 'white thing', sees the need to claim his manhood and identity, and the establishment of the universality of his citizenship and community.

Lula, according to Thaddeus Martin, in his essay *"Dutchman Reconsidered",* "is the symbol of all the arrogance inherent in whiteness and as such, embodies all its trappings" (cited in *"blackman's burden",* unauthored internet material, page 4). Despite Clay's outbursts, Lula tells him that he cannot escape his heritage of slavery, while neither she can be free from her heritage of oppression. Lula represents boisterous and murderous America. In fact, Lula is America, with all its trappings; the America that seeks to lure black people into her dungeon of destruction having cuckolded him into her 'hovel'. Critics once observed that "Lula is too crazy, extreme, neurotic", to which Baraka was quoted as having said that

> You remember America, don't you, where they have unsolved murders happening before your eyes on television? How crazy, extreme, neurotic, does that sound? Lula, for all her alleged insanity, just barely reflects the insanity of this hideous place (Gibson: 210) .

Clay, for failing to murder the 'white thing', gets himself murdered. For failling to murder, Clay "chooses instead to stay in his insanity, to deny his blackness, to deny the murder that would liberate him" (Gibson: 209). By this singular act, Clay dies unfulfilled, a victim of a dream deferred.

The African American middle class should be reminded of what Baraka said in one of his poems entitled **Black People:**

> … We must make our own
> World, man, our own world, and we cannot
> do this unless the white man
> is dead. Let's get together and kill him my
> man, lets get to gather the fruit
> of the sun, let's make a world we want black

children to grow and learn in….

Neal argues that Baraka never preached equality, but "the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas and white ways of looking at the world" (Larry Neal, *"The Black Arts Movement"*) which will create a black front that will eventually usher in 'a nation within a nation.

If *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are considered to be 'duology' two plays whose plots flow from one to the other, then it is credible and logical to assert that Walker in *The Slave* is Clay reincarnated. Here we see the revolution whose seed was sown by Clay in *Dutchman* blossom in Walker.

Walker Vessels is a revolutionary middle class intellectual who is confronted with the sin of individualism and the guilt of his past flirtation with 'white thing' and the white idea of the world. This bitter realisation sets him committed to destroying that slave past so as to enable him create a new 'being' and a new existence.

Suffice it to say that *The Slave* is phantasmagoric in form, it provides a glimpse into the inner drama that takes place in Baraka's mind. He creates a hero and a protagonist in Walker in order to enact the practices of the tenets of the revolutionary theatre. This play remains a stage enactment or Baraka's mindset because in truth, even the clamour by Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, etc, never yielded political revolution of the magnitude that we see in the play. But the world of the play provides material for polemics.

The message in the play is that because of racism, oppression, and denigration of the African American, the need to overthrow the hegemonic

structure becomes uncompromising. But this overthrow must assume a radical socialist revolution, which goes on in the play. While Walker is excited and enjoys the revolution because his side is winning, the white liberals, represented by Easley and Grace, rise up against it because it is killing white people. This is a case of the oppressor not willing to relinquish his hold on power willingly unless by force of arms. What is presented also is the truth that even so-called liberal whites harbour race-hate against blacks. What is more, those white liberals who think they know blacks are fooling themselves. We also get to know that despite the level of affinity between black male and white female, there is an outpouring of love-hate passion between them. The lesson seems to be that white is white and black is black no matter the degree or level of fraternity and affinity.

These explain why Walker is "… crying out against three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals". He therefore has to preach "hate the white man… get the white man off our backs…if necessary, kill the white man for our rights…."(*Dutchman* and *The Slave*, 1964:71). Nevertheless, the rights for which Walker is prepared to kill the white man in order to reclaim are Freedom, Manhood, Dignity, Self-determination, his erstwhile lost identity, and above all his full citizenship. He asks to be treated as a human being with all the dignity, respect and self-esteem due all civilised people.

Although Easiey's speech betrays the monopoly of the white power structure that seeks to perpetuate the oppression, dehumanisation, and denigration of the African American, Walter believes that the white power

structure, with all its pretentious veneer of civilisation, philosophy, and sciences, shall be pulled down while at the same time white monopoly too should stop. Walker tells Easley that "The point is that you had your chance, darling, now these other folks have theirs" (*Dutchman* and *The Slave*:73). Or, as contained in the message of the Black Manifesto (James Foreman's address to the National Economic Development Conference at Detroit, Michigan, 1969), "We must boldly go out and attack the white Western world at its power centers" (Floyd B. Barbour, ed, 1970:30). The dramatic dialogue and action in the play portray Walker as a loyal disciple of the Revolutionary Theatre and the Black Manifesto.

Walker is not an individual confronting his fate lonesome. He represents the wide gamut of the African American ethnic/racial nationality and by extension, the entire black world that is confronted with gruesome racism, segregation, and discrimination as well as oppression in the "internal colony of the United States"; the dialectics of the colonised and the coloniser on the African continent and elsewhere in the diasporic world. Larry Neal argues that

> This confrontation between the black radical and the white liberal is symbolic of larger confrontations occurring between Third World and Western society. It is a confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized, the slave master and the slave (cited in Angelyn Mitchell, 1994:6).

The scenario between Easley and Walker seems to advance the so-called innate cultural and political superiority of the white man over the black man. But Walker lampoons a civilisation that is riddled with violence and murder.

He realizes that the only elixir by which African Americans can survive turbulence of oppression in America is to organise themselves as an ethnic block, united and cohesive enough to fight the white power structure. 'The Basic Tenets of Revolutionary Black Nationalism', Article 2, provides inter alia:

> African Americans constitute an internal colony of the United States, an oppressed nation situated within the boundaries of the oppressing nation, white America (Barbour: 308).

Nevertheless, against the backdrop of this realisation what needs be done is

> As an internal colony situated within the most powerful imperialist force in history - the United States - African Americans and their allies have a key strategic role to play in the approaching world-wide revolution: the defeat of imperialism at its very source (Article 13; p.301).

With the murder of Easley and the death of Grace, Walker has been able to overcome his inner contradictions: a craving after the 'white thing' and the expurgation of his double consciousness. By killing Easley, Walker symbolically inflicts a political blow on the white establishment structure, while Grace's death symbolises the end of craving for the 'white thing'; the white female flesh. With these two actions taken, Walker, indeed, the African America middle class has reconciled with his ethnic identity and is equally free from mental enslavement.

3.3.3 The Middle Class Syndrome

The seed of fractured identity construction among African Americans was sown on the plantations of the South when slaves were markedly identified as 'field slaves' and 'house slaves'. House slaves enjoyed privileges because of their social closeness to the master which flowered close social interactions. Mostly they served as domestics, gardeners, stevedores, etc. On the other hand, field slaves were subjected to the most excruciating experiences of fieldwork and dehumanisation. This arrangement placed the house slave on a higher social pedestal thereby instilling him a feeling of superiority over the field slave.

In addition to the scenario painted above, the movement of freedmen and slaves to Northern cities either to escape slavery or in search for the 'good life' or both crystallised into the rise of the middle class. Those who constitute the middle class have the advantage of better education which places them on better job prospects than the less fortunate members of the ethnic group.

This negative development made it impossible for the collective of African Americans to evolve a commonly acceptable culture-rooted identity. Because of its historical origin, the middle class tends to identify more with the white mainstream culture and its value system than with the black ethnic communities. Gibson (1970:91) captures the historical origin of this absence of common identity in his titled essay *"The Negro: An Essay on Definition"* when he asserts that

> Those cultural elements responsible for internal cohesion of any ethnic group were consciously eliminated by the slave trader and slave masters.

Gibson further rationalises that the African American middle class has no cultural basis for identifying with the lower class because those basis do not exist. This is so because, as pointed out earlier, the slave masters destroyed the flowering of unity among the slaves right on the plantations. In truth, it is not that the cultural basis for unity does not exist at all, but the middle class deliberately sees it as disdainful in line with their leanings toward Euro – American values.

Paradoxically, the middle class who is economically, educationally, politically, and socially privileged and insulated than the lower class African Americans is a tragic figure. He is a tragic persona because he acquires dual identities which he must maintain and reconcile: one as a black man, and the other as on American. This tragedy is further exacerbated by what Butterfield (1974) calls "a kind of cultural schizophrenia" where he strives to "discover roots in a country which does not accept him as a human being" (94). He is two individual encapsulated in one: "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, quoted in Butterfield:95). What is worse still, as the middle class climbs up the ladder of success "he is more and more removed from the black masses; the gulf increases between himself and his own people", while at the same time, no matter the level of his success and achievements, "he can never wholly enter the white American mainstream because of his color" (Butterfield: 95).

The African American middle class intellectual must contrive "to attain self- conscious manhood" and "to merge his double self into a better and truer

self". He cannot remain, in Franz Fanon's construction, a black man in white skin wearing a white mask. He is not only divided against himself, but is doomed to alienation from both worlds. The middle class must either wholly identify and assert black identity, or be subverted to mainstream assimilation.

Clay in *Dutchman* fails to assert his black identity and manhood when he should have clobbered Lula. For this failure he gets killed. But Walker, the assumed reincarnate of Clay in *The Slave* realises this need to sever links with the past, decides on a radical pathology of self-cleansing and exorcism, parts ways with his erstwhile white wife, Grace, initiates a bloody physical revolution against the white establishment structure, kills Easley, while Grace gets consumed in the explosion that accompanied the revolution.

Clay in *Dutchman* is a middle class intellectual whose tragic death in the hands of Lula the temptress and flirtatious murderer resulted from the dilemma of his being black and accepting his identity as such, and the presumptuousness of his identification with the glamour of the white world and the irresistibility of the 'white thing' white female flesh. In one of their several banters:

> LULA: Don't get smart with me, Buster, I know you like the palm of my hand.
>
> CLAY: The one you eat the apples with?
>
> LULA: Yeh…. [Looks at him.] Also… the same hand I unbutton my dress, or let my skirt fail down. Same hand. Lover (*Oliver and Sills,* ed., 1971:221)

This is an allusion to the attractions of the middle class to the externalities of the white woman. Even his mode of dressing betrays his social class as Lula observes:

LULA: What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that?…. Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by …. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard.

CLAY: My grandfather was a night watchman (*Oliver and Sills,* ed.,: 222).

Metaphorically and psychologically, Clay oppresses himself within a culture that does not recognise him as a human being; yet he insists he must belong there. As if Clay's betrayal of his black identity was not enough,. Lula once again reminds him; "I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger …. A black Baudelaire." It is quite true that the middle class proclivity towards Western culture and values distances him from being "a black nigger." The only instance when he remembers that he is "a black nigger" is when there is "the mutual feeling of defense against a threatening white society" (Shuman: 93).

The high point of this dialectic is advanced in Lula's final dialogue in scene one. Having erotically subdued Clay, she feels she should provide him a protective cover of anonymity from his own people:

LULA: And we'll pretend the people cannot see you. That is, the citizens. And that you are free of your own history. And I am free of my history. We'll pretend that we are both anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails (*Oliver and Sills,* ed.,:223).

Lula is gory and ogrish in her advances and eroticism. It would appear she is luring Clay into final destination of his destruction. Being free of Clay's history could mean

being rid of his humanity, history, and ethnic identity; which are the features of the middle class. When Lula says that she too will be free of her history, it is a mockery of African American middle class who is ashamed of his history. White people will never wish to be free of their history because they are proud of their imperial conquests, civilisation, and the enslavement of the African. Rather, they wish to perpetuate the subjugation of black people forever as it suits their whims and caprices.

Nevertheless, Clay cannot continue in his "two-ness". He must extricate himself of one 'self' and live his real self or be doomed eternally. If Clay the middle class must assert his black identity then he must maintain and struggle to reconcile the two contradictory identities: one as a black person, the other as an American (Butterfield: 94).

Amiri Baraka, quoted in Hudson (1973:48), has these words for the African American middle class:

> The black middle class, from its inception (possibly ten seconds after the first Africans were herded off the boat) has formed almost exclusively around the proposition that it is better not to be black in a country where being black is a liability. All the main roads into America have always been fashioned by the members of the middle class (not as products of a separate culture, but as vague, featureless Americans)…. The black middle class wanted no sub-culture, nothing that could connect them with the poor black man or the slave.

Having realised the futility of refusing "to be black in a country where being black is a liability", Clay took the gauntlet and renounced Lula (symbolic of the white thing) who has been the ghost of the past; and a burden of the middle class. He "also let go the white ideals that have shaped his de-evolution,

dooming him to slave ships… perpetually." In his final blow to the white thing and white ideals, Clay, in an emotion-laden high-pitch rage tells Lula: "II rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being…. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device (*Oliver and Sills,* ed., :229).

Again, in a plain and direct revolutionary tirade, Clay tells her:

> CLAY: They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own. They'll cut your throats, and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation (*Oliver and Sills,* ed., :230).

Because of his middle class persuasion, Clay finds it difficult to extricate himself of the 'white man' within him. He believes that bottling the 'white man' inside him qualifies him to assert equality with the white man. Clay's identification with Lula, and allowing her to underscore his manhood betrays his black identity and subverts his personality and his essence. This adornment of the white woman makes it difficult for the African American middle class to identify with the masses of the lower class.

Clay's death also largely results from the individuality of the black middle class that distances him from the collectivity of the ethnic black community. He fails to see his ethnic group as his security and his protection. Just when he realises this and asserts his manhood and identification with his ethnic group, Lula kills him because she sees Clay as a dangerous betrayer.

Just then Clay is murdered by Lula 'for failing now' to compromise between his identity on one hand and the white people's idea of the world (with all its attendant glamour). But he succeeds in extricating himself while asserting himself and the restoration of his manhood and dignity before he gets killed. It is therefore logical to aver that Clay realised his manhood posthumously although he does not live to savour the beauty of the Spirit.

Undoubtedly, obsession with white women is one of the grave predicaments of the African American middle class. As such, his ultimate desire is to possess the white woman as the only qualifier for equality with the white man.

Unlike Clay, Walker Vessels in *The Slave* is not just another middle class, he is another victim of the American world. Middle-class and middle age inordinate revolutionary, Walker realises from the onset the need to destroy the white concept of the world and the white thing in order to assert himself and reclaim his identity, citizenship, freedom, and manhood. Against this necessity, he does not go through the romantic theatrics associated with Clay and Lula. The confrontation between Walker and Easleys symbolise a confrontation on a national level between blacks and whites which dates back to the post-Reconstruction era till date. The crux of the dialectics is African Americans' search for nationally rooted cultural identity and citizenship while on the other hand, the desire of the white power structure to frustrate this struggle.

Walker tells his ex-wife, Grace, that his hatred for white people is largely because white people have been oppressing his own people for over

three hundred years: "I was crying against three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals". (*Dutchman* and *The Slave*:72). Even when Grace seeks to explain why she took away the children and left; according to her, "I left you… and took the girls because you'd gone crazy. You're crazy now. This stupid ugly killing you've started will never do anything, for anybody" (*Dutchman* and *The Slave*:68). But contrary to her explanation, Walker believes that Grace left him because "I was preaching hate the white man… get the white man off out backs … if necessary, kill the white man for our rights" (71).

Easley, the professor of literature is a liberal white; and like all liberals, he claims knowledge of African Americans as much as he professes love and sympathy for them. But pushed so hard by forces of change, he exposes the deep-seated hatred that all whites harbour against blacks. What is more, he openly declares their naïve belief in the innate incapacity of the black man:

> EASLEY: You're so wrong about everything. So terribly, sickeningly wrong. What can you change? What do you hope to change? Do you think Negroes are better people than whites… that they can govern society better than whites? That they'll be more judicious or more tolerant? (*Dutchman* and *The Slave*:73)

Grace is Walker's ex-white wife. Easley was his former literature professor. They both represent his past which he now sets out to destroy in order to rid himself of the ghost of double-dealing, double-ness, and vague featurelessness. According to Larry Neal, (cited in Angelyn Mitchell: 5) "For it is the past, with all of its painful memories, that is really the enemy of the revolutionary. It is

impossible to move until history is either recreated or comprehended" (Mitchell:5). Easley and Grace truly show themselves as enemies of change and enemies of the ongoing revolution. To succeed, they must be destroyed so as to usher in change.

At the bottom of the middle class difficulty in identifying with the masses of African Americans is his assimilationist predilection which is symbolised in his possession of the white woman. This assimilation unfortunately tends to distance him from his ethnic collectives. According to Baraka,

> the white woman is not the only burden the Black man must shed for his own survival sake. He must also let go of the white ideal that have shaped his de-evolution, dooming him to slave ships … perpetually (Harris, ed., 2000).

It is also Baraka's clarion call that all middle class, and indeed all African Americans should emulate Walker by getting rid of double consciousness, double identity, and claim their black identity even as they continue to remain an ethnic colony in America. Above submission is the only way that African American middle class will remain relevant in identifying with its ethnic community as one people united in a resolve to forge positive changes and make America a better place for themselves and their children as recognised and acceptable citizens.

