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# **Race and Class in Kaye Gibbons' *Ellen Foster***

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## **Dedication**

*We dedicate our work to our dear parents for their encouragement. We also dedicate this work attempt to all teachers and anyone who helped us by a word or a deed.*

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## **Abstract**

The study of *Ellen Foster* novel is devoted to deal with how race and class are portrayed. The aim behind this study is to examine thoroughly the racial and classical insights in Gibbon's literary work. More importantly, it focuses to scrutinize how black persona endures white's segregation and his class separation attitudes. The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is about historical, social and personal backgrounds including the historical background of race in America namely the history of the civil right movement. The second chapter deals with the theoretical and literary backgrounds by employing Marxist and African American criticism to the novel. African American criticism depicts the aspects of race throughout revealing the historical background of the American persona while Marxist criticism has come to deter the class conflicts in African American societies. The third chapter profoundly examines class insights in *Ellen Foster* novel throughout analyzing each chapter. Eventually, the fourth and the last chapter scrutinizes the racial insights in this literary work. We have answered the raised questions which revolve around race and class in American societies in 50s, 60s and 70s.

**Key words:** *Ellen Foster*, race, class, segregation.

## **General Introduction**

The present study of Gibbons' novel deals with how race and class are portrayed through focusing on the characters. In this dissertation, we try to explore how race and class evolved to undermine the life of the black persona in *Ellen Foster* novel throughout investigating how race and class shape the life of both the white Ellen and the black Starletta. The study is an attempt to make an innovation and novelty in terms of focusing on the black Starletta rather than the white Ellen.

### **1. The Purpose of the Study**

The aim behind this study is to investigate the concept of race and class in *Ellen Foster* throughout relying heavily in its historical and social background by picking out the insights in *Ellen Foster* novel.

### **2. The Problematic**

The study is a humble attempt to investigate the relationship between class and race by focusing on the problematic that determines the nature of correlation between them.

### **3. Research Hypothesis**

We hypothesize that there is a relationship between two concepts; race determines class and the latter categorizes the former. In other words, how race shapes social class of both the white Ellen and the black Starletta and how class affects race.

### **4. Research Questions**

This research is built upon three main questions.

1. Do both class and race help Ellen to overcome her difficulties and contribute in a way or another to achieve her dream?
2. Can both the social status and racial belongings dehumanize the black Starletta and enforce her to endure long and endless pain?
3. To what extent do the white stereotypes enhance the idea that the black are born to chop and the white are created to be their masters?

### **5. Objectives of the study**

There are three main objectives

- Illustrating that both the class and race helped Ellen to overcome her difficulties and contributed in a way or another to achieve her dream



- Demonstrating that both the social status and racial belongings played a major role in dehumanizing Starletta as a black person and promoting Ellen as a white girl.
- Highlighting that the negative effects of the stereotype played an immense role in worsening Starletta's situation.

## 6. The Proposed Methodology

Our dissertation is a thematic study, focusing on the analysis of the concepts of race and class in *Ellen Foster* novel by Kay Gibbon. We analyze the novel using the descriptive analytical study in the light of the African American, the post-colonial literature criticism and Marxist theory in literature.

## 7. Chapter Division

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter tackles historical, social and personal backgrounds namely the chronological development of race in America, the history of civil right movement and the social circumstances of the blacks in 50s, 60s and 70s.

The second chapter shows theoretical and literary backgrounds by investigating the African American criticism, the most known African American writers between 50s and 70s and the impact of Marxism literary theory on African American literature.

The third chapter details the real manifestation of race in *Ellen Foster* novel throughout analyzing the racial insights towards the black people.

The fourth chapter deals with class in *Ellen Foster* by demonstrating the insights which reveal class conflict in both Ellen and her white community, and Starletta and her black community.

**Chapter One:**

**Historical, Social and Personal  
Backgrounds**

## Introduction

The concept of race in America rooted back to the phenomenon slavery in which the black people were treated very badly to the extent they were bought and sold like cheap goods because they were considered less valuable than the white people. The latter obliged them to work in their fields, industries and homes under unbearable circumstances.

After many years, the black and some of the white people like Abraham Lincoln made a revolutionary war to end slavery. Indeed, the phenomenon of slavery was abolished but its negative effects lasted for a long time and appeared in the shape of racist laws such as Jim Crow laws. This newly emerged type of racism was fought with nonviolent means by the efforts of black American writers and social activists who wanted to abolish racism from the subconscious stemmata of the white people. The Civil Right Movement has played a very influential role in fighting racism in America. This organization consists of religious, social and literary figures that made strenuous efforts to defeat racism. In order to demonstrate its crucial role, it is very important to explore its chronological development namely in the 50s, 60s and 70s relying heavily on the social and historical aspects.

### 1.1 Definition of Race

The common sense of defining the concept race is viewed as a category of people having biological differences whose ancestors came from different places over the world. The above mentioned belief is completely wrong owing to the fact that the differences resides in the social aspects not the local ones. In this sense, the *Racial Inequality* book portrays race as

Race is a social category, not a biological one. While racial classifications generally use inherited biological traits as criteria for classification, nevertheless how those traits are treated and how they are translated into the categories we call “races” is defined by social conventions, not by biology. (August, 2009, p. 1-2)

### 1.2 Racial Classification

Racial classification in America is defined by the color line as stated by Du Bois. For instance, if you are a black person, it means that you belong to an African category. More importantly, the aim behind studying race in America is to establish a clear relationship between the various racial classifications and its long suffering from different kinds of oppression. In other words, how race contributes, in a way or another, in promoting a social category and dehumanizing another one. (August, 2009)

### 1.3 The History of the Civil Right Movement

In order to understand the concept of race and how it evolved in America, it is of highly importance to mention the history of one of the most influential movement in the twentieth century. Eventually, the Civil Right Movement held the holy duty to battle racism in America.

