



## THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WRITER'S USE OF ART TO PROVE THEIR HUMANITY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper highlights focuses on “The African -American writer’s use of art to prove their humanity”. This view was substantiated by analyzing various works of Afro- American writers from various periods down the time. This analysis reflects the inhuman activities that took place in the past and also depicts the immense pain and intense longing of the black writers, for freedom . By focusing on “the influence of experience of slavery” in various works, the brutal practice of slavery was projected. African slaves undergone cruel experiences due to the barbarous treatment of their masters. By reminding those cruelties, various authors had tried to make us listen to the black’s unheard voice of suffering which screams that they are also humans. Their sufferings made them to lose their originality and individuality. Various authors like Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry, Phillis Wheatley had portrayed the death of the artistic skills of talented black women who went unnoticed or unheard of now. Thus the paper portrays the human qualities killed by the cruelty of slavery.*

**Keywords:** Afro-Americans, art, creativity, suppression, slavery

### INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance was the name given to the culture, social and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem between the end of the World War I and the middle of the 1930s. During this period Harlem was a cultural center, drawing black writers, artistes, musicians, photographers, poets, and scholars. This movement kindled a new black cultural identity. Its

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1P a g e

essence was summed up by critic Alain Locke in 1926 when he declared that, through art, “Negro life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self determination”. Locke declared the message through art where the same is used as a tool by the African-Americans to express themselves. The African-American writers worked to turn the artists’ dreams of freedom and equality into reality. Moreover they have represented their immense suffering through their writings.



Like most other regions of the world, slavery and forced labor existed in several parts of societies in Africa for thousands of years. They were treated brutally by their white masters. By recording the inhuman practices forced on them by the Whites through their writings, their unspoken voice echoes that they are also humans and deserve to be treated equally. Among the common themes used during Harlem renaissance, this paper focuses on “the influence of the experience of slavery”. Alaine Locke, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude Mckay has picturized the cruelties effectively. “The Slave’s Dream” by Henry W. Longfellow depicts the miserable life lead by the slaves who were once a free man.

#### **A portrayal of slave’s in ‘The Slave’s Dream’:**

The slave’s dream is what exactly the title implies. The poem starts as a slave fall asleep and enters into a dream while working in the field. The dream takes him to the time when he was happy and free. The slave also had a happy family:

*“He saw once more his dark-eyed queen, Among her children stand; They clasped his neck, they kissed his cheeks, They held him by the hand!” whom he sorely misses:*

*“A tear burst from the sleeper’s lids and fell into the sand.”*

This shows how much the slave misses his family and his happy life once he enjoyed. The image of a tenderly devoted family apparently presents a stark contrast his current realities. Moreover the slave misses freedom:

*“And then at furious speed he rode  
Along the Niger's bank”.*



This sentence helps the readers to understand the unlimited freedom enjoyed by the slave in his own land by mentioning his uninhibited ride on horseback. His ride carries him across the plains to the beautiful ocean side. These wonderfully colourful and vibrant visual images are accentuated by the free and native sounds of the wild. Along with showing what the slave felt, the poet shows us what the slave did not feel in his dream. He mentions the sound of the slave masters whip as well as the burning heat which was not felt by the slave.

The final three lines of the poem read:

*“And his lifeless body lay, a worn-out fetter, that the soul had broken and  
thrown away”.*

These lines bring the slave back to the hell where he lives in. He feels like his body is no longer connected to his soul; his soul remains in Africa with his family and land, when his body is now in captivity across the ocean. This shows the longingness of the slaves for their homeland. He has dreamt his final dream and his soul has been freed from the bonds of slavery. Rather than live a life of enslavement, the dreamer dies because death is the only



means of attaining freedom of any kind. This is one of the best evidences for the influence of slavery.

Though the loss of blacks by the white domination is more, another important record of the loss which the authors of this paper wish to make is the treatment of women. Black women were also treated cruelly equal to black men. Ezra Pound quotes that "Humanity is the rich effluvium, it is the waste and the manure and the soul, and from it grows the tree of the arts." Potrayal of Arts in Alice Walker's 'In Search of Mother's Gardens':

*The inhuman practices killed the human tendency, so dead, it killed the artistic skills in women. Alice Walker in her essay, "In search of Mother's Garden" has portrayed the artistry of African women. In this work, Walker seeks ways to uplift the blacks. She uses literature and poems of other authors to get a deeper impact on Black women in her era.*

*"Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint water colors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasturelands? Or was her body broken and forced to bear children"*

Walker personalizes these women by referring to them as "our mothers and grandmothers". This shows the thirst of black women for arts and paintings. And also the job assigned to them which stopped them from living the life as they wish. Toomer, a critic, felt that black women were unhappy and felt unloved. Both Walker and Toomer felt that black women were not allowed to dream, yet alone pursue them.

*"They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality, which is the basis of art, that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane".*

This shows that how the slavery had made many women talents to remain unknown. Walker gives a personal account of her own mother,

*"And yet, it is to my mother-and all our mothers who were not famous-that I went in search of the secret if what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day".*



Walker gives an account on her mother's talent on gardening. Walker says that her mother's ability to continue gardening even in the poor lifestyle proves her strength to strive in life and to do what she wishes.

*"She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover all our beds. There was a never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts..."*

This shows how women's life was tormented by various duties. Here garden symbolizes their inner beauty.

Portrayal of discrimination of women in society in "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou:

The poem is addressed to the society which treats women as a lower creature. The women boldly states that she will rise beyond the society's domination. The author states that though they were written poorly on the history and made them to lead a tough life, they will rise.

*"Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?"*

She replies that she is impertinent since she was troubled by them with gloom as though she has oil well in her living room. Her confident is explicit in the lines where she says that she will rise like sun and moon. The author has uttered how women were expected to be in the society. She was expected to be with bowed head, lowered eyes, fallen shoulders, weakened because of the cry.

*"Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?"  
She again question that,  
"Does my haughtiness offend you?"  
stating that she will laugh, as though she has gold mines in her backyard.  
"You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,"  
The above lines shows how she was tormented my society.  
She bears bitter words, cruel sights and heatedness.  
"Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise*



*Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise"*

The author says that she will raise beyond the history that says ill about her, the painful past fearful nights dwelled with fear, and represents herself as the hope of the slave.

## CONCLUSION:

Through these analysis the authors make evident of the sufferings of the blacks and the urge of the black writers to communicate the sufferings through their seminal works. The works under analysis, "A Slave's Dream" gave a vivid picture of an African slave, "In Search of Mothers Garden" speak about the declination of creative spirit in women due to the slavishness and the poem "Still I Rise" articulates the strength and resiliency of women against the social discrimination against women. Thus this is how the African-American writers has depicted the barbarous happenings which made the people to lose their originality, to make the audience listen to the unheard voice of their people. On the whole, this paper has depicted the human qualities killed due to the experience of slavery.

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