Unlike Clay, as a compliance to Baraka's directive to the African American middle class to sever links with the white thing, Walker parted ways with Grace, his ex-white wife. He does not only sever links with Easley, his

former professor, but he kills him too. But he identifies with his two daughters who presumably survive the explosion. Critics often tend to position Walker's action as reflection of Amiri Baraka's separation from Hettie, his ex-Jewish wife. By this separation, Walker frees himself of the yoke of past oppression. He sees himself within the context of new identity and citizenship that is liberational.

3.3.4 Heritage of Slavery and Oppression (Paternalism)

The two dialectical blocks that are at once oppositional to each other which define the nature and flow of discourse and relationship between black and white in the United States and elsewhere in the black diasporic world are the heritage of slavery and the heritage of oppression. Simply put, the institution of racism which set humans apart on a hierarchy of inferior and superior, humans and non-humans, seeks perpetual oppression of African Americans. This dialectic assumes an epic dimension when blacks endeavour to overthrow the yoke of slavery and servitude, but whites struggle harder to fasten the noose of slavery and servitude much tighter in their favour.

From the beginning of slavery which physically subjugated the African and stripped him of his erstwhile identity, citizenship, manhood, dignity, and freedom; the white slave master and his forebears engaged the African slave and his descendants in a psychological warfare of disproportionate indoctrination. The slave owner and the white Anglo-American establishment structure propagated the presumed notion of the natural inferiority of the

African American. For example, David Hume, quoted in Wilfred Cartey (1970) asserts that

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, or even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation (2).

Slaves were considered as "insensitive bags of coal, brutish, animal, not human" who could be easily disposed off. Because of this low level status assigned to the slave, he was subjected to the most heinous and inhuman cruelty of all time. Imagine for a moment a slave owner, a so-called Christian smearing the genitals of his slave "with brandy and his buttocks with salt and tobacco." Tortures like these and even worse ones caused "the Negro to secrete a deep hatred, a dark loathing for the whiteman" (Cartey:5). Against the benefit of historical antecedents, the African American developed into a mountain of "accumulated resentment and hostility toward white condescension and racism" (Butterfield: 256) and the realisation on his own part for the need to achieve economic independence, freedom, and the need to participate actively in organisations that fight for the interests of black people.

Heritage of slavery and oppression, or paternalism as a doctrine places the African American in a subordinate condition of a 'child' who would never attain manhood. He therefore remains servile, child-like, stupid, and meek. No matter how old the African American is, in the eye of the white man, he remains a child who must be led by the hand and nurtured. This scenario developed against the background of the castration of his manhood. The mortal

fear that the white man harbours is to enable the African American reclaim his manhood because reclaiming his manhood is synonymous with the granting and recognition of equality and full-citizenship. Nevertheless, for the African American to be able to negotiate and reconstruct his decimated identity and citizenship, he must break the cocoon of this oppressive doctrine and reclaim his manhood. This struggle to reclaim manhood is central to both *Dutchman* and *The Slave.*

Clay in *Dutchman* metaphorises the African American middle class who is ashamed of his slave heritage because of its inglorious past. But unfortunately for Clay this past is everywhere (David Lowenthal: 1985) like one's looming shadow. Lowenthal (1985) argues that the past is integral to our sense of identity; because the sureness of "I was" is a necessary component of the sureness of "I am' as much as "Ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value" (41). It is worthy of noting that all humans and civilisations are products of the womb of the past. On this note identities are constructed on the platform of history which could either be nostalgic or deprecatory and ignoble. Martin Doberman, in an essay titled *"History and Theatre"* reminds us that "…the totality of past experience does include more than despair and defeat; there is material in history which chronicles achievement and possibility" (cited in Patterson, ed, 1967:204).

Therefore, in wishing away his considered ignoble past, Clay garbed himself in a fashion reminiscent of the slave master's, which ironically is a dreaded reminder of the slave heritage of oppression. But Lula takes Clay up

on this seeming duality and hypocrisy: The implications of Lula's attack on Clay are multidimensional. One, it transports Clay back to the past; the slave era where he is presently reliving the substitution of the identity of the slave master. Secondly, because Clay's "father was a slave", he could not have gone to Harvard because Harvard is a citadel of white civilization and learning. Thirdly, three-button jacket evinces a metaphor of an oppressive tradition of the slave master to which Clay does not belong. The consequence of these narratives is that because Clay comes from a nationality of slave ancestry, he does not qualify for the bestowal of citizenship status. As such, he is a diaspora who should be condemned to perpetual slave status in the United States because he is not a bonafide citizen.

The tragedy that we see in Clay is in his attempts at shaking off the heritage of slavery, which lead him severally to assume identities that are alien to his black self. Lula once again retorts:

LULA: And who did you think you were? Who do you think you are now?

CLAY: Well, in college I thought I was Baudelaire. But I've slowed down since.

LULA: I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger…. A black Baudelaire.

CLAY: That's right (*Oliver and Sills, ed*., :222).

Amiri Baraka does not create Clay to situate him within a stage where he gloats over his burden of a slave heritage or to consume in the web of the white world. Baraka expects that Clay the hero and victim be "transformed from a detached individual whose private consciousness" should "reform" and cast him into "a participatory member of communal ceremony which affirms a shared vision" (Benston, Kimberly W., 2000:29).

In scene two, Clay tears off the barricade of the slave heritage as signification of "impulses both radical and recuperative, visionary and strategic, iconoclastic and redemptive" (Kimberly:25). This signifier establishes Clay's reawakened self-consciousness, historical awareness, and public assertiveness with restorative identity anchored on communal and political action:

> CLAY: And you tell this to your father, who's probably the kind of man who needs to know at once. So he can plan ahead. Tell him not to preach so much rationalism and cold logic to these niggers. Let them alone. Let them sing curses at you in code and see your filth as simple lack of style. Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or may be they'll begin to listen (*Oliver and Sills, ed.,*: 230).

Clay tears the hood off Lula's face, but Lula, unable to accommodate the shame and the prospect of 'a slave' re-claiming his freedom and manhood, kills him. This act of killing is an affirmation and symptomatic of the steel resolve of the white mainstream establishment structure to maintain its hold on the oppression of the African American, and the world at large.

Until Clay's restoration and rejuvenation, he suffered a great deal of what Louis Pratt (1978) calls grave alienation and estrangement which leads him to self-pity, and self- condemnation of his total self. Consequently, his final hostility, hate, and rage give vent to the final burst of emotion of anger, which liberate him from the clutches of 'whitery'. By this singular action, Clay goes through redemptive, iconoclastic and cathartic rebirth of new self and restored identity.

While Clay goes through painful regurgitation of slave hangover through unexpended memory, Walker in *The Slave* is a surrogate of the slave heritage. This positioning of slave identity is captured in the Prologue and at the end of the drama. These two scenes of his slave character enactment exorcise and typify the general down-cast emotional and psychological condition of all African Americans in America. The message therefore is for the African American, no matter the pinnacle of achievement and attainment in life, he remains unequivocally a slave because America is a slave society. But Walker rejects this white opinion of the African American stigmatisation; so when he emerges in Act one of the play, he is a revolutionary determined to destroy and kill the slave heritage which seek to haunt and hunt all African Americans for "three hundred years".

Easley and Grace, both metaphors of the heritage of oppression fail to recognise the renewed identity that Walter has assumed – a liberational identity of freedom, active citizenship, and manhood. To force change, Walker must EXPOSE! ATTACK and ACCUSE the white base and the superstructure; if need be, kill them because this is the only way to restore sanity, beauty and values in the world. The slave ideology of the white man must give way to the redemptive, "corrective homeopathic, and pedagogical" (Benston:33) Spirit of African American humanism.

The symbolic meaning or interpretation in the slave character at the end of *The Slave* is the irrepressive truth that the slave heritage, having been ingrained deeply in the psyche and psychology of the African American will

continue to torment him as a constant reminder of his past history and make it near-impossible to reclaim his manhood and identity. This fact, painful as it is, constitutes a decimal point in the life of all African Americans. Against the backdrop of this past history, the African American constructed and constituted the communitarian/civic republican citizenship, which is ethnically separate but distinct. As a separate and ethnically/ culturally distinct nationality, the desire is the bestowal of rights which should be guaranteed and protected by the nation-state. In addition, as communitarian/civic republican citizens, they demand to have voice, and that this voice should be heard through the agency of active citizens with rights to total participation in the democratic practices within their communities, the nation and in global concerns.

3.3.5 Community and Communal Consciousness

The construction of citizenship and identity by African Americans revolve around the consciousness of the community and groupism as pivot and pillar upon which every community member leans and draws support and strength. Members see themselves as "We" rather than the individualistic 'I'. This sociological premise provides agency for the articulation of the tenets of the Black Arts and Black theatre practices; a theatre which, according to Amiri Baraka, "The Revolutionary Theatre should force change; it should be change" (Neal, cited in Gibson, 1970:216).

The thinking is that African American theatre (the Black theatre) should be a direct antithesis to the barren mainstream theatre which is constituted as

"escapist, refusing to confront concrete reality" (Gilson:216). In its sterility and escapism, it serves no redeeming social value. Rather, it glorifies the dictum of "art for art sake." Neal (Gibson:217) puts it succinctly that

> the theatre of LeRoi Jones is a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre. It is primarily a theatre of the Spirit, confronting the Black man in his interaction with his brothers and with the white thing.

One avant-garde feature of the Black theatre is that it"… dissolves traditional divisions between actor and spectator, self and other, enacted text and material context" (Benston, 2000:29) in its dramaturgy so that it anchors on functionality and relevance to its immediate community. The identification of this theatre with its host community cultivates in members a consciousness of self-identification, a performance of 'our theatre', of historical dialectics, of realities and dreams, and of hope and despair. So, "The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them reality" in addition to

> Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are brothers of victims, and that they themselves are victims, if they are blood brothers ("The Revolutionary Theatre", curled from *Liberator,* July, 1965, pp. 4 – 6).

Positioning Clay and Walker within the ambience of Baraka's "Revolutionary Theatre" preachification, do these characters qualify as true representatives or embodiments of the masses of African Americans in the ghetto communities? Do they, through their performance, in anyway advance the cause and course of active communitarian citizenship and the construction

of acceptable and recognisable identity? Do they constitute role models? Or, do they provide a trope for heroism and high moral standard deserving of political and social action?

One thing that alienates Clay and Walker from the masses of the ghetto communities is their middle class predilection which aligns them more with the white liberal class and their wanton passion for "the white thing". Both are victims of vicious racism and oppression, but by their vantage acquisition of college education and relative comfort on the social hierarchy, they distance themselves from their unfortunate black masses. Clay is the more culpable of this self-distancing, until he goes through painful emotional and psychological redemptive catharsis of 'newness'.

Having gone through this self-exorcism which is a signifier of Neal's "destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas and white ways of looking at the world" (Oliver and Sills, ed., 1971), Clay reclaims the lost identity that was hitherto shrouded in his middle class duality. This singular action also reconciles Clay with his ethnic nationality.

Suffice it to say that Clay's middle class individualism transforms into positive collective group self. "My people's madness", "My people. They don't need me to claim them. They got legs and arms of their own,"…. "They will murder you",…. "They will cut your throats" (*Oliver and Sills*, ed.,:230), all allude to this new-found community consciousness.

Walker on the other hand represents the revolutionary radicalism and militancy of the Revolutionary Theatre and the ideology of the Black Panther

Party which advocated arms struggle against America as strategy for securing black freedom and citizenship. The action agenda is the creation of a separate political nation that is ethnically constituted within America. The venerable Malcolm X was an icon of this militaristic ideology. Mazrui (2002) believes that,

> Philosophically Malcolm was prepared to accept violence and perhaps even terrorism, provided the cause was morally right. After all, the American Revolution itself was a revolution of violence and war (internet material, page 3 of 15).

Walker recognizes the fact that a people's revolution must be championed by the conscious middle class who is enlightened; therefore he should lead such a revolution.

Unfortunately, Walker takes this militaristic revolution too far in 'actually' prosecuting a revolution in which both white and black are killed. Walker certainly is a student of history, political science, and literature. It is possible that his revolutionary instincts derive largely from the cruel treatment of slaves by their white owners – the lyching, the hanging, the burning, etc as well as the state-condoned activities of Ku Klux Klan in the South. These acts of state terrorism against African Americans were possible because the white establishment wield instruments of coercion; they control the military machines, political, and economic power base. They could therefore inflict grave carnage on the African American without a modicum of commensurate retaliation or revenge from the African American community.

In Walker we see threats, taunting, condemnation of white people, murder and blood-letting that excite chilling emotion of fear (no longer hatred) on both sides of the racial divide: mutual fear of revenge. Infact, Walker's murderous escapades transform him beyond humanity into an infernal machine; someone whose human instincts of pity and morality are consigned. Even if Walker is on a revenge mission, as an African American who is presumably a product of the African cosmology, it is expected that the virtues of African humanism, the soul-force, and sublimity, be demonstrated as antipodal to the murderous violence of white people. In this perspective therefore, if Walker had killed only Easley without the revolution at the background, that would have compensated for the killing of Clay by Lula. As such, Easley's death will assuage the killing of Clay. This analysis is premised on the hypothetical conjecture that both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* were scripted as "duology", and not separate and independent plays. In giving credence to this assumption therefore, the young black man who entered the train after Clay's death should have been Walker in *The Slave;* a victim who witnesses the killing of a brother and is now on a revenge mission. As a revenge mission, his killing of Easley would have balanced the racial equation without a surge of hatred and rage.

As a counterpoint to this hatred and killings, Donald P. Costello, in his titled essay, *"Black man as Victim",* denounces Baraka because his philosophy denies the black man the moral superiority over the white man, the moral superiority of nonviolence (Gibson, ed, 1970:213).

From the foregoing however, Walker may not be the model of identity that the black masses of African Americans would want to associate with in this millennium. As such, this drama might as well qualify as a piece of entertainment that was politically relevant in the 1960s – 1970s, but which unfortunately can incite mutual hate and violence. This anxiety probably explains why Langston Hughes derides Baraka by stating that " Both *The Toilet and The* Slave may be taken as serious exercise in masochism and sadism, full of bloody kicks, and better than *The Brig* for thrills" (Patterson: 206). By way of production advise therefore, Hughes has this to offer:

> Therefore, for the sake of today's sensitive Negroes and battered white liberals, I would like to offer the producers at St. Mark's Play house a suggestion –double cast both plays, and alternate performances racially. Every other night let all the present Negro characters be played by white actors, and vice-versa…. In *The Slave* let a bullying white man kick, curse, browbeat and shoot a nice liberal black professor and his wife in their suburban living room (206).

3.3. 6 *Ebonics:* Black American Vernacular English

In the construction of citizenship and black identity, one area of seeming monolithic universality is the development of Black American English; or what Mazrui, Ali A. and Alamin M. (1998) call *"Ebonics,* Black English, African American Vernacular English" (31). The concern in this discourse is not socio-linguistic appreciation or analysis of *Ebonics*, but its relevance, functionality, and above all, its construction as signpost of black ethnic identity that seeks to constitute the African American as separate but distinct. The failure of the

English language to integrate "precludes African Americans from acquiring an 'Anglo' identity". This position could be contested by scholars who hold the view that *Ebonies* developed in America "as a creolized form of English", or still those who hypothesize that Ebonics is "an African based tongue". Quoting Carol A. Blackshire- Belay, Ebonics is "not a dialect of English, even though it uses English words". Within the vortex of this crosscurrent of contestations, Fay Vaughn-Cooke argues that "Ebonics is exclusively an American-grown medium of African Americans which, though essentially a form of America English, sets them apart from white America" (cited in Mazruis: 32- 33).

Whatever the strength of argument for or against *Ebonics,* it remains a form of American English which is associated with its native speakers; the African Americans. Giving credence to the development of *Ebonics*; the Mazruis advance the logic that:

> In the USA, African Americans are about the only minority group whose linguistic heritage has virtually been obliterated by centuries of European enslavement and racial oppression. The struggle about the 'nature' of Ebonics, therefore, must be seen as an aspect of the wider African American struggle for self-determination and (re) possession of their history (34).

Unfortunately too, *Ebonics* is subjected to the crucible of racial-linguistic controversy even among cross-section of African Americans who tend to avoid the socio-economic consequences of being perceived as "different", uphold the dictum that "black speech patterns are simply vulgar folk versions of American English" (Smitherman and Mc Ginnis, in Jones, ed., 1980:135).

Whatever debates or arguments surrounding its acceptability or otherwise, *Ebonics* has become both medium of speech (orature) and literary communication. It is being textualised for reading and stage-crafted for artistic performance expression in oral poetry; drama, and popular culture.

Amiri Baraka however employs *Ebonics* effectively in both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* against the awareness and recognition that it is the communicative medium of the masses of African American people. *Ebonics* expresses their idioms, symbolism, mythology, and iconology clearly. It is therefore not a vulgar folk speech form. According to Hudson (1973), Baraka's choice and use of language is deliberate because "shortly after his first published works, he consciously began to avoid "white" language in favor of "black" idioms, grammar, and syntax" (59), Hudsoin observes further that "This language is characterized by verb-ellipses, reverse meanings, and non-standard superlatives". Baraka's use of what is considered non-standard vulgar folk speech draws the ire of critics who lampoon him as "being obscene, offensive to good taste and morality" (Hudson: 59 - 60).