The Civil Right Movement encompassed the majority of social and political groups that were active in America for the sake of ending racial segregations towards the African Americans. It tends to maintain full citizenship to its followers by means of judicial recognitions and federal protection. Initially, it emerged as a logical and natural response to the existing social and political circumstances. These circumstances resulted from racist laws that dehumanized the African people. The post -Reconstruction period did not meet the black expectations since its legislations were in favor of the white people. Thus, black community endured different forms of racism. Racial segregation was the most apparent form in which the black people were separated from the white people in all sphere of life including education, public places and churches (Karson, 2004 ).

The movement followed a highly organized and well planned political strategy to sound their grievances. Indeed, the above mentioned strategy resided in disobedience and civil resistance which was a fertile land for many positives changes to grow (Hall, 2005).

The circumstances of the Second World War urged many African American writers and social activists to revolt against their miserable conditions. The latter obliged to migrate from the south to the north as a way to improve their social situations. The black immigration created a sense of freedom which was obviously manifested in literature. The writers tended to make their voice well noticed by using their pens as a peaceful arm to battle the existed racial segregation and social discrimination (Karson, 2004 ).

One of the noted writers is James Baldwin who fought for the right of blacks and homosexual. His known novel is *Go Tell it on the Mountain* in 1950s. Richard Wright is another major figure thanks to his vital role in this era. He is best known for his autobiographical novel the *Black Boy* (Gates, 1988).

Ralph Ellison is another main novelist who wrote the well-known novel *Invisible Man* which tackles the issue of being both black and poor man in a society where the value of the character is judged by both skin color and wealth. The novel gained national reward for being influential in literary history(Rosenberg, 2017).

The civil right period witnessed the rise of black women writers such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez in 1950s and 1960s. In the decade between 1950s and 1960s appeared a group of playwrights notably Lorraine Hansberry's play which was entitled *Raisin in the Sun* that focuses on black poor family living in Chicago(Rosenberg, 2017).

Martin Luther the King was leader of the Civil Right Movement in 1960s. He was very inspiring to gather African American people around their common destiny to draw an end to social discrimination and racial segregation. His powerful rhetorical language helped gain the trust of black people as well as the white ones. In 1951, he began his studying career in Boston University where he spent four years. He is best known for his *A Letter to Birmingham* and his speech I have a dream. He is the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference between 1957 and 1968. He worked as a minister in Baptist church in Montgomery Alabama. . He is well known for his endless defending of the black people and the deprived social category especially the poor. He suffered from depression and humiliation in his adolescence. He was assassinated in the fourth April in 1968 by James Earl Ray. He won the Noble Peace Prize in 1964 and presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977(Hall, 2005).

#### **1.4The Social Backgrounds**

In this section, we look at how the black people encountered the social conditions of 50s, 60s and 70s. That is to say, to what extent the African American people reacted to the existed difficulties resided in social discrimination and racial segregation.

The African American people even though they were considered free and equal to their white counterparts; they were still enduring many social obstacles such poverty and marginalization which made their dream of freedom and equality just a pie in the American sky. However, segregation, disenfranchisement and exploitation were the three evil aspects that they African persona was put under their mercy.(Phoebe, 2015)

Racial segregation was intimately related to that era. Eventually, the black people were separated from the social domains of life. This racial strategy was maintained by

racist laws throughout applying the doctrine separate but equal in education and in public services(Phoebe, 2015).

The most significant thing relies heavily in the fact that the services that were intended to the black people were less qualified in comparison to the ones that were under the white command. For instance, in education the quality of teaching was inferior and did not contribute in the development of their students to overcome their daily challenges. These establishments were less funded than the white ones. In public services such as restaurants, coffee shops and social clubs, the black people were separated as a clear intention to minimize their social role(Morris, 1984).

Disenfranchisement is also a political measurement in which the majority of the blacks were far away from participating in elections. They were viewed as less qualified citizens to engage in making decisions since they were obliged to pass written tests and to possess houses in order to achieve full-citizenship. As a result, they did not benefit from the distribution of the wealth at that time owing to the fact that they were living under the poverty line(Morris, 1984).

Exploitation is the third evil that the African people endured for long decades. The racial segregation based on their skin color and the political disfranchisement humiliated the black's dignity and put them under various means of exploitations. In this sense,Bonnekessen determined that the above mentioned exploitation affected deeply the development of the African persona in America and destroyed his chances of success to be part of the American dream owing to the fact that they must endure poverty, inferior education and limited economic chances as apparent exploitation. The psychological or the intrinsic exploitation is another factor which deteriorates the blacks and enforces him to suffer from poverty and identity crises (Hall, 2005).

### **1.5Gibbons' Biography**

Kaye Gibbons is a white American female novelist who wrote many novels. She was born in NorthCarolina on May 5, 1960. Gibbons endured from social difficulties awing to the fact that she was raised in a poor family and suffered from continues hardships resulted in the death of her parents especially her mother who committed suicide because of her abusive husband(Childs, 2017).

Gibbons produced her first novel *Ellen Foster* which was a literary assimilation of her difficult life. Her studying career started in 1979 at North Carolina University. She

had been influenced by her teacher Louis Rubin who encouraged her to write her masterpiece *Ellen Foster*. It won the Louis Prize in creative writing. In 1987, she graduated from the university and she got her diploma in literature(Childs, 2017).

Kaye Gibbon's literary career is full of successive successes which made her a famous figure in literature. She won the National Endowment for her novel *A Cure for Dream*. She also received the Chicago Tribune Prize for fiction. In 1990, Gibbon succeeded in realizing the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction for her book *Club of North Carolina*. She was rewarded the title of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. Her most recognizable reward was winning the North Carolina award for literature in 1998(Childs, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the above mentioned information is turning around the historical, social and personal backgrounds of *Ellen Foster* novel as literary need to pave the way to the natural progress of this dissertation since that being familiar with the roots and the origins of race and class in America help building a clear image about this literary work and its basic components. More importantly, this chapter dealt with the history of the civil right movement by putting much emphasis on the social circumstances of the blacks in 50s, 60s, and 70s.

