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Title

The Dialectics of the Self and the Other in the Twentieth Century African-American Literature

The Case of Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*

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Statement of Authorship

The content of this thesis has not been previously submitted to fulfill the requirements of any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the research report contains no material already published or written by another researcher except where due reference is made.

Haifa BAFFI

Dedication

Dedication

To my parents, who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself.. They have been my constant source of strength, offering guidance and love at every turn. Their faith in my abilities and the countless sacrifices they made for my education has fueled my determination to pursue my dreams relentlessly. This achievement stands as a testament to their support, and I dedicate it to them with profound appreciation and love.

To myself, for the relentless pursuit of knowledge and growth.

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Abstract

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It is challenging for African Americans to maintain their sense of self-existence or to develop their racial identity in a systemic racist society. Kindred and The White Boy Shuffle, by Butler and Beatty, respectively, draw a renewed picture of the African American self, presenting a series of experiences of their protagonists, Dana and Gunnar, two untraditional African American protagonists with different journeys who illustrate the toughness of racial identity formation and self-representation. These experiences crystallize into culture, history, memory, time, place, and psyche explorations. This study focuses on the psychological scars of racism and its impact on African Americans's racial identity formation and self-definition. Through applying an innovative branch of Black Psychology, William E. Cross's Nigrescence Model, this research examines the representation of racial identity and self-perception in both novels. It explores how protagonists picture the tragic mulatto figure and how this trope might be reclaimed as a symbol of resistance. The study also investigated how Butler and Beatty reaffirmed the notions of meta-black identity and the New Negro. Through this exploration, this research highlights the complexities of identity formation as both a site of struggle and a tool for empowerment in the face of systemic racism. This study compares the two novels using the concepts mentioned above to show the similarities and differences between authors' representations of the African American struggle toward maintaining Black self-esteem. The comparison reveals a significant difference between the protagonists' paths of identity formation and foregrounds the importance of authentic backgrounds in the process.

Key-words: Black Psychology, Nigrescence Model, other, racial identity, racism, self.

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1 Background of the Study

More than ever, through language, writings, and movements, Black people seek self-definition, self-realization, and visible existence. Yet African American scholars are looking for answers to questions people had begun asking, implicitly, about those people neglecting their presence. Given the focus on the enduring search for self-definition and the challenges posed by racism, African American literature emerges as a crucial battleground where identity is contested, crafted, and continuously redefined through the power of language and narrative.

Literature is endlessly significant and likely to reveal universal truths about human nature, issues, and struggles. African American literature transcends literary expression to a rich and diverse tradition that emerges from African Americans' historical and cultural experiences in the United States – the resilience, resistance, and triumphs – of a people forged in the crucible of American history. From the poignant verses of enslaved poets like Phillis Wheatley to the unflinching prose of slave narratives, early works laid bare the brutality of bondage while asserting an unwavering sense of humanity with Blacks and their sense of being. Then, the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural and artistic explosion, whose writers like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston focus on Black existence, identity, artistry, and community while simultaneously critiquing societal inequities and racism scars in general. In subsequent decades, this period witnessed the emergence of giants like Richard Wright and James Baldwin, their poignant narratives illuminating the struggles and complexities of navigating a segregated America, or they as a segregated entity. In his works *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Richard Wright exposes the psychological impact of segregation. He mentions the inner turmoil and the external situation through his Black protagonists. Since the psychological side in African American novels became necessary, James Baldwin delved into the Black people's psyche, offering nuanced portrayals of his character's inner lives and desires. In addition, he explored themes of trauma, memory, self-deception, and the search for self-understanding. Contemporary voices –

Octavia Butler, Paul Beatty, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Colson Whitehead, and many others – continue to push boundaries, exploring themes of identity with unflinching honesty about their actual and individual experience. Thus, literature demands not just to be read but to be felt and understood. Moreover, it is a testament to resilience, identity, and the quest for justice. It contributes significantly to the broader American literary landscape, challenging stereotypes and fostering a deeper understanding of the African American experience.