Langston Hughes criticises this' use of language as "full of verbal excrement" (Patterson, 1967:205) in his essay *"That Boy LeRoi"* (though with specific reference to *The Toilet*). However before Baraka is crucified by apologists of standard English, the question is: Who does he write for? His audience are the community of ghetto dwellers, the drop-outs, the pimps, the hangers-on, drug addicts, criminals, pick-pockets, and other dregs of the society. He also writes for the alienated middle class, and the white

establishment (drawing their attention to the oppression of black people). Commenting on whom Baraka writes for, Hughes, quoted in Gibson (1970:226), describes them as,

> The people who have their nip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round. They live on Seventh Street in Washington or State Street in Chicago and they do not particularly care whether they are like white folks or anybody else. Their joy runs, bang! into ecstasy. Their religion soars to a shout ….These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child.

Clay and Walker's use of language is emotional and electric, but convey meanings in words and body that are comprehensible. The poetics of the language brings out the beauty and the music in it. Above all, the language in both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* is spiced with mental motifs that appeal to the intellect. Ultimately therefore, the baseness, lack of high verbosity, and the absence of standards associated with standard English tradition, make *Ebonics* not only acceptable but broadly intelligible among the communities of African Americans who are the proud owners of the language.

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CHAPTER FOUR

August Wilson: A Compelling Storyteller Exploration of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences*

4.1 Introduction

August Wilson (b. 1945) is a leading American dramatist of the 1980s and 1990s. A product of poor parentage, Wilson, as a poet, playwright, essayist, a self- professed cultural nationalist, is acclaimed to articulate "the black experience in the United States through a vision informed by history" (Michael C. O'Neill, cited in Philip C. Kolin, 1989:518). In his own words, Wilson admits that "I think the black Americans have the most dramatic story of all mankind to tell" (518). As a person possessing strong passion for history he believes that a lot can be learned from the past in order to reorder the future.

Wilson projects African American culture and history as "distinct, deliberately cultivated, collective achievement" (Merelman, 1995:223). This distinct cultivated collectivism is what the then New York City's Mayor David Dinkins ascribes as the concept and identity "African – American" which is a signifier to "white that blacks had their own culture prior to slavery" (Merelman: 123). This collective motif of common historical heritage and culture are dominant in Wilson's plays. In the light of this distinct black cultural identity, Wilson declares that African Americans will not "melt" in the mythological "pot" of America.

As a student of history, Wilson is critically aware of the tortuous road their ancestors traveled to freedom. He believes that the whole story of suffering and humiliation has not been told by their parents. He once told *"The New York Times"* in 1984 that their parents "shield us from the indignities they suffered" (quoted in *"Biography Resource Center"*. Display page: page 10 of 8). Now that the whole story was not told, Wilson sets himself the nationalistic duty "to illuminate that shadowy past with a series of plays, each set in a different decade, that focus on black issues" (page 1 of 8). According to Wilson, drama and theatre constitute portent means of raising his people's consciousness.

The plays that are treated in this chapter are *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences;* each set in different decade of the twentieth century, constituting an exposé of facets of the history and experiences of African Americans in America. The dominant themes revolve around racism and exploitation of African Americans as constituting an ethnic collective within America.

The chapter is divided into four sections, viz: (i) introduction, (ii) August Wilson: the man, his ideology, and vision, (iii) analysis of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and *Fences*, and (iv) general analysis of the study. These textual analysis are treated in line with the framework in chapter three, except that the formative content of Wilson is deeply rooted in history while his style is richly realistic

with free flowing dialogue, language and rancorous humour.

4.2 August Wilson: The Man, His Ideology, and Vision

A man of many parts, infact, a polymath, August Wilson is a self-made man who believes in hard work, "a kind of sensitive, tortured soul" but "gregarious, unpretentious, fond of coffee, cigarettes, and talk" (Barbour, *The Kennedy Center Stagebill*, Nov. 1991:11).

Wilson's white German father, Frederick Kittel, a kind of "absentee father" whom Wilson seldom saw, broke away from his mother, Daisy Wilson Kittle. Following Daisy's remarriage to David Bedford, an African American, the family relocated to a white suburb where Wilson encountered first hand racism early in life. His early encounter with racism and a false allegation of plagiarism levelled against him by his African American history teacher caused the young Wilson to drop out of Gladstone High School at age fifteen. However, because of his steel determination to succeed in life as a writer, Wilson spent time in the local Pittsburgh libraries reading such writers as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, among others. This way he educated himself privately. He is seen within the family circle as "a walking newspaper" for his gift in recounting almost verbatim and graphically things he read in the library.

August Wilson nevertheless took assortment of menial jobs to sustain his reading and writing because according to him, he grew up without a father. He received another sort of education in barbershops, cafes, and street corners where he had first-hand accounts of the experience and sufferings of his people. Immersed in black consciousness Wilson dropped his white father's name and took his mother's maiden name in recognition of her black heritage. It is however arguable to assert that Wilson's name-change resulted from the anger of being rejected by Kittel, his white German father. Just when he needed the necessary paternal love, affection, and support to grow up like other children, Wilson's father turned his back on the family. Paradoxically, from this rejection, and going through private studies and self-sponsorship, Wilson built for himself a towering identity that stands him today as a leading African American dramatist of the late twentieth century.

As a chronicler of the historical experience of the African American in the twentieth century America, his "works explore the heritage and experience of African-Americans, decade-by-decade, over the course of the twentieth century" (August Wilson, 1996). This historical craftsmanship results from his strong sense of history and the special place that history occupies in the life of African Americans in America. In the light of this positioning Wilson believes that "we

can all learn from the past so we can improve the future" *(The Hill District: August Wilson:* page 1 of 1). He has an unwavering faith in the historical cord that binds the present and the past. In an apparent endorsement of his passion for the past in the present, Wilson says

In all my plays, I always point toward ... reconnecting with the past. You have to know who you are, and understand your history in America over more than 300 years, in order to know what your relation is to your society (cited in Safier and Baci, 1992:793).

In addition to this, Wilson throws the challenge that when all his plays are put together, then the history of the African American in America is constructed. In his dramaturgy therefore, Wilson seeks answers to these questions: what do you do with your legacy? How do you best put it to use? (Safier and Baci: 793).

Moreover, Wilson employs the use of "cultural memory" in reconstructing and repositioning his dramatic works believing that some aspect of African American history may be considered shameful, but it is necessary for the present generation to know their history; where they came from, where

they are today, and where they are going and how they intend to get there. Memory is captured in what John Timpane sees as "History... is not merely a chronicle of shifts but a series of sites in which one historical narrative has silenced others", or that "one person's anachronism is another's history" (Nadel, 1994:4).

The African storytelling artistic form that got transported to the New World by African slaves survives till this day. It is therefore richly utilised by Wilson's characters. Thus, the storytelling, personal reminiscences as medium for the transmission of "common values and history" provided African Americans an "opportunity to witness and comprehend their present affiliation" (Pereira, 1995: 11).

Wilson believes in his Africanness because according to him, the African American cannot breakaway from his past. To those ideologues who hold the view that African Americans have no culture or history, he reminds them unequivocally that "black Americans are Africans, and there are many histories and many cultures on the African continent" (Wilson:15). Wilson's testimony to the historical linkage between African Americans and the African homeland is captured in the following thesis:

Growing up in my mother's house at 1727 Bedford Avenue in Pithsburg, PA, I learned the language, the

eating habits, the gestures, the notions of common sense, attitudes towards sex, concepts of beauty and justice, and the response to pleasure and pain... that my mother had learned from her mother, and which you could trace back to the first African who set foot on the continent. It is this culture that stands today on these shores as a testimony to the resilience of the African-American spirit (15).

From the foregoing account therefore, it was from his mother that Wilson cultivated the storytelling tradition that weaves its way into his dramatic work and poetry. By this legacy it can be argued that the material influence on Wilson was fulfilling and rewarding because it moulded and shaped his sensibilities and consciousness.

Among the catalogues of destruction visited upon the African American by the white mainstream culture, according to Wilson, the severest included: taking away African American language, the taking away of their drums, social organisations, destruction of self-validity and erasure of political history (*"The Boston Globe"*, October 26th, 1990:47-58). Against this backdrop therefore, according to Wilson, if fighting "to alter our

relationship to the society in which we live – and, perhaps more important, searching for ways to alter the shared expectations of our selves as a community of people" (Wilson: 12), will label him as 'racist', then he accepts to be tagged a "race man".

As an advocate of strong ethnic identity, August Wilson repudiates integration and assimilation. According to him, now that slavery is gone, African Americans as men must assert themselves as people with dignity and proud racial identity. Therefore his artistic works propagate the ideas of assertion of specific cultural identities which constitute antithesis to the old "melting-pot" mythology. But in his own words, Wilson opines that "we don't melt. We're a visible minority. We can't change our name and say we're hiding behind the label of being an American" (*Globe*:58). Rather, the position being advocated is for African Americans to contribute to America to make it represent African Americans.

Wilson's concern with history is enunciated by Lloyd Richards, the versatile producer of most of Wilson's plays; a friend, and dean of the Yale School of Drama. Richards sees Wilson as "one of the most compelling storytellers to begin writing for the theatre in many years"(Kolin,ed.,:518). Infact, it was Richards that discovered and popularised Wilson through his production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982).

In Wilson's view, the necessity for recollecting history hinges on the fact

...that we as black Americans need to go back and make the connection that we allowed to be severed when we moved from the South to the North, the great migration starting in 1915. For the most part, the culture that was growing and developing in the Southern part of the United States for 200 and some years, we more or less abandoned. And we have a situation where in 1991 kids do not know who they are because they cannot make the connection with their grandparents – and therefore the connection with their political history in America (*New York Times*, March 10, 1991).

A number of forces and personalities shaped Wilson's literacy and artistic direction and philosophy. His primal influence could be his mother from whom he inherited the storytelling tradition. Wilson's grounding and artistry in the storytelling tradition led O'Neill to comment that "Wilson's exposure to the matter and manner of the African storytelling tradition in black neighborhoods" constitutes "a major consideration in the

development of his dramatic voice" (Kolin, ed.,:523).

Commenting on forces that influenced him in an interview he granted *The New York Times* (Sunday, March 10, 1991) Wilson says that

In terms of influence on my work, I have what I call my four B's: Romare Bearden, Imamu Amiri Baraka, the writer; Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine short-story writer; and the biggest B of all: the blues.

His faith in the blues music reflects in his coinage of it as "the book" that informs the sensibilities of African Americans. Bessie Smith's *"Nobody in town can bake a sweet jelly roll like mine"* provided the much needed push. Blues music therefore provided Wilson a "source- book, the well-spring from which he gathers the centers of his plays" (Kolin, ed.,: 524).

As it were, the blues is uniquely an African American music form that reflects the particular history and culture of African Americans. It is indeed a product of the post-Reconstruction era in the South where African Americans were subjected to all manners of cruelty, political disenfranchisement, economic subordination, and systemic physical violence unleashed by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

However, with the great migration of 1915, blues also moved up North, divesting itself of its rural origin and assuming urban status which was characterised by rhythmic and rollicking dance forms. Most importantly, blues provided for African Americans a safe haven, in addition to the Baptist Church, in the face of political, economic, and social persecution and deprivation.

In his projection, Sellman (1999) argues that blues "grew out of and reflect the social realities of the American South from the 1880s to the 1910s, the nadir of American race relations since Emancipation" (271). In a nutshell, Wilson sees in the blues the pains and anguish, but above all, the resilience of the African American and his dogged will and spirit for survival in the hostile South. It is therefore the soul and spirit of the African American people.

The Black Power Movement greatly influenced Wilson so much so that he describes the movement as "the kiln in which I was fired, and has much to do with the person I am today and the ideas and attitude that I carry as part of my consciousness" (Wilson: 13). Juxtaposing the dramatic production and practices of the Black Power Movement era, Wilson explains that "I think black theatre of the 60s was angry, didactic, and a pushing outward. What I try to do is an inward examination" (Kolin, ed.,: 524). Wilson's inward looking approach sets as his focus the historical experiences of his people

in each decade of the twentieth century. This is also the statement of his ideology and vision.

Wilson has successfully blended history and politics, in addition to discernible aspects of African American culture into his plays, leaving a legacy of mass appeal and acceptance across a broad spectrum of African American audience. He sees his plays as vehicle that reconnect, reassemble, and gird up for the next battle to be fought by African Americans. As a literary connoisseur, Wilson has to his credit ten plays, thus completing "a cycle of the plays, each of which explores a central issue facing African Americans in a different decade of the twentieth century" (Gates, Jr., and McKay, ed.,:2409).

4.3 Analysis of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences*

Both plays, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences,* set in different decades of the 20th century, are historical rehash which are rooted in real situations that took place and are still taking place within the context of time and place of their setting. Infact, Ma Rainey was a real historical blues maestro and a vaudeville performer who migrated from Columbus, Georgia, to Chicago. She was a versatile and prolific singer who lived between 1886 – 1936. Her maiden name is Gertrude Pridgett Rainey, fondly referred to as "Ma". As a prolific singer and performer, Ma Rainey has to her credit 93 recorded songs, and as mark

of honour, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame posthumously in 1990 (Gates, Jr., and McKay: 1997). Ma Rainey's personality and relationship with her white manager (Irvin) and the owner of the recording studio (Sturdyvant) symbolize the relationship that existed between all African American blues and jazz artists and their white patrons then and even now. The historical situations in *Ma Rainey's* and *Fences* elicit the relationship between African Americans and white Caucasians. These plays dramatise and highlight racism, exploitation in economic and social spheres, and the white craving to perpetuate segregation and discrimination against African Americans. On the other hand however, African Americans have risen in defense of their culture, history, identity and citizenship, as well as personality and self-pride.

Troy Maxson and Jim Bono in *Fences* could be any African American garbage collectors on the streets of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Baton Rouge or any American city any time and any day because they are carriers of the same fate and destiny as their fellow African Americans whom they represent.

The analyses of the two plays is therefore treated under setting; plot and characterisation, middle class syndrome; heritage of slavery and oppression; community/ communal consciousness; language; family structure, and the blues, as

constituting parameters for the exploration of geographies of identity of diasporic citizenship among African Americans.

4.3.1 Setting / Play Titles

***Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set around March 1927, in Chicago. The 1920s witnessed the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance with its attendant flurry of literary and cultural productions as well as surge of political consciousness among African Americans, Africans on the homeland, and people of African extraction in the diaspora. The central locus of this movement and consciousness derived largely from the desire to construct separate and distinct black identity and the bestowal of nonnegotiable citizenship status.**

The immediate textual setting of this play is in two parts: a 'band room' and a 'recording studio'. This setting provides a metaphorical racial commentary that sets the mood of the play. Sturdyvant and Irvin enclosed in the "sound proof glass wall" of the control room, a safe distance from the music studio where the musicians are, enable the producer and manager to "oversee the black musicians in the studio". The metaphor here is the hierarchy of power and authority that the set establishes. Bergesen and Demastes (1996) see this arrangement as pervasively framing "the ensuing events that the infighting among the band members cannot be detached from the specter of white domination that looms in the

background" (230-231). As the scenes change from one acting area to another, we see the recording and musical instruments and the sets. We also see the relationship between Ma Rainey, her African American musicians, and her white patrons in such a way that crisis of identity and citizenship, self-assertiveness, and self-determination are captured and acted out graphically and brought to the fore in a compelling emotion. For example, when Irvin and Sturdyvant decided to record Levee's version of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom", Ma Rainey stands her ground that her own very old version must be recorded:

MA RAINEY: I' m gonna tell you something, Irvin... and you go on up there and tell Sturdyvant. What you all say don't count with me. You understand? Ma listens to her heart. Ma listens to the voice inside her.... Now if that don't set right with you and Sturdyvant... then I can carry my black bottom on back down South to my tour,'cause I don't like it up here no ways (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* 1981:63).

In an apparent capitulation to Ma Rainey's condition, Irvin concedes and submits:

IRVIN: Okay, Ma Have it your way. We'll be ready to go in fifteen minutes.

MA RAINEY: We'll be ready to go when Madame says we're ready. That's the way it goes around here (*Ma Rainey's*:64).

Ma Rainey refuses to be tossed and bossed around by Irvin and Sturdyvant because she insists on asserting her self-hood and rights. She must have things strictly on her own terms because it is her talent that she is offering. She knows the negative implication

of submitting to Irvin's and Sturdyvant's term which is that:

They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. (*Ma Rainey's* :79).

Another episode is when Ma Rainey insists that her nephew, Sylvester, should do the voice intro, for which Cutler, other musicians, and Irvin frown at. In her usual characteristic, Ma insists Sylvester must render the voice intro.