It is also of highly importance to know the background of the writer in order to establish a strong relation between the writer and his artistic work. In this sense, this chapter treated the biography of Kaye Gibbons and her difficult life since these hardships are manifested in her novel *Ellen Foster*. As any biography this part mentioned some of the rewards of this novelist.

# **Chapter Two:**

## **Literary Backgrounds**



## **Introduction**

This chapter is devoted mainly to determine a general overview about the literary and theoretical backgrounds of this literary work. Primarily focus ought to be on African American Criticism and its long endeavor to depict racism in American literature by revealing its themes and styles and stating some of its figures. On the other hand, class conflicts are closely related with Marxism theory in general and in America in particular. In this way, this part will deal with literary works that are contingent with Marxism theory in America for the sake of portraying the class divergence between the white and the blacks and its aspects.

### **2.1 The African American Criticism**

The African American Criticism became inseparable part of the American literature since it has been one of the most recognizable literatures in the modern era. It has examined deeply the current thorny topics such racial discrimination and its social, political and individual manifestations. The African American Criticism has initial correlation with the slave narrative and a close relationship with the newly emerged African literature such as Harlem Renaissance and the Negro Movement. The latter deters the socio-cultural aspects that the American persona was put under. The African American criticism has continued its long endeavor looking for literary inevitable means to be universally acknowledged. Ralph Ellison with his masterpiece *The Invisible Man* has demonstrated how the African man is suffering from different social problems that are the result of the racism towards the black people in the 50s (Gates, 1988).

### **2.2 Recurring Themes in African American Literature between 60s and 70s**

Since literature is the mirror of society, the African American writers began to reflect literary and artistically their insidious concerns. They use different literary genres. In poetry, Margaret Danner, Melvin B. Tolson and Langston Hughes were leading figures in demonstrating the African American demands to improve their lives. Other African American writers utilize novels and short stories as a fictional instrument to convey their concerns. A clear example is James Baldwin novel *Go Tell it in the Mountains* which describes the obstacles that the African American persona endures. In drama, Lorraine Hansberry's masterpiece *A Raisin in the Sun* play generated a considerable number of critics and won local and international prizes. The play addressed the racial policy of separating the blacks from whites in terms of constructing urban cities (Erven, 2000).

The African American writers employ aesthetically their traditions and literary heritage of their ancestors as a psychological need to deter their long existence in a world which annihilates them. They depend on rituals, stories and songs which were purely African to confirm their unique identity and their human ability to share the aesthetic part of life. The African American writers did not focus only on the form but also they concentrate on the content. The latter resides in rehabilitating the African lost values which employed as insidious tool to sound their human demands to be equal to their white counterparts(Erven, 2000).

The 1960s events which were closely related the riot in the urban ghettos enforced many African writers to incorporate political demands to their literary works(Sanchez, p. nd).

### **2.3 The Most Known African American Writers between the 50s and 70s**

There are many writers who use their pens as a literary tool to defend their fair affaire. Although they differ in terms of their literary styles and techniques,they share the nearly the same feeling of being isolated and lost in the land and the game of the white Anglo-Saxons. The following writers are the most influential figures in that era.

#### **2.3.1 Amiri Baraka**

He is born in 1934. He is a poet, writer and political activist who depend on his pen as a weapon to fight racism and social injustice. His style was very enthusiastic to the extent he is accused of arousing hatred between the different races in America. He adopts socialism as a political trend and considered a prominent voice in that era. His writings inspired many writers(Rosenberg, 2017).

#### **2.3.2 Alex Haley**

He is famous for *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Eventually this book became a worldwide bestseller. After this international triumph Haley became exceptionally well-known writer. This success encouraged him to write his epic novel the *Saga of an American Family* which makes him very popular and as a result he won the Pulitzer Prize (Rosenberg, 2017).

#### **2.3.3 Zora Neale Hurston**

She was a famous female black writer in the 1930s. Zora left a rich literary heritage which encompasses more than 50 novels, plays and short stories. She is best known for

her masterpiece *Their Eyes were Watching God*. She adopted a strikingly different style resided in defending the black community by concentrating on the African American traditions and their indigenous culture. She endured from social problems such as poverty which was the reason behind her lack of publishing her essays(Rosenberg, 2017).

#### **2.3.4 Richard Wright**

He is known for his literary works that portray his continuous struggles with poverty and racial segregations in America. He is renowned for his widespread novel *Native Son* in addition to his masterpiece *Black Boy* which artistically demonstrated the impediments that the African Americans suffer from them. Richard wrote other novels which are *The Outsider* and *The White Man, Listen*. Those literary works depict racism towards the black people and social inequality(Erven, 2000).

#### **2.3.5 Toni Morrison**

She is highly recognized as the prominent voice of the African American women owing to her triple literary works which are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *The Song of Solomon*. The three already mentioned literary works enabled her to win many national and international rewards such as Pulitzer Prize(Rosenberg, 2017).

#### **2.3.6 Gwendolyn Brooks**

She is considered the first African American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for her poetry which is entitled *Annie Ellen*. Her poetry made her very popular among the writers in that era(Rosenberg, 2017).

### **2.4 Marxist Theory**

Marx has brought two main sets of ideas. The first, he gave a theory of society that provides an explanation of how society works, including how and why history has unfolded and especially of the nature of capitalism. The second, Marx regarded capitalism as extremely undesirable and he was very concerned with getting rid of it. He thought it is contradicting that would lead to self-destruct(Parsons, Social Class and Class Conflict in the Light of Recent Sociological Theory, 2002).