Historically speaking, Black identity has gone through several different stages throughout history. In the early days of slavery, African Americans were seen mainly as property, with no sense of self-worth or dignity. However, as the abolitionist movement gained momentum, Black people began to assert their humanity and demand equal rights. This situation led to the Jim Crow era, during which they were subjected to legal segregation and discrimination. However, even during this time, they continued to fight for their rights, and eventually, the Civil Rights Movement led to the dismantling of Jim Crow.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans began to explore their identity in new ways. To some extent, they were no longer defined by their relationship to white people but could instead define themselves on their own terms. These conditions led to a flowering of Black art and literature as African American authors explored the concept of the self and the other in new and innovative ways.

The main goal of literature is to understand human nature and behaviour, a focal point shared with the field of human psychology. Delving into identity stages, personality, and character is a substantial means to shed light on and rationalize human actions. Self and identity are prevalent topics within literature and its studies.

More than ten decades past the publication of Du Bois' seminal work on African American identity and a half-century after the legal codification of equality effected by the 1965 Civil Rights Act, 1964's Voting Rights Act, and 1968's Fair Housing Act, which covered what

is named Post-Civil Rights Era, African American writings continue to wrestle with this paradox that is cryptically proclaimed, but never resolved, in many of African American literary works. While commentators, authors, and critics from both Westerns and a small number of African origins wishfully declare America to be in the "post-racial era", material realities such as those manifested by the persistent racial gap that is shown in many cases by killing innocent African Americans, Mike Brown, Atatiana Jefferson, George Floyd and a plethora of others which considered post-racial society a myth.

2 Rationale

In a notable departure from the researcher's past experiences, the researcher recently had the privilege of attending a doctoral session wherein it was asserted that discussions surrounding the pursuit of Black identity had reached a point of over-consumption. Nonetheless, the researcher's conviction remains unfluctuating: In a world teeming with iniquities, armed conflicts, and formidable human predicaments, the contemplation of identity consciousness in all its dimensions remains an enduring and inexhaustible subject of scholarly and social inquiry. Addressing the imperative concerns arising from rejecting diversity becomes also a matter of utmost significance. Among these pressing issues, racism also assumes a prominent and challenging role, illustrating its last longing impact on social organization and the shaping of racial identities, particularly among African Americans, impacting the lives of a substantial portion of the population. As a result, the insidious weight of racism may distort Black people's self-perception, casting shadows of doubt but never extinguishing the radiant glow of resilience.

3 Review of the Literature

Defining African American literature is an arduous task, just as defining what literature generally means. Considering themes, African American literature is no less than post-colonial literature. Racism, hybridity, identity, the search for cultural roots, and the recovery of lost or

suppressed histories are prominent themes in both. However, some critics argue that "African American literature" was a specific category of writing that arose in response to the Jim Crow era (roughly 1877-1965). Warren (2011) asserts that this literature was not a timeless category encompassing all writing by Black Americans or African origins but rather a historical phenomenon bound to a particular social and political context. Thus, applying the traditional reading of African American literature would be useless while interpreting such works. Jim Crow Era, for Warren, was the ultimate change in the history of African American literature; as many others claim, the relationship between literary production and racial inequality changed, and thus, modern black writing does not fall under the same category as "African American literature." They split history into two parts: Pre-Jim Crow and Post-Jim Crow decline. Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass, before and after Jim Crow, dealt with slavery and racism explicitly but also addressed broader themes like personal agency, faith, and universal human experiences. However, Warren suggests that with the decline of legal segregation, the connection between racial identity and literary production started to break down. He believes writers are no longer "bound" by this specific identity politics. Works by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin directly confronted segregation, discrimination, and the battle for social and political equality during the Jim Crow era. They focus on racial identity. Warren (2011) argues that a more unified, outward-facing struggle against racism dominated their literature then. In the following decades, he observes a shift towards a broader range of themes and experiences. Writers like Toni Morrison, Edwidge Danticat, and Colson Whitehead explore personal journeys, family dynamics, sexuality, and social commentary beyond solely the lens of race. Nevertheless, their ultimate focus was their sufferance, how to be Black, how to be I, and how to have relationships with others. Warren (2011) proposes that contemporary writings encompass a broader range of identities and

concerns, falling under the more general category of "literature of identity" rather than a distinct "African American literature."