MA RAINEY: Where's Sylvester's mike? You need a mike for Sylvester. Irvin ... get him a mike.

IRVIN: Uh... Ma, the boys say he can't do it.

MA RAINEY: Who say he can't do it? What boys say he can't do it?

IRVIN: He stutters, Ma. They say he stutters.

MA RAINEY: I don't care he do. I promised the boy he could do the part ... and he's gonna do it! That's all there is to it.

IRVIN: Ma, we don't have time. We can't...

MA RAINEY: If you wanna make a record, you gonna find time. I ain't playing with you, Irvin... Just go and get the boy a microphone. (IRVIN and STURDYVANT consult in the booth, IRVIN exits.)

STURDYVANT: All right, Ma... we'll get him a microphone (*Ma Rainey's* :74).

The play also exposes the exploitation of African Americans by their white patrons. As it were, because Sturdyvant owns the recording studio, he expects to dictate terms for Ma Rainey and her blues musicians. An example of this scenario is played out after Sylvester's successful rendition. Sturdyant tells Irvin that he is paying Sylvester 25 dollars out of Ma Rainey's fee:

IRVIN: He said the best he can do is to take your twenty-five dollars of your money and give it to Sylvester.

MA RAINEY: Take what and do what?.... He supposed to get his own money. He supposed to get paid like everybody else (*Ma Rainey's* :103).

Ma Rainey here defends the right of Sylvester to be paid like all other artists. While Ma Rainey succeeds in this struggle, Levee fails in his bid to have his songs recorded by Sturdyvant. At the end, he is cheated and exploited by Sturdyvant. Perhaps this results from Levee's isolationist persuasion which fails to enlist cooperation from his colleagues.

LEVEE: Mr. Sturdyvant, sir. About them songs I give you?...

STURDYVANT: Oh, yes, ...uh... Levee. About them songs you gave me.
I've thought about it and I just don't think the people will buy them. They are not the type of songs we are looking for.

LEVEE: Mr. Sturdyvant, you got to understand about that music.
That music is what the people is looking for. They's tired of jug – band music. They wants something that excites them. Something with some fire to it

STURDYVANT: Okay, Levee. I'II tell you what I'II do. I'II give you five
dollars a piece for them. Now that's the best I can do
(*Ma Rainey's* :107-108).

However, after a prolong insistence to have his songs recorded, Sturdyvant "attempts to hand LEVEE the money, finally shoves it in LEVEE's coat pocket and is gone in a flash. LEVEE follows him to the door and it slams in his face. He takes the money from his pocket, balls it up and throws it on the floor" (stage direction). Literally, Sturdyvant dupes Levee of his songs and paid him a stipend which Levee rejects. Because of Levee's individualism, he does not enlist his colleagues' support as "The other musicians silently gather up their belongings" (*Ma Rainey's,* stage direction: 109).

Sturdyvant pays each musician twenty-five dollars. Compared with what he will net in profit from the sales of the music records, twenty-five dollars is obviously a rip-off. This is the sort of exploitative relationship that existed in the record industry of the 1920s and right up to this day because whites own the recording studios therefore they dictate the contract terms.

In addition, the historical setting of 1927 Chicago presents a cascade of a community in which:

... sleepy – eyed negroes
move lazily toward their
small cold-water flats and
rented rooms to await the
onslaught of night, which
will find them crowded in
the bars and juke joints both
dazed and dazzling in their

rapport with life. It is with these negroes that our concern lies most heavily: their values, their attitudes, and particularly their music (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* 1981:xv – xvi).

Yet Chicago is a city of millionaires; a city of metaphors possessing dreams, realities, and contradictions. However, the concern here is not with the millionaires but the army of African Americans who constitute a legion of "derelicts, gangsters and rough house dandies, whores…" (xv) who drown themselves in the blues music, a placebo for social and spiritual catharsis; a people without modicum of social and economic prospect, a people consigned to racism and oppression.

On a symbolic level, the title of the play connotes the stereotype associated with 'black'. The perception of 'black' as evil, impure, heathen, dirty, dark, inept, inferior, etc, conjures negative images and assumptions that dictate levels and degrees of social relationship between whites and blacks. But Ma Rainey's display of strength and will extricates her of this negative attitude. This positive aspect manifests in her self-assertiveness against the ravenous and exploitative tendencies of her white patrons. The victim of this is Levee who gets duped and cheated by Sturdyvant.

However, the imagery of the title song, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" derives from a stomping African American dance form known as the "black bottom" which was fashionable in those days, but whose origin might have been the slave plantations of the South. This imagery projects a distinct African American musical dance form that is peculiarly theirs. Both music and dance forms accentuate the African American identity.

Generally therefore, the historical setting of *Ma Rainey's* and its dramaturgy present four levels of relationship: Irvin and Sturdyvant represent both the white Caucasian race and their innate glorification of material capitalism which evolves from the exploitation of African American labor; Ma Rainey, representing the middle class.

Levee's individualism serves his self-interest. This leads him to self-delusion and destruction because individualism is antithetical to collective group identity and survival that is characteristic of the African American. However, the other musicians, led by Toledo, exemplify the virtue and strength in communality and collective struggle and survival. Infact, Toledo is the conscience of the group, espousing the philosophy of Africanness and togetherness. Unfortunately, Toledo's intellectualism isolates him from the ideological leaning of other members of the musical group.

***Fences* is set in the 1950s, the period of the Black Civil Rights movement. The great**

migration which began in 1915 reached a crescendo in the 1950s. While European migrants moved into the United states from Europe,

The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work (Gates Jr., and Mc Kay, 1999:2413),

but on the contrary,

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation.... The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar-paper (2412).

The above scenario provides the historical setting of the play. The textual setting seeks to recreate the historical motif in "the yard which fronts the only entrance to the MAXSON household" harbouring "an ancient two-story brick house" (2411). Features of this house are "wooden porch badly in need of paints", "the porch lacks congruence", "one or two chairs of dubious values", "an old

fashioned icebox", "the yard is a small dirt yard, partially fenced", "hangs a ball made of rags", and "two oil drums serve as garbage receptacles" (2411 – 2412).

The derelict image presented in this setting represents the general nature of housing of most African Americans who are victims of America's discriminatory housing policy. The policy makes it difficult for an average poor African American family to have access to decent accommodation. Where they exist, such accommodations are not only dilapidated, but in state of disrepairs lacking decent lavatories and necessary facilities. In fact, most of these housing are owned by white landlords who charge exorbitant rates.

Similarly, the inability of most African Americans to own or rent decent housing is deliberate in order to keep them in permanent penury and subordination. As a result, African Americans are left with low- paying menial jobs that cannot pay for rent on housing, education, transportation, heating and cooling of rooms, etc. Troy Maxson summarises this situation pathetically:

... not only couldn't you get a job... you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under the Brady

Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper (2439).

This arrangement tends to entrench a circle of poverty and negative stereotypes on African Americans. The objective here is not only to represent African Americans in negative light, but as well seek to cast them as a people who are innately incapable of decent habitation. Certainly however, this negativism would not bestow expected dignity and respect upon the African American.

It is therefore the desire of the African American to pull down this 'fence' of discrimination which portrays him in bad shape. As citizens of America they also have the right to enjoy rights bestowed upon American citizens. This includes right to decent housing as their Caucasian compatriots. As such consigning them to ghettos in ramshackle structures, with some living under bridges or riverbanks is unacceptable because as a people with dignity they have right to choose to live in decency.

As a demonstration of desire for decent and secured habitation, Troy is not only able to own a personal house which he bought with Gabriel's military service discharge fund of three thousand dollars, but he also feels a determined need to give the house and the yard befitting outlook. He intends to achieve this by up-dating such structures as the fence which would invariably secure the house.

However, on a metaphorical plane of perception, the fence conveys the signification of safety, security, and protection. Bono advances reasons for fences as, "Some people build fences to keep people out.... and other people build fences to keep people in" (*Fences,* in Gates, Jr., and McKay, ed., 1997:2442) Most importantly, Troy's effort at fencing his yard fills him with a feeling of pride and identity that he has been able to own a personal home, although through the misfortune of Gabe's military misadventure in Japan. As a result of his infirmity, Gabe got three thousand dollars in discharge cheque which Tray used to own the house.

4.3.2 Plot and Characterisation

The Plot of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* exposes the unequal social and economic relationship that exists between white and black in the United States; especially in the music industry of the 1920s. The protagonist in the play is Ma Rainey, the musician who has a recording contract with Sturdyvant, along with Irvin, her manager. Her music band is entirely made up of African Americans.

On the recording day everyone awaits the arrival of Ma Rainey for the recording session. Musicians ready, recording studio and equipment tested and ready, Irvin and Sturdyvant, all ready, but Ma does not arrive. Her non-appearance on the appointed schedule gets everyone nervous and agitated.

However, while the waiting game lingers on, it is agreed between Irvin and Levee that Levee's version of 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' would be more appropriate for recording rather than Ma's original song because Levee's version fits the demand of the moment. The musicians exchange banters to the amusement of the group as they wait for Ma Rainey.

Suddenly however, Ma Rainey enters late afternoon with Sylvester, her nephew; Dussie Mae, and a policeman. She does not apologise for keeping everyone waiting. Her late arrival introduces a 'waiting game' which compels the audience and readers alike to focus attention on the four musicals as they too await Ma Rainey's arrival. Citing Shannon Sandra's (1991) article *"The Long Wait; August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* according to Nadel (ed., 1994:57) explicates the waiting situation on the audience and readers;

As a result of the delay, what they learn about the various idiosyncrasies of the troubled group serves as a context for understanding their motives when they are finally in the company of Ma Rainey.

Therefore, the upstaging of Ma Rainey is a deliberate stagecraft designed to let the audience and readers perceive the predisposition of all the actors, including

Irvin, and the impatience and arrogance of Sturdyvant. The lesson in Ma's late arrival is that as much as Sturdyvant and Irvin can control their recording instruments, they cannot control Ma Rainey. Ma Rainey knows that the economic factors at play are manipulated by Sturdyvant to exploit her enormously, so she "uses her exploitation to her advantage whenever she can" (Nadel, ed.,:54). This explains why she uses the accident ease to her advantage.

As the recording is about to commence Ma Rainey complains of the place being cold. Therefore she demands that "you better put some heat on in here." Upon granting her request, she again asks for Coca-cola to drink. Irvin has to provide the Coca-cola. Next is her insistence that her original song track, 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' must be recorded, and not Levee's version. Finally she has her way again. Last in the line of requests and demands is that her stammering nephew, Sylvester, renders the intro for the recording. Despite Sylvester's seeming vocal disability, Ma Rainey insists the crew must oblige her directive or there would be no recording. Upon her insistence, Irvin gives in to her request. After a few faltering attempts, Sylvester succeeds in the rendition and finally the recording takes place.

Sylvester's disposition exposes him as non-musician, but Ma's insistence on having him on the introduction is therefore significant for the blues and the voiceless

black people. Pereira (1995) sees Sylvester as representing these voiceless people in the community whose voices can adequately be heard through the medium of the blues. Figuratively speaking, Sylvester represents the fact that voiceless black people "can contribute to the successful advancement of black culture" thereby projecting their black cultural heritage and identity (20).

With the recording now over and contract fees paid, Ma Rainey, Sylvester, and Dussie Mae walk away leaving her musicians with Irvin and Sturdyvant to pay them their money. At this point Levee raises issue with Sturdyvant on the songs he Sturdyvant promised Levee that he would record. But Sturdyvant plays Levee out of the deal as he promises to pay Levee five dollars per song. He tries to hand over the money to Levee, but decides rather to shove the money "in Levee's coat pocket and is gone in a flash" (*Ma Rainey's* :109). In a fury of anger "Levee follows him to the door and it slams in his face. He takes the money from his pocket, balls it up and throws it on the floor" while "the other musicians silently gather up their belongings" (109). Unfortunately however, rather than face his real enemy, Levee became frustrated and enraged, and assailed Toledo with a knife and kills him.

Levee's misdirected ambition severed his linkage with his own people as well as with the blues because he is more preoccupied with "making records than with playing the music

"(Pereira:21). He is not interested in rooting himself in the tradition of the blues which constitutes black cultural insignia. Rather, Levee unwisely entrusted himself to Sturdyvant who eventually dumps him, thereby destroying him in the same fashion that white people destroyed his family. Consequently, Levee's alignment with Sturdyvant destroys him and his roots as a result of repudiating his own "people who can help him discover himself as a musician and person".

The plot presents Ma Rainey as the protagonist in the play while her remarkably visible and steel personality dictates the tone and pace of the play. All dramatic actions and dialogues in the play revolve around her. When she was not there the recording did not take place, but as she arrives, everything is dictated by her interests and wishes. This pre-eminent position shows that "Ma Rainey understands the whiteman that is why Ma Rainey listens to the voice inside her." To confirm that she is in control, she tells Irvin "We'II be ready when Madame says we're ready. That's the way it goes around here" (*Ma Rainey's*: 64).

The plot of *Ma Rainey's* unfolds the crisis arising from assertion of citizenship and identity of African Americans in the United States. The plot therefore revolves around Ma Rainey's insistence to be heard and acknowledged by both Irvin and Sturdyvant for her creative artistic talent. Here too, the

organic interrelationship of plot and characterisation is intrinsically entwined. Ma Rainey's self-assertiveness is a rejection of a situation where as Levee asks, "Is you gonna be satisfied with a bone somebody done throwed you when you see them eating the whole hog?" or as Toledo tells Levee; "They ain't got to accept your way of entertaining .... You's entertaining and the rest of the people is hauling wood. That's the only kind of job for the colored man" (*Ma Rainey's* :93).

Ma Rainey does not see herself making music as a privilege but a right of cultural expression, heritage and black identity. Rather, she considers whites lucky to have access to her music because "White folks don't understand about the blues....They don't understand that's life's way of talking" (*Ma* Rainey's: 82*).* She understands the sensibility of and concern of the whiteman towards her which is her voice. The mechanical relationship is that "If you colored and can make them some money, then you all right with them. Otherwise, you just a dog in the alley. I done made this company more money from my records than all the other recording artists they got put together" (*Ma Rainey's*: 79). Ma Rainey will not be a dog in the alley, as such she demands to be treated with respect and dignity as a human being and citizen who is entitled to rights and duties accorded bonafide American citizens, and not as one "hauling wood". She is conscious that what stands in her favour is her talent which

the recording company continues to harness. As a celebrity in the blues music, Ma is an asset.

Levee admires her courage and boldness in confronting Irvin and Sturdyvant. He is therefore determined to be like her. According to him,

> **...I'm gonna be like Ma and tell the white man just what he can do. Ma tell Mr. Irvin she gonna leave.... And Mr. Irvin get down on his knees and beg her to stay! That's the way I'm gonna be! Make the white man respect me! (*Ma Rainey's*: 94).**

The logic here is that Levee sees in Ma Rainey a model through whom he can develop a positive mental attitude that would embolden him to stand up to the white man. Getting the white man to respect the African American is a recognition and affirmation of citizenship and the identity of his black heritage which Ma Rainey achieves through the utilisation of her talent, and not because of her colour. Talent therefore can liberate one from the abyss of eternal relegation, but which must be backed up by hardwork, determination and being focused.

***Fences* presents the social, cultural, and political canvas of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This was an age when blacks openly demanded their rights at the**

peril to their lives. It was an age of growing citizenship and identity consciousness. It was instructive therefore that these agitations finally culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The period also recorded spirited struggles for full-citizenship by African Americans which crystallised into the celebrated overturn by the Supreme Court of the Plessy v. Ferguson 1954 ruling in favour of desegregation of educational institutions and public facilities. Then came the Rosa Parks saga which snowballed into the Civil Rights Movement (Pereira:36). In matching the play with its time and age, Pereira says that... 1957 represented a time of some protest, much hope, and great skepticism – all of which are present in *Fences*" (36).

On the other hand *Fences* dramatises what might be described as the 'crisis of father-son rite of passage'. Troy is a celebrated ex-baseball player who was used and dumped by the racist system without recognition because of his colour. Although now a garbage collector, Troy is begrudged by the racist system that seeks to keep blacks as garbage collectors while whites drive the garbage trucks. For him, this is injustice that is orchestrated against blacks.

Conscious of his right, and armed with the knowledge that driving requires no special academic qualification, Troy files a complaint against this discriminatory practice. Justifying his action Troy says that "I went to

Mr. Rand and asked him, "Why"? Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?....You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive truck. That ain't no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive truck" (2413). Although not college educated, Troy knows his rights as a citizen and as an employee in the garbage company. He therefore demands not only to be heard but to be incorporated. He demands for justice and fairness. His protest, as genuine as it is, earns him promotion to a driver. Narrating this to Lyons, Troy's son by his first marriage, Bono says, "Your daddy got a promotion on the rubbish. He's gonna be the first colored driver" (2435).