Karl Marx tries to understand how the capitalist society works, how it arose out of feudalism and where it is likely to lead. Concentrating on the social and economic relations in which people earn their livings, Marx saw behind capitalism's law a struggle of two main classes, the capitalists, who own the productive resources, and the workers or proletariat, who must work in order to survive. Therefore, Marxism is essentially

Marx's analysis of the complex and developing relations between these two classes (Parsons, Social Class and Class Conflict in the Light of Recent Sociological Theory, 2002).

Marx said history is basically determined by the struggle between classes for dominance. Marxists determined that social analysis should focus on the relationship between the different classes of society. In other words, the most important questions to ask about a society are to do with what groups in society dominate or gain most benefit from the status, or whose interests does a situation or policy or proposal serve most (Rummel, 1977).

However, Marxists generally view literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (Abrams, p. 149). Literature reflects an author's own class or analysis of class relations, however piercing or shallow that analysis may be.

## **2.5 Marxism in America**

The original theme of Karl Marx in the 19th century was that capitalism had to be destroyed. It was tyrannical and exploitative in nature. Under the guidance of Marxist revolutionaries, the workers of the world could eventually be made to realize this and rise up in revolt. A "collectivist" and "classless" society would then commence in which men and women no longer strived for personal profit, but for communal contribution, out of which they all would receive equal compensation (Robinson, 2000).

Marxism was so vital from 1960s, culturally as well as politically, America seemed to be changing and influencing the black people. Marxism supplied the intellectual energy and also a sort of collective personal glue. Evaluating the great impact of Marxism on black authors from the Harlem Renaissance and the Depression era, it is argued that the spread of Marxist ideologies and movements between the world wars did guide legitimate political desires of black writers for a world without racism. Classical Marxism argued that capitalism and the class structure it created must be overthrown because it is oppressive to workers, cultural Marxism argues that it is not economics that creates oppression but rather the nuclear family, traditional morality and concepts of race, gender and sexual identity. These are the chains of tyranny which must be broken by revolution. The strategy of Marxists is always to cultivate a victimized group and then convince its members that solidarity is required against the oppressors. This creates

resentment and hatred and is how Marxist ideologies fulfill their revolutionary objectives(Robinson, 2000).

As it is apparent that Western civilization instilled evil values into man, values of individualism, personal industry, monogamy, private property, patriotism, etc. These values had brainwashed the workers of the world, which kept them from realizing their true destiny, which was to revolt and usher in a classless society. Therefore, The American industrial working class would make a revolution against individuality (Raico, no date).

## **2.6 Marxism Flourishing in African American Literature**

The history of black people is continuous struggle against the European imperial attitudes that manifested implicitly and explicitly in literature.

In the 1900s century, the struggle was launched as a natural reaction to denounce the measurable circumstances that the blacks were living under. Eventually, in 1935, Du Bois produced a book in which he explained the economic struggle based on the inherited black history. He analyzed the causes and the effects of the American civil war taking into account the economic reasons. In the above mentioned book, Du Bois introduced the concept “Reconstruction” that means rebuilding and recognition the social justice which had been profoundly affected. According to Du Bois the emphasis of both the ideologies of American socialist movement and a revision of Marx’s theory of revolution and class struggle developed the concept Black Reconstruction(Gates, 1988).

Even though the black people were developed and given the opportunity to be free, they are still considered by European view that they are labors which is the original intention of bringing them to American at first as slaves. Indeed, this social category was suffered from various means of exploitation by the white capitalists (Dawahare, 2003).

In Sarah Wright’s literary work, in this *Child’s Gonna Live*, she depicted the difficulties that the poor black family endures throughout revealing the ramification of the deprived class on the development of the protagonist Mariah Upshur(Rosenberg, 2017). Another example of the social struggle is obviously stated in James Baldwin’s novel, *The Fire Next Time* that portrays the class conflicts amid the black poor people and the white rich ones. In this novel, we have a clear insight which is “you were born into a society...you were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to

make peace with mediocrity.”(Dawahare, 2003, p. 50)In other words, the black society is viewed as inferior and cannot make any progress due to the white social stigmatization. More interestingly, the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright tackles the issue of class conflict in American societies which black people are suffered the most. In the United States, many academics put much emphasis on the correlation between the blacks and the communist party whereas others examined black radicalism and Marxism within the framework of the black international movement(Dawahare, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

All in all, chapter two was typically associated with the literary and theoretical environment of *Ellen Foster* novel by dealing with the African American criticism and its prolific efforts to bring to light the issue of race in America. It was also related to Marxism theory in general and in America in particular by concentrating on its aspects and its existence in American literature.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Racial Insights in *Ellen Foster***

## **Introduction**

The third chapter is devoted to pick out the real occurring or the real manifestation of race throughout revealing the racial insights in *Ellen Foster* novel. The practical study is based on dividing this chapter into two main parts. The first one is related to the analysis of theracial insights that are in favor of the white Ellen and her community. On the other hand, the second one is purely consistent with the black Starletta and her black community by demonstrating the racial insights that are against their human nature.

The literary strategy depends on the individual analysis of each character within the framework of the analytical study and the common premises of the thematic one. It is also contingent with the comparative study throughout comparing and contrasting between the white characters and black ones.

### **3.1 The White Ellen and the White Community**

This section is mainly devoted to refute the common premises stating that Ellen is a white character who endured from different social problems by showing the privileges of being white. In addition, this part shows the racist conscious of the white people towards the black ones. It also reveals how race helps Ellen to overcome her problems.

### **3.2 Ellen and her Social Privilege**

This section revolves around two points, the first one is about how Ellen enjoyed a dream to surpass her difficulties whereas the second one that expresses the judicial support which plays a vital role in encouraging Ellen to defeat her tyrant father.