Black identity challenges the dominance of Western literature and firmly opposes the West as a normative source of knowledge. In *What is African American Literature?* Margo N. Crawford (2021) shows that African American literature transcends the conventional understanding of identity. Experiences and tackling feelings become essential to comprehending the African American identity. Crawford argues that African American literature is not just a collection of texts but a "moodscape" that is as stable as electricity (2021). She confirms her argument when she says, "I am letting the "what it is "bleed into " who we are." Crawford (2021) confirms what it means by "Feeling is what matters most"(p.12). Thus, she makes the reader respond that the meaning of African American literature is not just about historical events or political struggles but also about the emotional impact of those realities on individuals and communities. Think of it as a collection of voices that capture the joy, pain, anger, sorrow, resilience, and every other complex feeling woven into the fabric of the African American experience. This focus on individual effect challenges traditional literary criticism that often prioritizes historical context or sociological analysis. It brings the inner lives and personal struggles of Black individuals to the forefront. The meaning of African American literature is an archive of feelings, the tradition of a tension between individual effect and historical structure, which profoundly appeared in many of their works.

According to Crawford (2021), the idea of the *is-ness* of African American literature emerges when African American writers stop “speaking for Black people” and “speaking as Black people.” Understanding oneself and identity established on the feelings of Black individuals, authors, or readers necessitates recognizing Black identity’s inherent *is-ness* and constructed nature. This duality allows for embracing the reality of Black existence while acknowledging the constant evolution of self-interpretation that defines their experience.

Rather than just presenting feeling as a prominent part of understanding African American literature, it is necessary to present black texts as a purpose to characterize it as a shift in their identity. In *"The Blackness of Blackness": Meta-Black Identity in 20th/21st Century African American Culture* (2015), Casey J. Hayman disagrees with Warren's claim of the end of African American literature, refusing to consider Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man as the last piece that responds explicitly to Jim Crow rules. Instead, he crafted a complex "meta-black" identity for black subjects, built from both lived experiences and societal stereotypes. According to Hayman, a Meta-black identity is a contemporary Black identity that resists sometimes constrictive conceptions of "authentic" black identity within the African American community. It is called "meta" because it observes the ways that blackness necessarily "circulates" within a technologically driven mediascape, and these postmodern black individuals work within and against the constraints of traditional regime of blackness to perform individuality that exceeds the containment of these stereotypical representations. Meta-black self represents blackness, embodying the ongoing quest for liberation, not just from the shackles of Jim Crow but from all forms of oppression. This sense of self has to do with who you think you are and how you perceive yourself with and without relation to anything. It also represents a state of identity deeply connected to the modern relationship between Black individuals, their emotions, culture, and texts. Meta-Black identity, a reimagined vision of self in the contemporary era, can be developed through various stages of racial identity formation. On the other hand, it is a more evolved understanding of blackness that goes beyond stereotypical representations.

Thus, meta-black identity incorporates Black cultural expressions, historical knowledge, and contemporary experiences to construct an independent sense of self. While racial identity forms the foundation for meta-black identity, meta-black identity builds upon it by adding layers of critical reflection, cultural awareness, and a conscious engagement with

blackness in its various forms. Thus, between the identity imposed and the identity taken, new perspectives of their self-appear under the umbrella of interracial and intraracial relationships.

Many critics have analyzed *Kindred* and *The White Boy Shuffle*, focusing on both novels' various aspects, themes, and characteristics.