Bono adds that with this promotion, Troy "Ain't got to do nothing but sit up there and read the paper like them white fellows" (2435). Troy's protest and its aftermath constitutes triumph of citizenship and rights claim. He demands for right to be a full participant in the company, to render his worth, and not an ordinary passive player. Troy realises that truck driving requires no special academic qualification; it is unacceptable within the context of citizenship rights claim to reserve it for whites only. This demonstrates the capacity of the African American to perform as good as their white compatriots if given the same opportunity. Troy's recognition symbolisses recognition of the African American and the bestowal of pride and dignity in his humanity. Ironically

however, Troy's elevation isolates him from fellow black workers as well as from his white colleagues. Whites would not identity with him as equals, while he no longer gets involved in the garbage lifting with his black colleagues. His reading of newspapers is to 'kill' his boredom and loneliness.

Against the backdrop of Troy's struggle for rights and his agonising experience, he would not want Cory, his son by Rose, to take to playing college football because according to him it has no future for him. Troy explains to Cory that "The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway". Rather Troy wants Cory to "...go on and get your book learning so you can work yourself up in that A & P or learn how to fix cars or build house or something, get you a trade" (2430). Nevertheless, not understanding the wisdom and significance in Troy's reasoning, Cory insists on playing football. Regrettably, father and son get divided along irreconcilable lines of differences in ideology. Cory feels Troy's domineering attitude does not allow him self-actualization because "The whole time I was growing up... living in this house... Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere.... Everywhere I looked, Troy Maxson was staring back at me... hiding under the bed...in the closet. I'm just saying I've got to find a way to get rid of that shadow, Mama" (2459). Cory could not exorcise his father's spirit because he is destined to be like his father. But Troy tries to save Cory the agony

and trauma of hard living by being passionately concerned about Cory's future prospect. He however ends up dominating Cory just as his own father once dominated his life. The imagery of this dominance is recreated "By protecting Cory, Troy denies him the chance to pursue his own calling.... Afraid that Cory will be destroyed by the same forces that hurt him, Troy clips his wings" (Pereia:43). What Troy fails to realise is the changing times that seem to offer younger generation of African Americans opportunities that are limited only by their own abilities. The burden of Troy's protectionism weights heavily on Cory by lack of parental love.

In the end, Cory's attempt "to find a way to get rid of that shadow" results in his leaving "home in search of his own identity" (Pereira: 44). The more Troy tries to keep away from his father, the more he remains separated from his true self. The only soul purgatory option is to reconcile with his father even in death which is "a recognition by Cory that it is left to him to accept the best of his father in him and banish the worst; to celebrate the strength of character that survived half a century of prejudice and forgive the pain that came out of that battle" (Pereira:45).

Rose, Troy's wife and Cory's mother, is the mediating voice between father and son: Although she is sympathetic to both because she seems to understand the comportment of both, she fails to convince Troy to drop his

hard-line stance and allow Cory to play football. In this mediatory role, Rose finds herself torn between matrimonial and filial loyalties. Characteristically of most mothers, she bends sympathetically in favor of Cory. However, Cory lost out as he is thrown out of the house for filial disobedience.

Paradoxically, amidst this ongoing filial crisis, Troy begets a child out-of- wedlock with a lady called Alberta. Although Alberta dies during child-birth, the baby girl survives. The begetting of this baby, Raynell, rocks Troy's family stability as Rose tells him "From right now... this child got a mother. But you a womanless man". But she loves her husband and wants to keep him as a symbol of her security and happiness. Alberta becomes an intruder who should be fenced out because her presence in Troy's life threatens the stability of his family. As it were, Alberta's death saves the family from final collapse. By her death, she metaphorises the sacrificial lamb that saves Troy's family. Troy's matrimonial infidelity "cannot ever regain the full relationship he once had with his wife, for now Rose knows that Troy Maxson is not her only way to self-fulfillment; she can achieve the full stature of her true identity without sacrificing her womanhood to him" (Pereira:51). The baby, Raynell, therefore symbolises a new life, a rejuvenated Rose.

Troy is the "shadow" that is digging in the flesh of all other characters in the play. He is a very strong character with threatening

presence, especially in the world of Cory and Lyons. As the head of his family, he directs its affairs with a passion for success and survival. He is consumed by a drive to protect his family, bring up his children to excel, and derive reasonable income to provide modestly for the family. Cory's complaint establishes one level of conflict in the play where Troy disallows Cory from playing football or even to accept football scholarship to college. Nadel describes Troy as "a large man who has been underestimated" (90). Even Rose admits this truth when she explains to Cory that "Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of .... When your daddy walked through the house, he filled it up" (2460).

Rose further tells Cory that that "shadow that followed you everywhere" was Cory himself growing into himself, emphasising the inextricable relationship between Cory and his father. The metaphorical reading proffered by Nadel is that "Cory is being urged not to measure himself against Troy but to use Troy's size as a defense against the other ... norms" of the wider dominant white culture. Cory is thereby encouraged by Rose to continue in his father's footsteps; footsteps that are double-edged:" both the model of error and the model of correction" (91-92).

The final realization is captured by Pereira when he argues that Troy's action propels his family members toward the actualisation of their being, while "they learn to accept his

action's as a consequence of his struggle to save himself and them from destruction" (52-53).

4.3.3 The Middle Class Syndrome

The middle class is a syndrome because it offers a filtering process that provides a space for African Americans to migrate from a low class into a geographic space that metaphorises their identity status into 'white' while remaining black in color. This migration in reality is only in hope because of the few tokenistic privileges thrown at the middle class African Americans. Nevertheless, the geography of their citizenship remains rooted; black with all this associations. The middle class is assimilationist in character, while seeing the backward lower class blacks as hindrance to progress.

Ma Rainey exemplifies the middle class with all the airs of arrogance characteristic of the class. Her musical success and enhanced socio-economic status make her a celebrity, thereby establishes an identity for herself.

Informed by this instinct however, she would not compromise her interest even where there is no obvious threat to such interest. For example, Ma Rainey spurns Irvin's suggestion that Levee's edition of the song "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' be recorded in place of her own: "Irvin, what is that I hear? What is that the band's rehearsing? I know they ain't rehearsing Levee's "Black Bottom". I know I ain't hearing that?"

IRVIN: **Ma, listen ... that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Levee's version of that song... it's got a nice arrangement ... a nice horn intro ... It really picks it up.**

MA RAINEY: **I ain't studying Levee nothing .... I' m doing it the old way. That's why I brought my nephew to do the voice intro.**

IRVIN: **Ma, that's what the people want now. They want something they can dance to. Times are changing .... It gets them excited... makes them forget about their troubles.**

MA RAINEY: **I don't care what you say, Irvin .... I' m singing Ma Rainey's song. I ain't singing Levee's song. Now that's all there is to it (*Ma Rainey's* :63).**

Neither Irvin, Sturdyvant, nor Levee understand the philosophy that is encapsulated in the old tradition of the blues. According to Ma Rainey, "The blues help you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain't alone....This be an empty world without the blues. I take that emptiness

and try to fill it up with something" (83). The blues in its traditional form represents the essence of black identity and what Nadel sees as exciting the will-to-power of African Americans "who would otherwise lack the power to will beyond the narrow and racially defined spheres of their existence".

For Ma Rainey, she draws her strength from her deep-seated sensibilities that are informed by the blues. Therefore, "Any attempts to tamper with it", the way Levee Irvin, and Sturdyvant want, "is tantamount to a personal attack on her; to compromise this music is to desecrate the thing most sacred to her, the essence of her identity" (Pereira:21).

This rationalisation explains Ma Rainey's aversion to Levee's idea of the swing reworking of the blues. His motive is to record and not to make music. He is also driven by the immediate quest for money, not making a profession. As much as it might be true that the people want the swing because as Irvin says, "They want something they can dance to... makes them forget about their troubles" (62), but Ma sees the blues as retelling memory of black history and experience in the old South – experiences and history that should not be forgotten because of their significance to black survival and identity

On a metaphorical level however, Wilson's *Fences* is a middle class play. The play express the anxiety of members of the middle class, exemplified in Rose's burning concern to shield her family from the vagaries and

machinations of the world outside her home. Bono understands this when he told Troy that "some people build fences to keep people out ...and other people build fences to keep people in (2442). Rose insists that Troy builds the fence "so she can keep her family safe from the forces that threaten the stability she has worked so hard to maintain" (Pereira:49). Being a restless soul, Rose must keep Troy near her while she seeks to keep other predators such as Alberta out.

Ma Rainey's relationship with her African American musicians is informed by the confidence and protective security that she gives them. They, except Levee, are content being her sidemen, a status which makes them proud and happy. This offers a recognition for being "sidemen of one of the greatest blues singers of their time, jobs that give then steady work and the opportunity to make living doing something they love" (Pereira:26). As lower class people who are not educated, the musicians have no prospect of moving beyond being musician sidemen. This limitation therefore explains their dedication and devotion which constitute a vehicle for upward mobility in music. To move further up, they need to also remain focused while identifying with fellow black people who can help one another to discover themselves. For now however, Cutler, Toledo, and Slow Drag depend on Ma, symbol of their musical heritage, and their musical talent for their fulfillment as musicians.

Cutler argues that "The colored folks made Ma a star. White folks don't care nothing about who she is". As plausible as this statement is, Ma is conscious of this truth which explains why she identities strongly with her musician sidemen. She brings in Sylvester, a non-musician, as a demonstration of her wish to give the voiceless lower class opportunity to be heard. Her treatment of Levee is informed by Levee's arrogance and lack of knowledge for the cultural significance of the blues for African American identity.

The middle class therefore constitutes itself into a separate and distinct identity that is socially, economically, and politically insulated but correspondingly flexible to allow for upcoming members who distinguish themselves in education, economic pursuit, etc. Concern of members of this class is the protection of its group interests. For them, identifying with the lower class tantamounts to demeaning and betrayal of its white-acquired values because they perceive the lower class as lazy people who fail to take challenges.

4.3.4 Heritage of Slavery and Oppression (Paternalism)

The paternalistic social relationship which developed on the Southern Plantations dictates the pattern of sociological interaction between whites and African Americans in the Untied States, and elsewhere in the diasporic world. Against this historical relationship of

master-slave arrangement that flowered on the plantations the white master regarded his slaves as 'children' no matter how old. Nevertheless, this paternalism transcended the plantation socialscape after the emancipation, and coalesced into a configuration for subsequent "relationship of white to colored people in many parts of the world" (Freyre, 1946; cited in Frazier, 1957:241). However, African Americans as victims of this paternalism abhor being treated as 'child', 'boy', or 'children'. Paradoxically, the psychic and psychological damage had already been inflicted on the African American as he sometimes responds to these cliches intuitively.

Irvin and Sturdyvant in Wilson's *"Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"* symbolize white paternalistic tradition or the heritage of oppression. Irvin addresses and treats the musicians with condensation in a fashion reminiscent of this culture of paternalism. For instance, while still waiting for Ma Rainey's arrival, Irvin asks" Any of you boys know what's keeping Ma?", to which Cutler answers "Can't say, Mr. Irvin." Then Irvin tells them, "Well, you boys go ahead" (36). Yet another encounter with the musicians elicit this dialogue further when Irvin tells Cutler, "Cutler... you boy's sandwiches are up here... Cutler?" Cutler answers, "Yessir, Mr. Irvin... be right there".

As a demonstration of the low-level opinion that whites have about black-time-

consciousnesses, Sturdyvant accosts Irvin on why Ma Rainey has been so long in coming for the recording session: "Look what time it is, Irv. You told me she'd be here". Irvin then explains, "She'll be here, okay? I don't know what's keeping her. You know they're always late, Mel" (*Ma Rainney's*:47). The opinion elicited here is not only derogatory but also depicts the African American as generally irresponsible and pathologically incapable of time consciousness. But Ma Rainey's action is deliberate. It is Wilson's stage device aimed at making audience and readers focus attention on the idiosyncrasies of the musicians, the impatience of Irvin and Sturdyvant thereby revealing the working of their inner minds.

Sturdyvant is insensitive to the disposition of both the African American musicians and Ma Rainey. He is only concerned with getting the recording done on his own term that is why he derides Ma Rainey when he retorts, "I don't care what she calls herself. I'm not putting up with it. I just want to get her in here... record those songs on that list ... and get her out. Just like clockwork, huh?" (*Ma Rainey's*:18). Whatever the attainment level of the African American in the socio-economic sphere, the most decrepit and lowly white man believes he is better than the black man. It is this white consciousness that informs Sturdyvant's opinion of Ma Rainey whom Irvin calls "Mother of the Blues", but whom Sturdyvant derides because as he claims,

"I'm not putting up with any Royal Highness… Queen of the Blues bullshit!" (*Ma Rainey's*:18). But when Irvin reminds him that she is "Mother of the Blues, Mel. Mother of the Blues," Sturdyvant again interjects, "I don't care what she calls herself." What Sturdyvant reckons with is the business of getting Ma Rainey's voice then he walks her out of his sight.

In the encounter between Levee and Sturdyvant, this paternalistic relationship manifests more crystal clear:

STURDYVANT: Good! Say, Levee, did you finish that song?

LEVEE: Yessir, Mr. Sturdyvant.

STURDYVANT: Good! Good! I'll just take this. I wanna see you about your songs as soon as I get the chance.

LEVEE: Yessir! As soon as you get the chance, Mr. Sturdyvant (STURDYVANT exits.)

***Ma Rainey's*:66 – 67.**

Cutler, witnessing this exchange along with other musicians, jeers at Levee for cowering and answering 'Yessir' to Sturdyvant in docile, childlike manner while "Shuffling them feet". Toledo justifies Levee's action, saying "Levee can't help it none. He's like all of us. Spooked

up with the white man". But this act of spooking up with the white man does not appeal to Cutler who charges Levee that "You talking out your hat. The man come in here, call you boy, tell you to go get up off your ass and rehearse, and you ain't had nothing to say to him, except 'Yessir!" (*Ma Rainey's* :67).

The point Cutler makes here is to all African Americans and not Levee alone,a call to stand up and face the white man as man to man, not 'boy' to man, and talk straight into his face. This is why Levee admires the gusto with which Ma Rainey handles Irvin and Sturdyvant. The kernel of Ma Rainey's encounter with Irvin and Sturdyvant is that the African American cannot secure his citizenship right under this paternalistic milieu without demanding for it. Or, to construct positive identity the African American, middle and lower classes, must compel the white man through collective group consciousness and action to expunge the negative stereotypes that the white man harbours against him. This can only be achieved through the cultivation of a consciously strong identification with the ethnic group.

The established relationship in *Fences* is equally dictated by white paternalism. Because of deliberate policy to subjugate and subdue the African, the white society does not deem it fit for the African American (Troy Maxson and others) to drive company trucks, but to be 'lifters' of garbage. This paternalism

instils fear in the African American, thereby renders him docile, child like, etc, like a mule or a horse that is broken in. However, Troy Maxson, conscious of his rights as a citizen, rejects this social arrangement. He therefore decides to question it, even against the prospect of losing his job:

TROY: I ain't worried about them firing me. They gonna fire me cause I asked a question? That's all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, "why?" why you got the whitemens driving and the colored lifting? (2413).

This racially inspired paternalism permeates every fabric of social relationship and human activities. As a nationally celebrated ex–baseball player. Troy retired with neither reward nor recognition. He asks indignantly about the benefits that he got: "What it ever get me? Aint got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of." But mediocres like Selkirk who batted only 269 gained recognition, while Troy, with his 432 and thirty-seven home runs ends up a garbage collector. Against this racist practice, he refuses Cory's bid to play in college football league.

One victim of this heritage is Pope who bought off a restaurant from playing numbers (gambling). Among his clients are both whites and blacks, but he seems to favour whites as stated below:

TROY: ... and didn't want nobody to come in it! A Negro go in there and can't get no kind of service. I seen a white fellow come in there and order a bowl of stew. Pope picked all the meat out the pot for him. Man ain't had nothing but a bowl of meat! Negro come behind him and ain't got nothing but the potatoes and carrots. Talking about what numbers do for people, you picked a wrong example. Ain't done nothing but make a worser fool out of him than he was before (2423).

Troy sees Pope's action as foolish because he has no justification for treating the white fellow preferentially over the black man. Yet another victim of this heritage of oppression, slavery, and paternalism is Gabriel, Troy's brother who fought in the World War II in Japan. Fighting for the United States, "Man go over there and fight the war ... messin' around with them Japs, get half his head blown off ... and they give him a lousy three thousand dollars" (2426). As if this was not insulting enough, the police constantly harass both Gabriel and Troy. They always claim Gabriel disturbs the peace, and always expect Troy to pay fifty dollars for his ransom. Yet he gets reduced to this level of lunacy in the course of fighting a national cause. Rather than treat him as a national hero or a veteran,

he is often molested and maltreated. According to Troy, "The man done had his life ruined fighting for what? And they wanna take and lock him up. Let him be free. He don't bother nobody"(2444).