#### **3.2.1 Ellen and the White Dream**

Ellen has deemed as unlucky girl that underwent through many harsh experiences. Actually, she gets benefits from a considerable number of advantages because of her white color. Ellen is always dreaming of improving her life throughout hoping that her daddy will die someday and as a result she will have a better life“all I did was wish him dead real hard every now and then. And I can say for a fact that I am better off now when he is alive”(Ellen Foster, p.6).This feeling is likely to take place in the real world since her father is extremely addicted to alcohol and he will surely have health problems which will put an end to his life and consequently she will realize everything she desires

She is thinking of getting a new and luxurious life including proper house and being free to run it “I live in clean brick house and mostly I am left to myself” (*Ellen Foster*, p.21).She is contemplating of her daily food and how easy she would afford it “There is



plenty to eat here and if we run out of something we just go to the store and get some more”(Ellen Foster, p.6).

### **3.2.2 Ellen and the Judicial Support**

Ellen is protected sometimes by the law which gives her relief from her tyrant father especially when she was affected and his art teacher noticed that the court gave the latter the right to keep her away from her abusive father “The law said I could stay temporally until somebody decided what to do next” (Ellen Foster, p.45).

Now the white Ellen can enjoy the dreaming house with welcoming people such as Roy and Julia. At these moments Ellen would enjoy many things to the extent that she gets surprised to have all these things in one time “so many things came to me so fast I did not know how to keep up” (Ellen Foster, p.52). One of them is going outside and watching movies like the white community.

The most important thing in this period is that Ellen realized self-esteem which leads, psychologically speaking, to self-confidence when defeated the boy and she felt that she regained her dignity that was deeply affected by her father “he better watch out for me is what else I said I am strong as an ox”(Ellen Foster, p.54). In contrast, Starlleta because of her color no one can stand beside her and makes her enjoy her life.

Ellen can have happy moments in her house and sometimes can even dance “I myself can dance like I ready said but not like Jo Jo”(Ellen Foster, p.63).

### **3.2.3 The White Racist Attitude towards the Black People**

The first impression that is perceived in the beginning of the fourth chapter is really how awful the extent of white racism towards the black people. They put themselves in such a high pedestal so that the colored people are deemed as a source of dirty, anxiety and disorder. In this context, you will feel safe when you are far away from them “My aunt is glad to be out of colored town. She unlocks her car door because now she feels safe”(Ellen Foster, p.24).

### **3.3 Ellen and Her White Conscious**

When we scrutinize Ellen conscious we found out that the white man is good by nature and he is born to do well in this life; the one who does not confirm to this common perception is highly deemed as the exception “when Julia said there was more like him I shuddered to think how God let him and the rest slip through”(Ellen Foster, p.55). Thus, Ellen is very surprised to know that there are many people like her white father and she insists on the idea that the white man is created to be good and her father

is just a fault “my daddy was a mistake for a person”(Ellen Foster, p.55). On the other hand, the black man is conceived to be bad and this analogy is apparently concluded when Ellen got surprised to behold the habit of Starletta father not to be addicted to alcohol “and he is the only colored man that does not buy liquor from my daddy I do not know when he spends his money”(Ellen Foster, p.21).

When Ellen invited Starletta to her party, she attended just to enjoy the luxurious life of the white people including housing “she was not paying attention to me but looking all under the bed and examining all what was not nailed down” (Ellen Foster, p.55). It is up normal for the black person to be part in the cultural life like going to the cinema and watching movies since Starletta is the only colored girl in this cultural place “Starletta was the only colored girl at the movie and she was mine”(Ellen Foster, p.84).

Ellen expectation of Starlettas reaction in being present in the cinema can be explained as another occurring of racist attitudes towards the black people by considering them less civilized and less experienced to interact positively with the modern ways of life owing to the fact that the white Ellen expected black Starletta to over react when she would be exposed to watch movies for the first time. “She was better than I expected her to be in the movie” (Ellen Foster, p.85).

Ellen although is familiar with seeing people working in the field, she cannot bear the fact that she will chop in it. This sensation is a result of mental process that is socially programmed to rank the white people to be masters and black ones to be their workers “I used to play in the fields with Starletta and watch her mama and daddy chop but I never figured it would be me one day”(Ellen Foster, p.77).

The black community is socially separated from the white one in all sphere of life even in practicing the same religion which is Christianity but still they have a specific church to practice their faith which means that this social category are not accepted even in spiritual side “they go to the same church!” (Ellen Foster, p.74). They are separated in homes just to make them feel that they are a second type of human beings who should not be close to the white people “at the end of each day the colored workers went to their shack and I walked to mama mama home” (Ellen Foster, p.78).

### **3.4 Fulfilling the Dream**

Ellen gets what she wants after the dying of the two undesirable persons primarily her abusive father and secondly her tyrant grandmother. Now, Ellen can enjoy the luxurious life that has dreamt of. In the beginning of the twelfths’ chapter, Ellen starts to

list the means in which she will appreciate her current life. First of all, she is fully satisfied with this new family and she declares that she will pass almost her life without thinking of immigrating to somewhere else “Number one is that I do not plan to leave here until I am old”(Ellen Foster, p.84). Second, she can now have wide range of good possibility to enjoy food without getting blamed for having too much of it since she has a family to take care of her “number two and three is that I do not owe anybody any money and I can count on food to eat that I do not always have to fix or be guilty” (Ellen Foster, p.85).The most essential part is that Ellen has achieved the intrinsic feeling of having a good mother who naturally takes care of her with all sincerity and faithfulness “and the best one number four important is my new mama saying good morning to me like she means”(Ellen Foster, p.85).

Since Ellen is socially stable she can enjoy her study beginning from waking to the school till coming back to the home. On the other part, Starletta is still suffering in a total negligence in a world that the value of human beings is judged by the color of their skins not by the content of their characters.