Starting with *Kindred,* in the International Journal of New Technology and Research, Adolf Tanyi Mbeh (2017) entitled "*Didactics and Intersections in the Teaching of Genre and Interracial Desire in Octavia Butler's Kindred*." He discusses the interracial relationship, which he called interracial desire. Mbeh (2017) sees the fact that interracial marriage is taboo by agreeing to an argument about Dana's unconsciousness toward two oppressors' bodies that lie down above her. He also compares the way showing love between two white men toward black women by (1) raping, which is addressed by white men toward black women as 19th-century conventional love, and (2) sharing the mutual desire, which questions the lingering presence of oppression and sexual violence.

In "*Racial, Gendered, and Geographical Spaces in Octavia Butler's Kindred*," Lena Ampadu (2004) discusses how Butler created her story by considering racial, gender, and geographical spaces. This article gives the understanding that black women should have the chance of survival in antebellum slavery. She claims that as neo-slave narratives, Butler wants to highlight the physical injury as the impact of the brutality of antebellum slavery. She argues that the choice of Maryland as the setting of the novel is the result of the consideration that Dana will run from Antebellum to survive South. Therefore, Maryland sounds perfect because it allows the main character to know her authentic self.

Sarah Eden Schiff (2009), in "*Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred*," finds out that *Kindred* is a fantastic journey representative of the discursive manipulation of black history which has a dual effect of a curative memory and history. To Schiff, Butler shows double consciousness, highlighting the

intimate connection between past and present; she also claims that the present is the double of the past. To Schiff, Butler shows double consciousness, emphasizing the intimate connection between past and present; she also claims that the present is the double of the past.

Moving to *The White Boy Shuffle, in Punked for Life: Paul Beatty's The White Boy Shuffle and Radical Black Masculinities,* L. H. Stallings (2009) argues that Beatty challenges the hegemonic masculinities through the protagonist, Gunnar, who navigates through various forms of masculinity, embracing alternative models that disrupt the norms. The article highlights Beatty's revision of black masculinities, employing satire to deconstruct and challenge the hypersexualized and hypermasculine representations commonly associated with black males. Additionally, the text examines the complex dynamics of gender and sexuality in the novel, emphasizing the importance of cultural pride and the rejection of binary models of masculinity. Stallings ensures that Beatty's use of satire is to critique gender hegemonies in the contemporary black public sphere. The article highlights Beatty's revision of black masculinities, employing satire to deconstruct and challenge the hypersexualized and hypermasculine representations commonly associated with black males.

In *Resistance on the Imperial Terrain: Constructing a Counter-Empire Paul Beatty's The White Boy Shuffle,* Brian Grosenbaugh (2006) argues that using satire in this novel still haunts and informs our national consciousness of African Americans. Grosenbaugh confirms that Beatty ostensibly presents a new model for black leadership through the protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman. However, Gunnar's cheeky characterization of this leadership role as a "Negro Demagogue" and "Ebon Pied Piper" raises doubts about the feasibility of representing such a broad spectrum of entities. Instead, Gunnar's maturation reveals that he is co-opted and moulded by various mechanisms and institutions, echoing Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of biopower and the shift from a disciplinary society to a society of control.

In her 2002 work, *The White Boy Shuffle: Teaching True Diversity*, Marcela Fuentes focuses on the importance of the novel in depicting a more authentic view of intercultural and interracial structure. She argues that the novel is centred on the protagonist's challenges in navigating his identity within a multi-ethnic neighbourhood and predominantly white high school, which is critical for addressing various educational issues. Fuentes argues that *The White Boy Shuffle* provides a valuable foundation for black students to delve into diverse cultural interpretations and the process of socialization.

In *Understanding Absurdity: From Satire to Hysterical Realism in Paul Beatty's The White Boy Shuffle and The Sellout*, Inger Marie Lauvås Alver (2021) explores how *The White Boy Shuffle* depicts a young man named Gunnar, who grapples with his identity amid the shifting landscapes of race and place in America. Gunnar reluctantly becomes a leader who urges his followers to commit suicide in the struggle for African American equality. One might speculate that this evolution in Beatty's approach reflects the persistence of these issues nearly two decades after the novel was published. This shift in writing style indicates a recognition within the literary field of the need to push boundaries to achieve equality, resulting in a new form of writing that emerges at the edges of the satire genre.