This paternal, slave, and oppressive relationship is largely responsible for the dilemma of non-acceptance and non-recognition of the manhood and citizenship status of the African American. For example, by deliberately castrating the African American economically, black theatre is constrained to rely on white patronage for commercial success. This explains efforts by black playwrights such as Wilson and Fuller to eye the Broadway theatre as symbol of artistic breakthrough. In order to sustain this paternalism, it behoves on the white mainstream to entrench racism, discrimination, and segregation which continue to hold the African American down not only as unequal, but second-rate and dependent citizen. This alienated status as a devise of the dominant culture keeps the African American outside the mainstream.

Be this as it may, while the African American may have lost quite substantially to the dominant white culture, he finds solace, strength and essence in the surviving vestiges of his slave heritage. Such vestiges are expressed in his music, folk storytelling tradition, and his cultural heritage and history. These attributes therefore constitute signposts of his identity and survival in the

American hostile social environment. Exorcising his music and the storytelling tradition, he is able to develop amazing resilience and unsurpassed survival instinct.

The African American must therefore graduate from being a 'boy', and a 'child' to being a 'man' in dealing with the white society. He must assume his full citizenship status as equal with all American citizens while he constructs strong and cohesive group identity based on his African cultural heritage.

4.3.5 Community and Communal Consciousness

The musicians in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* are a Community of people pooled together by a common interest of making music. Although belonging to the same ethnic category, they have different experiences, backgrounds, and varying worldviews. Aside being musicians, they are a vestige of the wider community of the lower class

sleepy-eyed negroes move
lazily toward their small
cold-water flats and rented
rooms to await the
onslaught of night, which
will find them crowded in
the bars and juke joints both
dazed and dazzling in their
rapport with life (*Ma Rainay's*: xv – xvi).

While Ma Rainey, the bandleader lodges in hotels her musicians scamper for available spaces in "cold-water flats and rented rooms" because of their low economic status. They constitute victims of harrowing economic mastication in the North. Although they have been together for an upward of twenty years, yet they have differences in their views about life and about themselves. For instance, Slow Drag reminds Cutler:

SLOW DRAG: Twenty-two years ... we done played the juke joints, the whorehouses, the barn dances, and city sit-downs...I done lied for you and lied with you...we done laughed together, fought together, slept in the same bed together, done sucked on the same titty ... and now you don't wanna give me a reefer (*Ma Rainey's*:31).

On the surface of it the Slow Drag-Cutler relationship could be seen as communalistic, built on the tenets of the African credo of caring and sharing. Toledo seems to understand this along the African world view of being a brother's keeper. That is why he calls it "African conceptualization," or African spirituality without invoking the gods. But without invoking the gods, a ritual is incomplete. Slow Drag and Levee do not understand this African "conceptualization,"

consequently Slow Drag renounces his Africanness; saying, "Nigger, ain't no African! I ain't doing no African nothing!" On his own part, Levee declares, "You don't see me running around in no jungle with no bone between my nose. "This statement is an endorsement of the savage images of Africa and Africans propagated by white anthropologists and scholars. The picture is that Africa is one large jungle with Africans living on trees and having flat noses.

This brief scene above exposes all the musicians, except Toledo as ignorant of their African history. Toledo knows his history and tries to educate the others about it Although his intellectual consciousness is equally projected in this scene, it alienates him from the group. He however projects the need to embrace those positive attitudes that are African as cord that should bind the group together. Toledo bemoans the absence of Africa-consciousness among members of the group:

TOLEDO: We done sold Africa for the price of tomatoes.
We done sold ourselves to the white man in order to be like him. Look at the way you dressed... That ain't African. That's the white man. We trying to be just like him. We done sold who we are in order to become someone else. We's

imitation white men (*Ma Rainey's*:94).

Issues raised by Toledo are significant and crucial in understanding the inability of the African American to forge common ethnic identity. By rejecting Africa, by being like the white man, especially the middle class; the African American has lost his personality, culture and history. He is a mere imitation of the whiteman. He ends up being a ghost; neither completely white nor entirely African. He is a victim of "double-consciousness" or Franz Fanon's 'Black skin, white mask'. By assuming this phantom featureless 'personality', the African American losses his true identity and citizenship.

Moreover, because African Americans have "sold" Africa by being assimilationists they have lost the heritage of community, commonality, and proud identity which are the basis for collective group identity.

However, Slow Drag captures this fragmentation when he replies Toledo that "You can't change what you are by how you dress". Unfortunately Slow Drag's assumption reads Toledo in the contrary, which is why Toledo immediately replies him that "It ain't all how you dress. It's how you act, how you see the world. It's how you follow life". But Levee sharply declares, "I ain't no imitation white man. And I don't want to be no white man" (*Ma Rainey's*:94) Unfortunately he possesses the integrationist tendency of the

black middle class. Rather, "I'm gonna be like Ma and tell the white man just what he can do" (94). He is caught-up middle-road in confusion; to be an upcoming middle class or to identify with his kindred in the symbolism of Ma Rainey.

The dilemma militating against the ability of African Americans to forge strong ethnic ties of community consciousness resides in Toledo's epic pronouncement above. By so doing, African Americans are victims of their collective failure to forge proud ancestral legacy and common cultural identity. Levee betrays himself and sells out to Sturdyvant who eventually destroys him. It is a tragedy to see that Levee prefers to align more with Irvin and Sturdyvant than with Ma Rainey and his fellow musicians. Levee's action could be understood as a pursuit of economic possibilities and possible attainment of social esteem as Ma Rainey. It is equally insightful for Ma Rainey having sensed Levee's ambition, decides to dismiss him. Symbolically however, Ma Rainey sees Levee as the white man who does not understand the blues.

4.3.6 *Ebonics*: Black American Vernacular English

As pointed out earlier in chapter two of this dissertation, *Ebonics*, or African American Vernacular English, or Black dialect,

or slang, stands out as a distinct African American linguistic identity; and African American contribution to civilization and American culture. This construction must be viewed against the truth that language establishes people's identity and people's expressive cultural boundaries. By extension, a people's language when entrenched becomes a powerful means of establishing social and political control (Thornborrow, in Thomas and Wareing, 1999:136).

Ironically but quite expectedly, the dominant culture looks down on *Ebonics* as trash language of lazy, ignorant, and uneducated black folks. Even some cross-section of African American middle class repudiate *Ebonics*. They fail to see it as "a distinct, healthy, functioning African American culture which is not white, and which does not want to be white" (Thomas and Wareing: 93).

Opponents of *Ebonics* see it as "rebellious, destructive, and hurtful to the American ideal of "one nation, indivisible". But *Ebonics* binds its speakers, the African American Community together in the understanding that they derive an identity that the dominant culture denies them. Strictly speaking, *Ebonics* is no longer an exclusive African American dialect, but an effective alternative American dialect that is used even by white Americans either consciously or as unconscious imitation of African Americans.

In their speech analysis, Haskins and Butts (1987) argue that some of the slang lexicons are derivatives from Africa. Such examples include "*O. K ....jazz, jitter* and *jitter-bug, hep,* (or *hip*), *banjo*, *boogie-woogie, jam* (as in *jam session*), *jive, to goose, to bug someone, to lam* (90), *to dig* (to understand or appreciate), *uh-huh* and *uh-uh* (for yes and no), *ofay* and *honkie* (names for the white man) *cocktail guy*, and *bogus*" (85). They assert that while some of the words are direct loan words from Africa, "others are metamorphosed African words", yet others are direct translations from Africa.

However, there are those terms that are originally African American derivatives. Such terms or words developed from the growing need to positivise negative stereotypes associated with blackness. In this category are "*bad* meaning good; *hard* having a positive connotation, *kill* to mean affect strongly, to fascinate; *love letter* to mean a bullet, and *murder* to express approval of something, excellent" (Haskins and Butts:85).

***Ebonics* has become easily associated with the language of African American drama because it has the portent capacity to communicate directly, effectively, and efficiently to the dominant black community. Justifying this position, Smitherman and Mc Ginnis (1980) argue that *Ebonics* is "a complete, systematic language variety with residual West African language influences" (cited in Jones, ed., 134),**

Expectedly however, African American integrationists (the black middle class) adopt the dominant racist view that qualifies "Black English as Black Nonsense" thesis just because this group fears the socioeconomic consequences of "being different" from the mainstream. It must be appreciated and admitted that the popularity of *Ebonics* in speech, drama, and music is a component of the Black consciousness movement of the 1960s and 1970s which sought to negotiate a distinct positive identity for African Americans within the locale of language. Therefore, the negative attitude of the black mainstream community lends credence and credibility to the Fanonist thesis of a people rejecting their own speech; a classical case of linguistic colonisation. For the African American to be truly decolonised, in addition to other factors, he must go through linguistic decolonisation (Jones, ed., :136).

By employing the use of *Ebonics* in his drama, Wilson succeeds in giving validity and value to the use of the language. More importantly, as a cultural purveyor, he also negotiates distinct speech identity by its use in his drama. The fact that Wilson's use of *Ebonics* does not disqualify his plays from Broadway performances give credibility to the use of the dialect; thereby discountenancing its denigration by both the dominant white culture and their African American middle class apologists who see *Ebonics* as an "impoverished" language.

The *Fences,* as an all-black character play, presents characters that employ the use of *Ebonics* in the dialogues and interactions. Except for the stage directions, all speeches and lines are rendered in the language of the community. Likewise, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* which features two white characters, Sturdyvant (the producer) and Irvin (the manager) is in no way any different. Both characters employ the use of *Ebonics* in their speeches. For example, their first speeches in the opening scene of the play, Sturdyvant tells Irvin; "(Over the speaker.) Irv… let's crack that mike, huh? Let's do the check on it", while a little down the line, "(Taking off the earphones.)" Sturdyvant once again to Irvin" Okay… that checks" (17). Such usage as "let's crack" and "huh" are lexicons of *Ebonics.* Irvin seems to be more affected by the black dialect. He tells Cutler: "Cutler… you boy's sandwitches are up here…", or Irvin's questioning of Toledo about Ma Rainey: "Do you know what's keeping her? Do you know why she ain't here? (46 – 47). Such usages as "shit!", "okay, boys, we're gonna do" (Irvin, 73) attest to the way *Ebonics* affects the mainstream dominant speech culture.

Generally, except for the stage directions which are written in standard American English, Sturdyvant and Irvin get caught up oscillating between American English and *Ebonics.* Thus, the occasional rendering of slangs by Irvin and Sturdyvant exposes the

extent to which they are affected by this speech pattern which they acquired either consciously or unconsciously. What is important is that the American mainstream cannot escape being affected or influenced by this language form. This symbiosis could have its roots in the Southern plantations, thereby constituting a legacy of oppression and slavery.

4.3.7 The Black Family Structure

Universally speaking, the family as a social unit is responsible for the socialisation, inculcation of morals and discipline of children. Children are expected to be direct reflection of the family they come from.

The destruction of African American family structure could best be understood against the framework of the slave regime which stipulated that "By law, a male slave was a more degraded being than a female slave, for the latter could be legally recognized as a mother. Since marriage between slaves had no legal standing, no offspring of slaves was ever recognized as having a legal father" (Thorpe, 1971:6). What this amounts to is the fact that "the black male has been denied the right and opportunity to play the role of a man..." (6).

E. Franklin Frazier (1939) therefore advanced socio-historical argument which blamed the fractured nature of African American family on slavery, racism, and economic conditions in the North. On the

other hand, Genovese and others advance the theory that even in the era of slavery, slave families were kept intact (cited in Staples :1).

Listed among some of the fallout of slavery, racism, and economic exploitation are the emergence of the syndrome associated with the matriarchal character of the family where black males are marginalised and rendered ineffective figures in the family circle. The instability of marital life resulting from the absence of legal basis for marriage during the period of slavery; and the dissolution arising from the process of urbanisation had existed among Black peasants in an agrarian society (Frazier, 1939; cited in Staples: 2).

Whatever the position of the pendulum in these arguments, the crux of the matter remains that slavery, racism, and economic conditions in the North dealt devastating blows on the African American family structure. For instance, a study conducted by Robert O. Blood, Jr., and Donald M. Wolfe, of Detroit families reveal that "Negro husbands have unusually low power" largely because of the consequence of job discrimination, segregated housing policies, and lack of educational opportunities for the men (Staples: 6).

In his summary, Staples (1986:2), supports the thesis that "it is the inability of Black men to secure employment that is largely responsible for the proliferation of Black-headed households" His prescription for

this anomaly is that it is only when Black-male employment opportunities are enhanced that the family can be made whole again.

Because the structure of the plantation regime precipitated the decimation of the African American family system it left in its wake far-reaching consequences for locales and spaces of identity that are negotiated with the family as its signpost. The movement for freedom which symbolised in the Underground Railroad and the post-Construction era ushered in a wave of migration to the North. This movement further compounded the misfortunes of African American family structure as families, individuals, and groups separated as a result, taking their destinies in their hands. They were only guided by their kindled souls and unwavering spirits.

This is the quagmire into which August Wilson, as a child and teenager, while growing up in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, found himself. His experience and story are the experience and stories of most African Americans. He suffered the agony of being brought up by a black mother whom he has great respect for. He grew up in poverty in the face of racial discrimination without savouring the joy and protection of paternity. Although his mother re-married a fellow African American, life for young Wilson did not improve. It is this cumulative scenario that August Wilson captures and dramatises in *Fences* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.

The theme of the African American family as one of the attributes of distinct ethnic group identity befitting of diasporic citizenship is not fully developed in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Due largely to the visible and domineering presence of Ma Rainey in relation to her affinity to Sylvester, the family system assumes seeming matriarchal disposition. Sylvester is her nephew, her sister's son, while Dussie Mae is either her daughter or a relation. Dussie's character is not developed in the play, but her presence in relation to family kinship is significant to this theme. The family relationship creates a niche for the extended kinship that is characteristically African in nature.

However, there is thematic shift in the treatment of the family as an identity in *Fences*. The play provides a seeming 'ideal' African American family structure that comprises the father (Troy), the mother (Rose), sons (Lyons and Cory), daughter (Raynell), and brother to Troy (Gabriel). Troy is both the family head and the breadwinner. He develops consuming passion for the well-being (economic and social) and security of members of his household. Although Gabe moved out and rented a place at Miss Pearl's, Troy pays the rent. So also Lyons lives with Bonnie, his wife, but comes around sporadically to borrow money from Troy. Troy's concern for the future progress of Cory is demonstrated in his refusal to get Cory

registered in the college football league. His reason is that: "The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book learning so you can work yourself up in that A & P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade" (2430).

But Cory insists on getting enlisted in the college football which will guarantee him a college scholarship. However, he believes that his father does not like him. He asks his father "How come you ain't never liked me?" The fact is that Troy is being protective of his son for fear that Cory might be destroyed by the white society just like he (Troy) was destroyed After a spell of question and answer between the two, Troy tells Cory that:

It's my job. It's my
responsibility! You
understand that? A man got
to take care of his family.
You live in my house ...
sleep you behind on my
bedclothes... fill you belly up
with my food... cause you
my son. You my flesh and
blood... cause it's my duty
to take care of you. I owe a
responsibility to you! (2431).

Dictated by this sense of responsibility and duty, Troy does not want Cory to go through life the way he (Troy) did. He explains to Rose when she pleads with him to allow

Cory to go ahead and enlist in the football league that, I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get. You the only decent thing that ever happened to me. I wish him that. But I don't ever wish him a thing else from my life. I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn't getting involved in no sports. Not after what they did to me in the sports (2432).

Troy, a spectacular ex-football player is never rewarded for his excellence. Today be is a garbage collector who gets elevated to a position that alienates him from both his fellow African Americans and his white colleagues. Since he cannot move beyond his present social level, his passion is to see Cory move up the social ladder into a comfortable position in life; a position of power that recognises his citizenship.

Indeed, this concern as expressed by Troy is typical of the concern every father harbours about his male children. Fathers' concern is to bring up male children that will carry the banner and image of the family with pride in succession. No father wants a child that ends up a failure. This explains why Troy expresses anxiety at Lyons' inability to get a decent job,

to which Bono rationalises that Lyons is still very young. Troy disagrees because, according to him, the boy is thirty four years old.

It is an act of indignity and shame for a family to have a son like Lyons lofting about without a decent job. While Troy struggles to establish an enviable and reputable family identity, Lyons seeks to be dependent on his wife for livelihood. However, a sour point in Troy's effort to bring up a decent family is the out-of- wedlock child that he begets through Alberta. This punctures his pride and threatens his family stability. However, the death of Alberta saves Troy's family from collapse. This explains why Rose accepted Raynell into the family. As such, by taking Raynell, Rose sees herself once again becoming a mother. Perhaps Rose's thinking is premised on morality; seeing that the coming into being of Reynell is not her fault, but the product of her husbands infidelity and amorous life. Therefore, Rose's acceptance of the baby, Raynell, is courageous and bold. After all, Raynell is already a member of the family, thus brining her into the fold is in line with the philosophy of the extended family system. In her exchange with Cory before Troy's funeral, she tells him:

Your daddy wanted you to
be everything he wasn't...
and at the same time he
tried to make you into
everything he was. I don't
know if he was right or

wrong… but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm (2459).