It is really so depressive to live in such a world that the racial prejudgments and the social classes are both combined to destroy black persona dream to the ground and make unbeatable challenges to shutter their human nature of progress and development. The white Ellen because of her white color and racial belongings has passed her problems by having the suitable family which offers her everything she wants. As a result, she starts to change to be successful white person. The already mentioned scenario is socially planned and racially elaborated to support the white Ellen.

### **3.5Starletta and the Black Community**

This part tackles the issue of the black people and their lifestyles that are portrayed in *Ellen Foster* novel. It demonstrates the white racist attitudes which dehumanized all of the African American society in general and its family members in particular. The section depicts the inherited racial stereotype that accused the African people of being evil ethnic group. Also, it deals with how the African American people have endured from social alienation.

#### **3.5.1TheBlack People and Their Daily Food**

The portraying of black daily food is another culmination of racism throughout reinforcing stereotypes that black people are second type of human beings who eat anything including dirt. Eating dirt is considered very common for the colored

people “Starletta and her mama both eat dirt” (*Ellen Foster*, p.24) while for the white people this habit is not tolerated at all and this rejection is clearly seen in Ellen daddy reaction when he discovers her that she is eating dirt “my daddy slapped my face for eating dirt” (*Ellen Foster*, p.24).

### **3.5.2 The Black Man and His Role in the White Society**

Buying liquor or the wrong stuffs is closely related to the black man and the one who does not confirm to these bad habits, most of the time, is viewed as the exception not the rule. This remark is deduced through Ellen confirmation “...and he is the only colored man that does not buy liquor from mydaddy” (*Ellen Foster*, p.43).

### **3.5.3 The Black Woman in the Eyes of the White People**

Cooking is a sign of progress and social development and in this novel the black woman is depicted as less talented and even if she will try to make some progress she will not be accepted by the white people. This conclusion is drawn when Ellen judged the biscuits depending only on her racist intuition towards the black woman “No matter how good it looks to you it is still a colored biscuits” (*Ellen Foster*, p.44).

In the beginning of the tenth chapter, Ellen now is passing her vacation with her grandmother. The latter owns a big field and employs only the black people to work in. First of all, she utilizes two black women in working inside the home “a colored woman just to cook and another one to make up your bed and dust the what-nots” (*Ellen Foster*, p.67).

### **3.5.4 The “N” Word and the White Explicit Racism**

The occurrence of the n word is seen here as a clear indication of racism. “It was she had rather some real niggers have my mama mama things than any of us that drink and carry on like trash” (*Ellen Foster*, p.60).

The symbol of the N letter is an implicit message that the black Starletta has chosen her destiny to be a nigger girl throughout taking the part of the cake that carries the N letter “she took a hunk with the N part out of my name” (*Ellen Foster*, p.55).

The word nigger, an offensive utterance that the white people used to humiliate the black people, is uttered by her grandmother “ask a nigger what to do is what she said before she drove off” (*Ellen Foster*, p.73).

### **3.5.6 The Old Racial Stereotype**

The racial analogy between color and the content of the characters is another technique that has been used for the sake of giving a very gloomy atmosphere

throughout linking black people to scary darkness “step over the sleeping arms and legs of dark men in shadows on your floor” (*Ellen Foster*, p.48). The above mentioned analogy is an aesthetic literary tool that hides a dirty racist consciousness towards the humanity of the black people.

### **3.5.7 The Black People and Their Identity Crises**

The question of the self and the question for the self are closely related to the black community and these questions are explicitly asked by Ellen “I do not know where come from” but in comparison with the white family exactly Roy and Julia both of them know their origins “both Roy and I were raised in the northeast” (*Ellen Foster*, p.55) because they have strong background depending on their happy past they are fulfilling their shared dream which is leaving the sinful city and living in the innocent nature. They are watching their dream grows as they irrigate their crops “our dream had always been to have a quite place in the country far away from all city hassles” (*Ellen Foster*, p.55).

### **3.6 Black Girl and Her Status in the White Society**

By the end of the eight chapters there is an important mentioning of Starletta habit of breaking down the crowns “you can have my old crayons if you need something to ruin” (*Ellen Foster*, p.56). This citation deters that the black girl is viewed as savage and she lacks the artistic part of life since she does not recognize the role of the pencils and enjoy just the negative habit of destroying them.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter Three was wholly practical aiming at picking out the racial insights. It was divided into two main parts. The former was intended to sort out the racial insights that are in favor of the white Ellen and her white community while the latter was meant to pick out the racial insights that are against the black Starletta and her black community. The analysis technique was based on the comparative study throughout comparing and contrasting the characters. The white Ellen due to her skin color succeeded in achieving her dream while the black Starletta is in continuing struggle just because of her black color.

**Chapter Four:**  
**Class Insights in *Ellen Foster***

## **Introduction**

This final chapter is mainly dedicated to give a picture of the class conflicts in *Ellen Foster* novel by demonstrating the insights which portray class clashes in America between the white people and the black ones.

It is divided into two separate sections. The first one is devoted to show the class insights that are in favor of Ellen and her community whereas the second section is intended to expose the class insights that are against Starletta and her community by putting much emphasis on the living standards of both the blacks and the whites.

As in the third chapter, the analysis is based on comparing and contrasting the living standards of Ellen, Starletta and their communities by applying the Marxism theory techniques.

### **4.1 The White Ellen and her White Community**

The following titles deter the white Ellen and how she got various advantages owing to her white social category. They also illustrate how the white people consider themselves and how they deem the black ones.

#### **4.1.1 Ellen and the Privilege of Reading Books**

Ellen, despite the fact that she is under huge pressure, can enjoy reading old books which means that she can be an intellectual person who appreciates classic literature such as the Bronte Sisters “lately I lay up in the bed and read old books. I told the library teacher I wanted to read everything of some count so she made me a list” (*Ellen Foster*, p.14).