4 Statement of the Problem

Contemplating the nature of the self and questioning its boundaries and relationship to the external world is a significant issue. Henry James (1995) suggests that the self is a definable entity but somewhat ever-expanding. It is not limited to our physical bodies or thoughts but encompasses our experiences, relationships, and place in the world. The argument above reminds of the self's elusiveness, precisely the Black self. Addressing the imperative concerns arising from rejecting diversity becomes a matter of utmost significance. Among these pressing issues, racism assumes a prominent challenging subject, illustrating its enduring influence on

social organization and the shaping of racial identities, particularly among African Americans, impacting the lives of a substantial portion of this time.

African Americans are a unique population due to their history of enslavement, oppression, and injustice in the United States, as well as their subsequent fight to build a place of equality for themselves. Their literature shows the desire for identity belonging, which is not new, having existed at least since W.E.B. DuBois documentation of Afro-Americans' history of seeking better and truer self. Du Bois addresses the notion of double consciousness which refers to the experience of viewing oneself through the eyes of others, particularly in the context of racial identity. It involves a dual awareness of being both a unique individual with personal thoughts and feelings and, simultaneously, a member of a larger societal group subject to external perceptions and stereotypes. This notion is linked with the perception of the self and the other as individuals seek their own identity and the expectations and judgments imposed by external perspectives. It underscores the internal conflict that arises when one must reconcile one's authentic self with societal expectations, highlighting the ongoing negotiation between identity and societal constructs. Thus, understanding the dialectics of the self and the other still reveals much about the enduring struggle for recognition and self-determination within marginalized communities, such as Afro-Americans here.

The investigation of the dialectics between self and other reveals a profound issue in the history of human thought. However, this issue has become more prevalent and urgent, especially in recent decades. Yet, in literature, many communities witness racial and sectarian conflicts despite the openness between nations. Identity issues become a central focus for Blacks as their quest for identity has lasted for decades. The hypotheses surrounding this dilemma come from different beliefs.

On the one hand, the Black self has felt its relationship with the Other White from the very beginning of its history. Thus, a series of dichotomies arise for me and others, here and

there: enemy and friend, enslaver and enslaved person, colonizer and colonized, majority and minority. These dichotomies define the boundaries between the self and the other in the African American context. On the other hand, the Black self-navigates a complex way of interconnectedness with the Other White. This duality, where separation and entanglement coexist, profoundly shapes the African American experience. Despite the historical legacy of oppression and marginalization, Black communities have built vibrant cultures, forged resilient identities, and contributed immensely to American society. The self-other intersection and the legacy of Du Bois transcends to be the core of many other voices concerning focusing on African Americans' duality, psychology, inner conflicts, and inner desire. Janie Crawford, the Afro-American female essential character of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), meets her inner satisfaction with her beautiful appearance as a fair-skinned woman. Hurston focuses on the intersection between Blacks and Whites in the 20th-century American South, highlighting the complexities of race relations and the impact of racism on the lives of African Americans. However, she uses a black woman, Mrs. Turner, who is nonetheless extremely racist against blacks, particularly darker-skinned blacks.

In James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962), the characters of this novel intersect the reality of different races, backgrounds, and skins, thus different perspectives of their lives, which makes them portray the complex relationships between the self and the other in 1950s New York, showcasing the co-existence of both separation and complication across racial lines. The literature is too vast to mention. Black voices use the utmost of their language, aesthetics, and creativity to cover the psychological side of Blacks in their narratives. African American characters develop to delve into different methods to tackle the inner conflict concerning their being. The Tragic Mulatto, a new symbol, emerging from the shadows of a divided society as a poignant symbol, forever caught between two worlds but belonging to neither, their journey a testament to the complexities of race, identity, and the ever-present yearning for belonging.