On her acceptance of Raynell into the family, Rose confesses that: By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. I didn't want to make my blessing off of nobody's misfortune… but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted then and never had (2460).

Rose promises therefore that "if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength… I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you… I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me" (2460).

August Wilson, to a very large extent succeeds in crafting positive African American family identity in *Fences*. It is commendable that Troy is able to hold his family together, despite Cory's rebellion and recalcitrance. The symbolism of Rose as a caring mother and mediator holds the fragile family balance till the end of the play. The construction of a patriarchal family as symbolised here marks a positive shift from the stereotype of stigmatising African American family structure as essentially matriarchal.

4.3.8 The Blues: African American Musical Form

The cultural significance of the blues to the identity and survival of the African American collective has already been highlighted in chapter two. However, it is necessary to emphasise that Wilson's interest in the blues draws largely from the fact that it is a folk musical form that expresses the dreams, experiences, agony, and aspirations of ex-slaves in the South. It is the music of these poor people who "have been able to find a vehicle of self- expression and raise themselves temporarily or even permanently out of the rut of poverty and isolation" (Ferris and Hart, 1982:164). It expresses a feeling towards life, dramatising and celebrating the ups and downs, thereby enabling both singers and audiences to externalise their deep-seated feelings of sorrow and sadness.

The blues constitutes both historical and cultural link between Africa and the Deep South in such a way that it embodies the essence, the spirit, the heritage, and the identity of the African American masses. It is therefore this concern that preoccupies August Wilson in *Ma Rainey's black Bottom* which establishes the significance that Wilson attaches to the philosophy of the blues. Not only does blues represent the essence of black identity, it also excites the will-to-power of African Americans who would otherwise lack the power to will beyond the narrow and racially defined spheres of their existence

(Nadel, ed., 1994:63). The blues therefore is a medium by "which African Americans deal with their troubled world", a metaphor for strength and will-power.

It was against these background that when Wilson was asked about factors that influenced his life and writing, he pointed out to the 4 – Bs; with the blues as having the strongest influence (*The New York Times*, Sunday, March 10, 1991). He sees the blues as the 'book' that informs the sensibilities of Africa Americans. Readers need to understand Wilson's passion for the blues in order to equally understand his work. In this light, citing an interview Wilson granted Bill Moyers (1989), Sandra Adell in the titled essay *"Speaking of Ma Rainey/ Talking about the Blues",* Wilson was quoted as extolling the blues as:

The blues are important because they contain the cultural responses of black in America to the situation that they find themselves in. Contained in the blues is a philosophical system at work .... The music provides you an emotional reference for the information, and it is sanctioned by the community in the sense that if someone sings that song, other people sing the song. They keep it alive

because they sanction the information that it contains (Nadel, ed., :52).

As if that was not enough, Pereira (1995) further captures the essence of the blues as conceived by Wilson as containing "ancient cultural clues to the true identity of African Americans which they cannot ignore except at their peril" (33). Ma Rainey understands this philosophical undertone of the blues which white people do not: because she explains that white people do not understand the blues, although they hear it being played out but they do not know how it evolved. They are therefore ignorant of its meaning and essence.

The spiritual essence of the blues is invoked by Ma Rainey when she observes that:

The blues help you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain't alone. There's something else in the world. Something's been added by that song. This be an empty world without the blues. I take that emptiness and try to fill it up with something (*Ma* Rainey's: 83).

The message being relayed by Ma Rainey is that even if the "God of Israel" is distanced from the life of the black folks, they still have their blues to fill in the emptiness, that " *em-*

powers **them to seek their truth in a "dimension of happening" that transcends the value-laden realities of the everyday" (Nadel, ed., :63). For Ma Rainey, her truth lies deeply embedded in the blues.**

As the older of most musical forms; jazz, swing, etc, blues naturally influenced them considerably. But the relevance of the blues as a folk musical form endears it to the poor rural peasants of the South. The reemergence of such forms as jazz and the swing witnessed generational interest in the new musical forms which affected the popularity of the blues. This is the conflict that August Wilson captures in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom;* a conflict symbolised in the character of Ma Rainey who represents the old form, and Levee who represents the new wave of the "swing". As far as Ma Rainey is concerned, she is a torch bearer of the black tradition; and as a torchbearer, she must preserve and protect the cultural relic that gives meaning to her being. Meaning what she believes in, Ma tells Levee, "You supposed to play the song the way I sing it. The way everybody else play it. You ain't supposed to go off by yourself and play what you want" (*Ma* Rainey's :101).

Understanding the need for conformity with the blues tradition, Cutler reminds Levee, "I done told you...it ain't *your* music. It's about *Ma's* music". Levee is more concerned about the danceable swing which he believes would earn him money. This drive for money leads Levee to ingratiate himself

with Sturdyvant who cheats him out of his talent. Levee ends up not only a sell-out to his people, but "he turns his back on the most important aspect of his musical heritage. It is also a denial of an essential part of his identity as a black American" (Pereira: 18).

4.9 Overview of Analysis

African ex-slaves in America, especially in the South had held the notion that the Civil War and the post-Reconstruction era were capable of integrating them into the mainstream American culture as equal citizens with same rights as their white compatriots. Unfortunately however, unfolding political, social, and economic developments dashed their hopes and aspirations. Black Codes, Jim Crow legislations and discrimination on all fronts excised African Americans as non-American or second-class citizens. The murder, lynching, and police brutality gave expression to these discriminations; invoking the reminiscences of slavery.

As a consequence to these harsh treatment which were accentuated by racism, Africans began the Northward migration in search for freedom and economic independence. This movement to the North changed their status from rural peasantry to urban dwellers. With unimproved economic fortunes and segregation at work places and unsanitary accommodation, African Americans were exposed the more to a new

brand of slavery. African American urbanisation culminated in the growth of ghettoisation across most urban cities in the land – New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, etc.

Against the background of all these unsavoury developments, African American citizenship consciousness and the quest for distinct identity came with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. In literary circle and politics this identity and citizenship consciousness manifested in the Civil Rights and the Black Arts Movement of the, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In the 1950s, African American dramaturgy was more dominantly nationalist and integrationist. The works of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and even Lorraine Hansberry tilted towards projecting the African American against integrationist and liberal leanings. But nationalism must be conjoined and subsumed under the ideology of African American theatre that speaks directly to the community. Hitherto, the theatre of the 1920s to 1950s were bereaved of ideological leaning that should have set an agenda for genuinely African American theatre that promotes the ideals of full citizenship and identity.

The first attempt at projecting genuine black theatre with ideological focus was that by the Free Southern Theatre, the cultural wing of the Council of Federal Organisations. According to Larry Neal,

It was activist theater: they wanted from the start to do plays "written for a Negro audience, which related to the problems within the Negro himself and within the Negro Community (Hill, ed., 1987:295).

The attendant problems that this theater faced were lack of defined content ideology which rendered their public statements "part Marxist, part nationalist", but above all, while the theatre was directed toward the black community, it "was co-directed *by* white theater people, co-acted by white northern professional actors, and entirely financed by whites" (Hill, ed.,:296).

Since every art is a product of an age and every artist is influenced by his social environment, the Free Southern Theatre abandoned the non-violent spirit of the Civil Rights Movement and adopted the radicalism and militancy of the 1960s. The arrowhead of this radical and militant African American theatre was Amiri Baraka. His Black Arts Repertory School and Theatre (Harlem) and The Spirit House (Nework, New Jersey) set the agenda for black community-oriented groups and companies across America. Ideologically, Baraka's Black Arts Theatre was to provide a theater in the community, and a manifesto for the theater as a total nationalist

institution, a reflection in miniature of the entire nation which was meant above all to be an instrument for the raising of political, ethical, and aesthetic consciousness (Hill,ed.,:296).

Baraka's ideological pursuit is seen as an attempt to "reach some people, move some people "-not with mere "skin drama," the black Broadway plays that lack revolutionary ideology, but with propaganda that is art that unites art and politics; literature with a "clear revolutionary edge to it" "(Mc Michael, ed; 1985:2096). Baraka's vision therefore created the ideology for the black theatre and Black aesthetics as summarised by Neal;

The ideology of blackness sprang out of American blacks' legitimate need to develop a philosophical orientation which would let them find a space within themselves to move, a private space that set them apart from whites, from the European value system. It was also a reaction to a racist language and imagery that made blackness a thing of evil; .... It's a frame which finally provided

operational identity to black artists. Because this ideology was created out of psychological need, it has no single text. The word "black" is the key to all its meanings, but sometimes black stands for spiritual commitment to black people (Hill, ed.,: 296- 297).

The Black Revolutionary Theatre was constructed on the basis of constructing the citizenship and identity of the African American diaspora through cultural and political nationalism.

The focus of the new African American theatre was the community – the home of the masses of the peoples. This theatre was not only radical, but rejected commercialisation of the theatre, "that black theatre would be legitimised by the black community *only*" – this addresses the content of black theatre which sought to reject white culture and traditions. In his own words, Baraka stated at a symposium in 1969 that the idea of a black theater should involve community consciousness. He stated that:

I would like to ...say that my conception of art, black art, is that it has to be collective, it has to be functional, it has to be committed and that

actually, if it's not stemming from conscious nationalism, then at this time it's invalid. When I say collective experience of black people, when I say committed, it has to be committed to change, revolutionary change. When I say functional, it has to have a function to the lives of black people (Hill, ed.;329).

The concept of identity as both psychological and social paradigm derives meaning from Garvey's statement that "the world has made being black a crime, and I have felt it in common with men who suffer like me, and instead of making it a crime, I hope to make it a virtue" (Dieng, 2004:2).

Identity cannot be negotiated in marginal space or locales, it must move from a marginal to a central position, desperate and shy to dignified and self-reliant positions in the wider society (Dieng:3) because hitherto the chief bond between African Americans " has been that of a common condition rather than a common consciousness: a problem in common rather than a life in common (Locke, 1968).

Therefore, it is insightful to highlight, arising from above schema that the first defining precept and sign post for identity is

colour; a call for pride in one's blackness. Dieng (2004:3) contends that "The uniqueness of his colour is the first element of the Black's attempt at identification in America". All other identities follow from the celebration of the black colour; a glamourisation and valourisation of its innate resilience and survival.

For any thought on African American identity to be relevant, the construction of the community and communal consciousness become the next consideration in citizenship and identity negotiation. Since "All blacks share the experience of racial subjugation... despite their many differences, blacks remain a community of fate" (Merelman, 1995:291). A people without a community have no basis for existence because their community defines who they are, what they are, and where they come from; in short, it defines their culture and tradition. This sense of community and communal consciousness has been adequately treated by both Amiri Baraka and August Wilson. This explains the ideological thrust of black aesthetics whose point of centrality is the black community.

Black diasporic citizenship and identity are negotiated through the dynamics of migration, separation, and reunion, thereby creating physical, social, political, spiritual, and economic locales. The flight from oppression, slavery, and rural poverty resulted in the movement to the North. While up North, and propelled by the dream of "pursuit

of happiness for all men" their dreams dashed as mere mirage in their pursuit of economic empowerment. Consequently they found themselves consigned to ghettos in run-down accommodation where they developed their communities.

Inadvertently, it was this migration that saw the emergence of African American middle class as a distinct and separate identity from the "sleepy-eyed" who always "move lazily toward their small cold-water flats and rented rooms" (*Ma Rainey's*: xv – xvi). Insulated and fenced-off, they imbibe the value system and traditions of the white mainstream. As signifier to their new status, most get married to white ladies as a symbolic expression of equality with white people. They therefore tend to distance themselves from the lot of African Americans by repudiating their culture and heritage. This scenario is vividly dramatised in *Dutchman*. But their rejection of their culture and heritage bears grave consequences for them as is depicted in the character of Clay. Clay's long flirtation with the white dominant culture as represented in Lula led to his death just when he denounced the oppressor. He is then seen as a dangerous betrayer. This is therefore the dilemma and tragedy of the African American who must either choose to identify with his people or identity with the white society at his own peril.

As signpost of proud cultural identity, African Americans developed separate

language form; the *Ebonics*. *Ebonics* is distinctively an African American cultural expressive medium that conveys the idiom and speech pattern of the masses of African Americans. It symbolises a rejection toward assimilation into the mainstream. Both Baraka and Wilson employ this language in their plays; spoken by Clay and Walker (both middle class) in *Dutchman* and *The slave;* and all characters in *Fences* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Commenting on Wilson's use of *Ebonics* in his plays, Hay (1994) describes it as "literate and thought-provoking as the best of the protest dramatists. Importantly, Hay defines the grammar and style "as those of ordinary people, embellished by music, poetry, and dance" (71). *Ebonics* therefore is a folk language that appeals directly to the consciousness and sensibility of the masses who live in the black communities. The lexicons convey deep-seated meanings that project positive images that hitherto had negative connotations.

The development of positive functional black family structure is yet another geographic locale of identity construction that features dominantly in Wilson's *Fences*. The hitherto widely held notion of visible female-headed households created negative identity for African American family as matriarchal. This impression was partly true then, when males were subjected either to low-paying jobs or had no jobs at all as a racist strategy to castrate manhood and render him ineffectual.

With the changing economic fortunes of males, this circle is swinging in favour of the men folk. As such, black family structures are more assuming the patriarchal structure, either as extended, nuclear, or both.

This positive image of the family is also presented in both *Fences,* especially; and to a lesser degree, in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. Ma Rainey* captures the practice of incorporating relations into the family circle so that they do not constitute destitute. Dusie Mae (a relation) and Sylvester (a nephew) represent this arrangement.

The epic struggle against paternalism and heritage of oppression and slavery constitutes the basis for citizenship and identity construction which dominates the life and existence of the African American till this day. The relationship between blacks and whites which is racially dictated is the root of this struggle. Baraka captures it in both *Dutchman* and *The Slave;* a dramatisation of a will to perpetuate domination on the one hand, and resistance and the quest for liberation and freedom on the other Wilson treats this theme subtly against the social geography of his own age. Wilson's point of diversion is that he does not lay the entire blame on the white man but also on the African American. Wilson's approach is reflective, to incite the African American to prick his conscience with a view for self-examination of his relationship with the dominant society and with his fellow

brethren. The economic exploitation of African Americans by whites is a major theme in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences* which altogether constitute racism and discrimination; especially Troy Maxson's experience at work place and as an ex-football player.

Geographies of identity and citizenship of African Americans continue to be negotiated and renegotiated as signposts that are not permanent. These identities are fluid and flexible, subject to changes depending on spaces and locales. The spiritual realms of black religiosity provides another space for strong identity construction. This development arose as a result of the failure of white religion to integrate and incorporate African Americans as equal before God.

The blues music as another vibrant and reverberating space of citizenship and identity which is indisputably African American contribution to the culture of America. What makes blues so unique is its grounding in its African heritage as an expression of the essence and experience of the African American. It is essentially a folk music, which belongs to the rural poor people. Rural folks tell their stories through singing the blues. African Americans also created such other musical forms like the ragtime, the gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul and hip hop. Dance steps and styles peculiarly African American were invented – the cakewalk, Black Bottom, the Twist, and Bugaloo. Prominent

names that stand out include the legendary James Brown and the phenomenal Michael Jackson dance styles (Gates, Jr., 1999).

African Americans are presently actively reinventing themselves, especially in music (hip hop), sports, the popular culture, the media, in education, and even in politics. The achievements recorded by scores of African Americans in their various spheres is unprecedented. Today quite a number of them have emerged as captains and Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of industries and corporate businesses. In the Armed Forces African Americans fought gallantly in World War I and II, Vietnam war, the Gulf Wars, etc. In the Sciences, they made foray into the North American Space Agency as scientists, as well as in Medicine and Engineering. The visibility of African Americans in high profile locales gives credit to the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, especially the focus on the movement for cultural nationalism and the political drive for recognition and participation as full citizens of America.

Within the locale of education and culture, a 'freeway' was provided for the construction and emergence of identity among African Americans. It is desirable for African Americans to ground themselves in an aggressive pursuit of education as one singular way of breaking the barriers for entry into other spaces of identity negotiation. Social, economic, and political mobility can

only be attained when African Americans acquire qualitative professional, vocational and academic education. However, a number of African Americans, past and present realised this necessity and used education to develop and advance their individuality and the ethnic community. Prominent among these are Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, the venerable Du Bois, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, Colin Powell, among others, used education to attain greater heights in their various fields of calling.

The introduction of Black Studies programs in American universities attest to the recognition of the growing importance of black identity in both education and importance of black identity in both education and black cultural production. This success resulted largely from the landmark efforts of the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements.

The political turf is the most difficult geographic space for the African American to break through because it remains the dominant locale for citizenship recognition and, or non-recognition. It is one space where African Americans expect to negotiate and have their voices heard and rights respected. In tandem, it is also one area where injustices and discrimination could be negotiated and redressed. But this philosophy is antithetical to the principles and ideology of the dominant

mainstream which seeks to perpetuate political domination of the American black. This explains the murder and assassination of prominent African American political leaders- Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and a host of others. It also explains why the Rev. Jesse Jackson got short-circuited in his bid for the Presidential Democratic Party nomination in 1984 and 1988 respectively.