Ellen is most of the time in touch with the white intellectual people namely her art teacher and her husband. “or we would take a part reading Prince Valiant” (*Ellen Foster*, p.90). In parallel, Starletta is the only girl that can read and in difficult manner “the only one that can read is and Starletta she misses words” (*Ellen Foster*, p.40).

#### **4.1.2 Ellen and the White Support**

Ellen can have people to take care of her in hard times especially in her mama funeral when she felt the brotherly spirit of her relatives “the undertaker opens the car for me. He has been to the house twice since Sunday just to say he cares” (*Ellen Foster*, p.21). Ellen is at least clean girl in comparison to her friend Starletta who sometimes ought to be washed in order to be consistent with her friend Ellen “you got to wash before I will

play with you is what I told her. She went and stood by the stove while her mama wiped her down and put her on an outfit” (*Ellen Foster*, p.37).

When Ellen got affected by her father, she found many people to alleviate her pain starting from her teacher and the close people till she hoped that no one had discovered her injuries.

My teacher noticed a bruise he put on my arm and they all have a day over it in the school near to the office. Calling in everybody but the janitor to come in and take a look at it. I hard rather nobody saw my business (*Ellen Foster*, p.50).

The history of white persona is a continuation of better life since Ellen can have her grandmother heritage including her old room “my room was mama mama room she had when she was little” (*Ellen Foster*, p.72). The most important thing is that her grandmother gave her this room just because she is white and for this reason she deserves “my mama mamasaid she gave me that bedroom because I deserve”(Ellen Foster, p.72). Why those black women who have made strenuous efforts to serve her grandmother do not deserve. The answer is very clear because they are colored people.

#### **4.1.3 The White People and their Sense of Pride**

In this literary work, the white people consider themselves in high social status than the colored ones. Ellen perceives Starletta staying in her house as a huge achievement just because she deems her white house a very special place for a black girl who lack even an inside toilet “that is something big (...) how she stayed in the white house all night with Ellen” (*Ellen Foster*, p.91).

The way Roy and Julia elaborated their present is an example of how the white people see themselves and how they perceive the colored people. They consider themselves as the pioneers who should be on the top of other nations just like the white pencil is on the top of the colored ones “Roy and Julia gave me a round thing with the colored pencils stood up in circles and circles until the white one at the top” (*Ellen Foster*, p.93).

#### **4.1.4 The White People Perception of the Black People**

Even Ellen is a close friend to Starletta; she is still considering her inferior to a great deal. Starletta can be perceived as infectious illness that may cause damage. The concept of damage generates two main aspects of analysis. The physical damage or the apparent damage which conceives Starletta as a sort of dirt is one probable analysis. More importantly, the psychological damage is one of the analysis in which we figure out the social status of the white Ellen. The latter considers her superior over Starletta. This black girl is deemed by Ellen as a real threat that may damage his so called shining



white class and this may explain his intrinsic conflict when she tries to drink in the same place that Starletta has drunk in the bottle.

I try to see what Starletta leaves on the lip of a bottle but I have never seen anything with the naked eye. IF something is that small is bound to get into your system and do some damage (*Ellen Foster*, p.41).

Ellen is a young girl who demonstrates the subconscious stemmata that scorn the black people when she reported the common saying “people say that they do not try to be whit”(Ellen Foster, p.40).

## **4.2 Ellen Housing versus Starletta Housing**

The white Ellen is a poor girl comparing to her white community but she is still superior to the black community. Ellen is very surprised of seeing large family number of colored people living together in the same room and she declared that she cannot live in such unbearable circumstances. “All three of them stay in one room. I myself could not stand it”(Ellen Foster, p.42). At least Ellen lives in a room with the necessary equipments for her study “I have a donated desk and chair in my room”(Ellen Foster, p.63).

She is continuing to narrate the difficulties that the black people are enduring during their daily life to the extent that they lack an inside toilet “they do their business outside and when it is cold they do it in the corner in a pot”(Ellen Foster, p.42). She is now superior and at least can enjoy this human service “I hold myself until I get home”(Ellen Foster, p.40). These unlucky people do not possess the necessary modern equipments. For instance, they do not have a television set “they do not have even a television set” (Ellen Foster, p.40).

## **4.3 Starletta and the Black Community**

This part looks at how the chances of black people are restricted within American societies to indulge the human activities that demand innovation and creativity. It concentrates on showing the miserable circumstances of the black people namely their housing. The part deters how the black people admitted their harsh destiny to be just servants who serve their white masters.

### **4.3.1 The Black People and Their Limited Chance in the Society**

Born to chop is the expression of the inherited stereotype in which the blacks are endowed with that minimize black ability in endeavoring the other human activities including intellectual works that demand innovation and creativity. In this novel

Starletta and her mother are depicted as a sample that represents the whole black community” she sits at the end of the row while her mama chops”(Ellen Foster, p.25).

Manual work is also linked to black people that traces back to the phenomenon of slavery determining the relationship between the black and white people. This correlation sheds light on the white man putting him in more social, political and economic status in parallel dehumanizing the black man through portraying them like slaves who serve their white masters. Starletta is black girl who by nature can serve the white Ellen “she will plait my hair if I ask her right” (Ellen Foster, p.79).

In the following lines it is obviously shown how black people are bound with racial prejudgments that undermine them and even when they try to accommodate themselves to reach the white people. They cannot resemble them even in small activities such as cleaning the house “they clean the house all the time but still it is still dirt”(Ellen Foster, p.39).

#### **4.3.2 Black People Housing**

In this literary work the colored people are extensively dehumanized especially in describing their homes and their way of life. In the second line of the sixth chapter black Starletta house is shown in very miserable conditions in terms of its smelling “the house Starletta and her mama and daddy stay in always smells like fried meat” (Ellen Foster, p.40).