In a society where white supremacy is supposed to have been discredited, and blackness is no longer an acceptable justification for dehumanizing treatment, it is still possible to experience race consciousness and self-awareness to survive black self-invisibility. Racial oppression is a conflict that has remained a significant concern of the United States throughout history. Not surprisingly, then, "race relations" – This focus, however, has been uneven over the past century–often dim and reflecting the racist norms of the times. It may seem that discussing the nature of the self and the other is entirely linked to the magnitude of the suffering experienced by the black individual, conveyed through various types of novels. This reality makes the black person's understanding of themselves entirely connected to their relationship with the other. Other factors may be challenging to explain but have a significant role in comprehending the self.

The development of racial identity, which is a fundamental question, remains one of the principal and significant points in the history of African Americans and Africans, or almost the literature of subjugated communities, since at least the Sixties, for black voices. The theme of racial identity after the Sixties became less about a singular answer and more about a continuous dialogue. It is a challenging and ever-evolving conversation filled with pain, joy, defiance, and hope. Whether woven from personal experience, historical reflection, or creative imagination, each thread contributes to an influential collective that continues to reshape the present understanding of race and identity. On the side, this issue has become controversial, with many conflicting opinions. Because it involves many points of disagreement among writers, significant challenges are created when tracing the novel's key characters from childhood to advanced stages of life and studying them in different environments, places, periods, and from various perspectives.

5 Aim of the Study

This thesis explores the works of Octavia Butler and Paul Beatty, *Kindred*, and *The White Boy Shuffle*, respectively, as lenses to examine the complexities of meta-black identity as an extension of the self-other dialectics in late-twentieth-century African American novels. Specifically, it analyzes vital characters' relationships from both plots, placing them within the context of the tragic mulatto archetype. By examining the protagonists' identity development and their interracial and intraracial relationships, the thesis also aims to reveal how these authors consciously engage with issues of race, identity, and self-definition. This awareness of one's racial identity and how identity shapes one's experiences covers the core of their works. Butler and Beatty's works explore how racial and cultural identities intersect to reconstruct the sense of pride that can persist even in a society that claims to be colorblind.

The main concern of this thesis is to highlight the connections between history, psychology, and culture in modern African American literary texts as parts of the African American more authentic self. Also, it focuses on the lived experience of African Americans in their everyday activities through the works of modern African American authors Butler and Beatty. Most importantly, it will examine the presence of African originality in the African American context. It is not the researcher's or the author's goal to provide the final word on how blackness is experienced; instead, there is a wish for a new avenue of dialogue on the problem of blackness. In this sense, many questions that deserve a deep reading and analysis could be set forward. However, the ultimate pursuit of this work transcends mere documentation; it seeks to unearth the pulsating heart of blackness originality within the African American context.

6 Research Questions

In order to achieve the aim of the present study, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How do Butler and Beatty represent the impact of racial identity on their protagonists' self-perception?

2. How can the tragic mulatto characters—Dana and Gunnar—and their identity formation be reclaimed as a symbol of resistance in modern African American literature?

3. How do *Kindred* and *The White Boy Shuffle* contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the role of historical memory and interracial and interracial relationships in shaping contemporary African American identity?

4. To what extent do Butler's and Beatty's works challenge or reaffirm the notion of meta-black identity within the context of African American literature, and how does this relate to their portrayal of racial identity?

7 Research Hypotheses

To address the above stated questions, the study will propose and examine a series of hypotheses:

1. It is hypothesized that Butler and Beatty represent the impact of racial identity on their protagonists' self-perception through contrasting narrative approaches: Butler may employ time travel to demonstrate how historical racial trauma could directly shape contemporary Black identity. At the same time, Beatty uses satirical exaggeration to reveal how societal expectations and stereotypes might influence Black self-perception in modern America.

2. It is hypothesized that both Butler and Beatty subvert the traditional tragic mulatto narrative by presenting protagonists who, despite their mixed-race heritage, seem to resist societal expectations and might utilize their liminal status as a source of strength and cultural critique rather than a cause for tragedy.