Despite the institutional structure that impede African American progress in the locale of politics, a few giant strides have been recorded. African Americans – thanks to the franchise granted via the 1965 Voting Rights Act, African Americans have emerged as Governors of states – Virginia, California, Chicago, etc. Others have emerged as Senators and Mayors. The bold shot at the presidential nomination by Jesse Jackson is cataclysmic, giving way to the most visible African American political figure, Colin L. Powell, the American Secretary of State.

The geographic locale of cultural production saw the emergence of literary gladiators and gurus, beginning with Philips Wheatley who "gave birth to the African American literary tradition by publishing a book of poetry" (Gates, Jr., 1999), to the Harvard historian, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison,. Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, August Wilson, etc. In fact, the space is star-studded like the

countless heavenly stars. Quite a sizeable number of them are Award winners. Of particular mention is Toni Morrison, the 1993 Nobel Prize winner for Literature. To the credit of their collective literary/cultural endeavour is the production of *Africana: An Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, predicted by Du Bois in 1909. This documentary encyclopedia crowns the cultural identity initiative of African Americans.

In brief therefore, African Americans have succeeded in negotiating and reinventing their identity in various geographic locales across all boundaries and parameters of human endeavour. These identities continue to be shaped by the one dominant factor: 'blackness', as embodiment of the skin colour which is a signifier of the will to survive in a hostile environment. Against the backdrop of these achievements, Merelman (1995) opines that blacks are no longer the "invisible men" of Ralph Ellison's great novel; instead, they have become a highly visible puzzle. Black troops *have* now finally arrived at the gates of the cultural citadel (224).

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CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has been informed by the need to situate the African American historiography within the context and content of the dramaturgy of African Americans; especially the dramatic practices of Amiri Baraka and August Wilson. The disposition of these two prominent African American dramatists project the vision, the struggles, and aspirations of African Americans in their individual and collective search for identity and full-citizenship as diasporic citizens. The African American as diaspora is a "forced immigrant on a foreign soil with shattered tribal culture, living within the colonizing power as a minority group" (Butterfield, 1974:31). Similarly, he is perceived just a level above property. Infact, a Kentucky court once ruled that *"a slave is not a person, but a thing"* (cited in Thorpe, 1971:5). Underlying this definition lies the dilemma of the African American. But the African American is not the only immigrant or diaspora on the American soil. With the singular exception of the native Red Indians, all American citizens are immigrants. However, what sets the African American as distinct diaspora is the heritage of slavery and peculiar skin colour. Even the Red Indians who are the aboriginal owners of the land have not only been forced into near-uninhabitable reserves, but have had their population heavily depleted by the Colonists.

Paradoxically however, the labour of these ex-slaves was responsible for the evolution and development of European and American industrial capitalist structures. What African Americans got in return for their sweat, labour, and blood was racism, discrimination, segregation, poverty, and exclusion. Racism reduced African Americans to what North Carolina white landgrant described as (Thorpe:7) "The Negro is a child race...bound to be under the tutelage and control of the whites" whose responsibility it was to civilise, guide and control the black man.

Slavery destroyed the African American social fabric, including the family system, as black families were abruptly sundered and husbands, wives, and children flung far and wide among the great plantations of the South, where voluntary movement was curbed and blacks could not travel without a pass (Pereira, 1995:1).

This situation has made it difficult for the African American to rise above white social construction associated with him. Removing the scars of slavery, racism and prejudice has been a daunting task; as such, his institutional construction of low racial status continues to deny the African American

fundamental right accorded citizens as prescribed by the American constitution.

Following from above therefore, the African American odyssey has largely been the struggle for "freedom, equality, and manhood" (Thorpe: 4) because slavery deliberately denied "the black male the right and opportunity to play the role of a man, to be aggressive, competitive, and to hold high positions." The exercise of manhood presupposes an expression of freedom, pride, the opportunity for maximum growth, self-expression, and personal and social health (Thorpe: 5). Above all, an expression of manhood is symbolic of recognition of full-citizenship and construction of positive identity.

The construction of geographies of identity by African Americans as diasporic citizens results mainly from "within a Black Atlantic tissues of memory, community, exile and distance" (Kanneh, 1998:63); a people that "are not ethnically rooted in the land where they live" (McGiffert, ed., 1964:232). They constitute victims of separation, skewed from their ancestral homeland, their ancestral worship, forced to adopt new names and new thinking; and an estrangement from the human spiritual essence which constitute loss of identity and personality. They were also dismembered from community identification and consciousness, not only separated from the family, but also condemned to remain 'black' even as offsprings of mixed marriages,

remain 'black'. These dialectics therefore constitute the basis for the contestation and negotiation of geographies of identity at several geographical locales – ranging from the physical to the social locales and spaces, to the spiritual, community, gender, race, family, etc that have been analysed in chapter three and four of this dissertation.

By the antecedents of slavery and separation, the African American cannot afford to be a lone ranger in a wilderness of white individualism. This explains Pereira's (1995:51 – 52) position that

During slavery, the destruction of families and forced separations engendered among black people a sense of community that extend its sheltering embrace to every destitute person of the community ... everyone belonged to the community.

The community therefore becomes the focal point of the construction of the communitarian / civil republican citizenship model.

One other major factor that shapes the various geographies of identity is the tragedy of forceful separation from the African motherland to the New World, the unsolicited separation from families and relations, separation arising from the flee from the

South to the North in search for economic empowerment and freedom, breakdown of matrimonial institutions leading to fathers, mothers, and children "having the walking blues". In the same vein, separation also resulted from the craving for freedom, equality, manhood, and survival, but which remain an endless gyration in a wilderness of rejection. Central to this sense of rejection and despair however, is a strand of hope that keeps alive the human spirit determined and resilient.

Aside the decimation of all forms of social structures which invariably made it mandatory for the African American to forge community consciousness, the abstraction and stereotypic stigmatisation also tended to exclude and thereby deny his citizenship status. Although citizenship manifests individualistic and collectivist elements in its expression, it only remains meaningful when expressed in communal context because it serves as agency for sustainable human relationship (Faulks, 2000).

Indices of active citizenship; economic, political, and social capitals are denied the African American. As a result, he is not only marginalised but exposed to poverty, discrimination, and exclusion. It is however instructive to remind us that all models of citizenship developed as backlash to the innate manifest contradictions arising from the practice of liberal citizenship which does not recognise group or difference in rights

claim. These contradictions therefore seek to exclude such minority groups, religious, gender, race, and colour difference.

Liberal citizenship is central to the promotion and protection of capitalism and individualism; thereby recognises only individual rights to the exclusion of group rights. Liberal thought conceives of difference and groupism as oppositional to the nation – state (Kylicka, Schlesinger, Jr., among others).

Diasporic citizenship is a victim of discrimination on all fronts– political, social, economic, educational, etc. These discriminations culminate in the economic condition of poverty that has become the hallmark of the masses of African Americans. Exclusion therefore leads to the construction of all forms of identities on different geographical locales and spaces. However, at the heart of diasporic citizenship and geographies of identities is the dire drive for recognition through active participation, not just passive beholder of rights, in the business of positively impacting in the political and social affairs and policies of one's community or nation.

Faulks (2000) argues quite objectively that " to deny others basic right that we enjoy on the grounds that they are culturally different is to put at risk our own rights and the basis of social rights" (41). It is these denials of rights and the irrepressive spirit for survival that cause African Americans to

refuse "to be banished to the edge of town, although white America would have preferred them there. They were inching closer to the mainstream of American society" (Pereira: 35) through resistance in the streets, the court rooms, the press, the pulpit, etc.

The celebrated Civil Rights Movement which culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has far-reaching consequences for the full-citizenship of the African American. It is far-reaching because the Act legally outlawed discrimination in public facilities, employment, and integration in schools enrolment. The scope also guaranteed the rights of minority groups and women who hitherto experienced discrimination. Similarly, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was one of the monumental dividends of the Civil Rights Movement. Both Acts seek to reinforce the guarantee of full citizenship which brought to an end the system of Jim Crow in the South (Appiah and Gates, Jr., 1999:155). Not only did the Civil Rights Movement expand the parameters of American democracy, it succeeded in foisting citizenship, racial, social, and economic justice. In principle however, it might be plausible to argue that the success of the Civil Rights Movement opened up greater playground for the attainment of full potentials of African Americans.

In the same vein, the Black Power and Black Arts Movements provided the touchstone in the struggle for citizenship and

identity because they arouse new black consciousness and pride. However, often times African Americans' efforts and struggles were resisted with brute force, murder, lynching and acts of state terrorism as examplied in the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. But as Faulks (2000) argues further, there is no single country anywhere in the world that is homogenous because all states are "multinational, containing as they do many competing cultural and ethnic traditions" (37 - 38).

According to Potter (1964), with the exception of the remnants of Red Indians, all Americans are immigrants who "began as Europeans (or in the case of 10 per cent of the population, as Africans)..." (McGiffert: 232). The tragedy of the African American is the inability to construct recognisable citizenship status as a diaspora without recourse to freedom struggle and the legality of self-definition. This difficulty is also captured in Potter's (1964:232) treatise below:

No people can qualify as a nation in the true sense unless they are united by important qualities or values in common. If they share the same ethnic, or linguistic, or religious, or political heritage, the foundations of a nationality can hardly be questioned. But when their ethnic,

religious, linguistic, and political heritage is mixed, as in the case of the American people, nationality can hardly exist at all unless it takes the form of a common adjustment to conditions of a new land, a common commitment to shared values, a common esteem for certain qualities of character, or a common set of adaptive traits and attitudes.

Unfortunately, the antecedents of slavery as well as the fact that slaves that were brought to the New World did not come from one territory along the West African coastline made identification with Africa in practical terms impossible. Since all thoughts on citizenship are rooted in the notion of nation and nationality, it becomes imperative and desirous of African Americans to identify with Africa as a trope for unity and power. As it were, their identification with Africa is only captured in memory, nostalgia, forgetfulness, and mythological spiritualism. Africa constitutes not only "roots and routes" of contact with the diaspora, it remains, by and large, a physical and mythical distance.

Nevertheless, collective African American citizenship and identity is a choice made in

furtherance of collective survival and interests along the line of "the protection of rights for members of the groups within the existing states, with no claim for a territorial homeland" (G. Vuckoric, 1997:48). Therefore, the significance of full-citizenship and inability to construct single dominant identity are rooted in the inevitable reinventing of cultural, emotional, and social history and geography of the African American which seeks to assert group collective and difference. In the light of this, R.H. Edelin (1990) proposes that the African American collectives must be active in the new cultural movement with infinite potential, must see his freedom and advancement as indivisible, while recognising all African people as kin, must turn negatives into positives and challenges into opportunities; and must convert their political power into actual group empowerment in policy and public areas (J. Dewart ed., 1990: 182-183). Above all, Edlin suggests that "Black definitions in terms of identity, life, and behaviour, must be left for blacks to determine" (Dewart, ed.,:171) while advocating for unrestricted ground to facilitate broad base participation

Since it is axiomatic that every writer is a writer in politics, and by extension a product of his age and time, both Amiri Baraka and August Wilson could not have written for an age other than theirs. It is also truism that all writers are "products of the age into which they are born. They are more shaped by

society than are able to shape it" (Verney, 2000:116). Both playwrights, in situating the debate on citizenship and geographies of identity within the content of dramatic practices, have successfully captured the political, social, literary, and cultural nuances and mood of their age. They project their characters as victims of the racist system, victims of segregation and discrimination, and a people who are fighting to re-establish themselves as recognised and acceptable citizens of America through social mobility in contestation and renegotiation of geographies of identity that seems endless. Both Baraka and Wilson create characters who seek to redefine themselves by themselves – their identity, their place in the American mainstream, and their relationship with the mainstream society. Fundamentally however, what appears in agreement is that the characters seek to repudiate the exclusivist nature of the mainstream which is the bane of their condition through a complex network of separation that tends towards self-affirmation and self-fulfillment.

In arriving at this summation, there are quite a number of limitations in this scholarship. It is admitted that this study is not a complete trajectory of the struggle of African Americans in their strive toward the establishment of full citizenship and proud identity as captured in these dramatic practices. A lot of study can still be done with a view to filling the gaps, dotting the 'i' and

crossing the 't' that are left out. This dissertation therefore provides an invaluable reference point and springboard for further and future studies in this field. It is a considered view that there is dearth of materials in the areas of African American dramatic tradition, especially critical works, on this side of the Atlantic largely because the study area has not yet been as entrenched as the dramas of Europeans and white Americans. It is necessary therefore to seek to popularise the study of African American drama in Nigerian Universities as part of the growing consciousness of the American studies program. The historical and cultural linkages and heritage binding Africa, Africans, and the diaspora world, especially African Americans, makes it more necessary for this reordering of interest.

The choice of Amiri Baraka and August Wilson as playwrights, and two of their plays each; i.e. *The Slave* and *Dutchman; Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Fences,* respectively do not holistically reflect the wide cornucopia of dramatic works that have been produced by African American playwrights. But the plays help to bring to the fore the projection of citizenship and identity of the African American. This position therefore constitutes a limitation in scope. However, these select plays offer a window into the wide horizon of literary corpus that have been produced. This choice is especially instructive because Baraka is an icon, the

moving spirit, and the flagship of the revolutionary theatre of the 1960s. August Wilson, a playwright of the 1980s and 1990s admits being influenced by both the personality and revolutionary works of Baraka. Admittedly however, both playwrights differ in their literary styles. While Baraka is militantly radical, a political agit-prop dramatist on-and-off the stage, Wilson treats his 'radicalism' with the subtlety of a historical chronicler who believes in depicting the factual relationship between African Americans and the white mainstream on the one hand and inter African American relationship on the other. In short, while Baraka tends to wholly blame whites for the condition of the African American, Wilson while blaming the whites, also blames blacks for accepting their condition as fait accompli. By adopting such a position, Wilson seems to relive the conservatism and accommodation of the 1980s and 1990s, "a period in which earlier gains, and the promise of more enlightened age in U.S. race relations, were lost or compromised in a return to more reactionary values" (Verney: 115).

Amiri Baraka and August Wilson, as well as their characters are victims of separation on different levels. For example, in living to the true ideology of the revolutionary theatre, Baraka parted ways with his white Jewish wife. This can be seen as symbolic repudiation of "the white thing". In his dramatisation of this separation in *The Slave,* Walker Vessels

does not only part ways with Grace, his white wife, but he also separates from his two daughters and Easley his white literature professor. Similarly in *Dutchman,* Clay's final tirade and outburst to Lula represents separation and repudiation in classical term of the "white thing" and white flesh which constitute the consuming passion for the black middles class.

On the other hand, Wilson suffers separation on several levels: at an early age he separated from his white German father, Kittel; Wilson dropped Kittel's name and took up his mother's maiden name as recognition for her African heritage; he also found himself separated from high school at tender age of fifteen. From then on, he had been through life on his own engaged in private studies and reading. Troy Maxson, the protagonist of *Fences* epitomises this separation bug on several levels: his mother left his father just when Troy was eight; while he himself developed the "walking blues" and left his father at age fourteen. In short, Troy's life has been a cascade of one separation after another.

It is these separations arising from search for full citizenship and identity that developed into streaks of never-ending geographies of identity that are contested and negotiated at different spaces and locales. The challenge before African Americans today and beyond is to identify and forge common cultural and national parameters for unity. Or

in the words of August Wilson, (Safier and Baci, 1992:793):

You have to know who you are, and understand your history in America over more than 300 years, in order to know what your relation is to your society ("*The Boston Globe*, October 26th, 1990).

Furthermore, Wilson poses a challenge that now that slavery is gone, African Americans must assert themselves as people with dignity and proud racial identity.

African Americans, and indeed the entire black world are confronted with the daunting task of dismantling and eliminating racism and its attendant bigotry and prejudice. Appreciation of this position lies in Degler's (1985) argument that slavery might not be the origin of racial discrimination and prejudice against blacks. Racial bigotry and prejudice are traceable to sixteenth century Europe (England) long before migration to the New World. Evidences abound in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*. Here Shakespeare stigmatised the noble and commanding Othello as a "thing" while Moor Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* is referred to as a "barbarous Moor" (Degler:3). The only ground upon which blacks can be considered as equal to whites is when prejudice and bigotry are

eliminated. But is this possible? The difficulty lies in the ideology of the Aryans' (Teutons) racial superiority through so-called 'God-endowed' purity of the bloodline.

Against the background of this analysis therefore, the negotiation and contestation of geographies of identity and full-citizenship remain an endless search because American Caucasians, no matter their limit of liberalism, will not shift grounds to allow for the enthronement of equality, freedom, manhood, full citizenship and common dominant African American identity. This difficulty constitutes a dilemma not only for the African American but a dilemma that confronts the entire human race.

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