At the end of the seventh chapter, Ellen is comparing her ultimate suffering with her daddy to the smell of Starletta house in terms of being familiar with their social problems and the ability to bear their daily difficulties. So, Starletta endures more problems since Ellen herself indirectly confessed that her friend has witnessed many problems by means of this explicit comparison. “You live with something long enough and you get used to it like smelling the inside of Starletta house”(Ellen Foster, p.50).

#### **4.3.3 The Blacks’ Perception**

Mavis saying that it is of no sense of a white child to work in the heat is also a double conscious racial attitude towards her community because she knows herself by the eye of white people who through accumulation of systematic process of inhaling the black people “they is no sense in a white chile working in this heat” (Ellen Foster, p.72).

In a larger scale, the white people succeeded to make the black people believe that they are created to do manual work under their command “she said they were born to chop and that is how they could work so fast and steady” (Ellen Foster, p.87).

#### 4.3.4 The Colored Boy and his Social Role

The colored boy is portrayed as less valuable in comparison to the white one due to the fact that Ellen is trying to figure out what Starletta is thinking of having an intimate relationship with a white boy instead of black one. She explains that through relying on social and material reasons which the white boy can afford.

What a colored boy can bring me for a valentine present but some cheap candy or some paper he cut out and glued into a heart?. But that white boy Tom could tell his mama to pick up something nice in town and she would put it on her account (*Ellen Foster*, p.98).

Therefore the black boy is considered silly and unable to meet the girl's expectations in terms of offering what they want concerning the material aspect of life.

#### Conclusion

In nutshell, the final chapter covered the class insights in *Ellen Foster* which exhibit the class inconsistencies in America amidst the whites and the blacks by narrowing the scope to compare the white Ellen community and the Starletta one.

To conclude with; Ellen, because of her social belongings, was able to surmount her hardships while Starletta is still enduring her difficulties owing to her feeble community.

## General Conclusion

In this study, we resorted to the historical, social and personal backgrounds of *Ellen Foster* novel in order to establish an understandable image of this literary work by stating the history of the civil right movement and its social circumstances. Concerning the personal part, we have mentioned the biography of Kaye Gibbons and the relationship between her real life and her fictional work.

As literary need, we have employed the African American criticism and its technique to deter the racial segregation in this novel between the white Ellen and the black Starletta. In addition, we have resorted to Marxism theory and its fruitful procedures to reveal the class conflicts between the blacks and the whites namely in showing the strikingly discrepancies in all spheres of life between them.

The study utilized the analytical study based on scrutinizing the insights that reveal the class conflicts and the racial separation. The researcher has used also the comparative research throughout comparing and contrasting the white Ellen and her community by the black Starletta and her community.

This dissertation seeks to find out that race and class helped the white Ellen to overcome her difficulties. In other words, her skin color and social belongings served as weapons to end her hardships and contributed as effective means to accomplish her dream to be successful white girl.

In contrast, the black Starletta because of her social belongings and her skin color is still enduring countless forms of dehumanization and exploitations. Thus; she will not achieve her dream because she did not possess the natural criteria based on the whiteness of the skin and the social ranking.

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## Résumé

L'étude du roman *Ellen Foster* est consacrée à la façon dont la race et la classe sont dépeintes. Le but de cette étude est d'examiner à fond les idées raciales et classiques dans l'œuvre littéraire de Gibbon. Plus important encore, il se concentre sur l'examen de la personnalité noire qui résiste à la ségrégation des blancs et à ses attitudes de séparation de classes. L'étude est divisée en quatre chapitres. Le premier chapitre porte sur les antécédents historiques, sociaux et personnels, y compris le contexte historique de la race en Amérique, à savoir l'histoire du mouvement des droits civils. Le deuxième chapitre traite des antécédents théoriques et littéraires en employant la critique marxiste et afro-américaine au roman. La critique afro-américaine représente les aspects de la race tout en révélant le contexte historique de la personne américaine alors que la critique marxiste est venue dissuader les conflits de classe dans les sociétés afro-américaines. Le troisième chapitre examine profondément les idées de classe dans le roman *Ellen Foster* tout au long de l'analyse de chaque chapitre. Finalement, le quatrième et le dernier chapitre examinent les idées raciales dans cette œuvre littéraire. Dans ce chapitre, nous avons essayé de révéler quelques limites qui ont rencontré le développement de notre travail.

**Les mots clés:** *Ellen Foster*, race, classe, ségrégation.

## المخلص:

هذه الأطروحة تعنى بدراسة العنصرية و الطبقية المجسدة في الرواية الأدبية المعنونة *Ellen Foster* الهدف من وراء هذا البحث هو التحليل المعمق للأفكار و المقولات التي لها علاقة مباشرة أو غير مباشرة بالعنصرية والصراعات الطبقية تجاه السود في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. الدراسة تنقسم إلى أربعة فصول الفصل الأول هو عبارة عن إعادة دراسة الخلفية التاريخية والاجتماعية و الشخصية للعنصرية و الطبقية في المجتمع الأمريكي. الفصل الثاني يناقش الخلفية التاريخية للتمييز العنصري و الصراعات الطبقية الفصل الثالث يدرس بتبصر المقولات المأخوذة من الرواية المعنية و التي لها علاقة مباشرة أو غير مباشرة بالعنصرية تجاه ستارلتا السوداء و مجتمعها. الفصل الرابع يدرس بتبصر المقولات المأخوذة من الرواية المعنية و التي لها علاقة مباشرة أو غير مباشرة بالصراعات الطبقية تجاه ستارلتا السوداء و مجتمعها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** *Ellen Foster*, العنصرية, الطبقية, التمييز العنصري.