3. It is hypothesized that Butler, as a female author, tends to focus more on the intersectionality of race and gender in self-other relationships, highlighting the unique

challenges faced by Black women. In contrast, Beatty, as a male author, may emphasize the performative aspects of Black masculinity in both white and Black communities.

4. It is hypothesized that Butler's and Beatty's works challenge the notion of meta-Black identity by presenting protagonists who appear to resist easy categorization and actively negotiate their racial identities.

8 Methodology

In the 1970s, a wave of groundbreaking research emerged in psychology, shedding light on the complexity of racial identity and its profound impact on African Americans unveiled self. These theories, pioneered by esteemed scholars like William E. Cross Jr., revolutionized our understanding of how these individuals struggle with their racial heritage, culture, and trauma and navigate the complexities of a racially charged society.

The work of DuBois influences William E. Cross's work. His theory, the Nigrescence Model, has helped shed light on the complex process of Black identity development. It is important to note that Cross' theory is not a one-size-fits-all model because it emphasizes what individuality means. Everyone's journey to Black identity is different, and people may move through the stages in a different order or revisit them at various points in their lives. Thus, they may reach the point where enjoying the freedom of meta-black identity differently. Inspired by Du Bois's ideas - double consciousness- and other contemporaries, William E. Cross embarked on a groundbreaking study of Black racial identity and "nigrescence" - the process of becoming black and achieving the point of independent self. His 1971 work, *The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience*, introduced a pioneering model of Black racial identity development in psychology. This "Nigrescence Model" explored the stages of consciousness one undergoes while transitioning from "Negro" to "Black," outlining a five-step process for achieving a fully integrated racial identity.

1. **Pre-Encounter:** Low awareness of race and its implications.

2. **Encounter:** Exposure to racial oppression.
3. **Immersion/Emmersion:** “Just discovered Blackness” and abandonment of old self.
4. **Internalization:** Acceptance and respect for blackness and other racial/ethnic groups.
5. **Internalization-Commitment:** Comfort in one’s racial/ethnic identity and working to empower one’s community.

It is worth mentioning that this model is a part of the reform school of thought, one of the three schools of Black Psychology (Traditional, Reform, and Radical). Reform school psychologists disagreed with the limitations of White psychology for understanding Afro-Americans. They created theories about black self-concept, which is a key element in the process of developing blackness, by correcting racist ideas and recognizing a unique black psychology.

The present research is a comparative study that compares *Kindred* and *The White Boy Shuffle*, following Cross's theory. Reading these novels through a black psychologist orientation provides a crucial lens, offering invaluable insights into Black people's experiences. Notable figures in Black Psychology include Dr. William E. Cross, Jr., Dr. Na'im Akbar, and Dr. Frances Cress Welsing. Their works have helped to establish Black Psychology as a distinct field of study and have contributed to the understanding of the psychological experiences of African Americans. It emphasizes understanding the cultural, historical, and social context in which African Americans live and how these experiences shape their psychological well-being and identity.

Regarding their people’s well-being, the self is their primary concern, implicitly or explicitly; the field scholars believe African Americans’ experiences can never be diagnosed through Western perspectives. There is a vast gap between the dominant power and the victim of this domination. It also highlights the importance of the involvement of the African American community in the research and development of culturally appropriate interventions, treatments,

and policies. However, It is not only about adding another perspective to psychology; it is about challenging existing paradigms and enriching the understanding of Black people's mental health, identity, and societal forces.

9 Organization of the Thesis

Throughout this thesis, the following five chapters will address the dilemma of presenting the self and the other used by the authors above and their mentioned works, as well as the presence of culture and trauma to be the keys to flourishing the unstoppable new realities surrounding the notion of identity of the twentieth century, about the messages they attempted to convey to twentieth-century readers. Therefore, it is a prerequisite to arrange the ideas and discussion of this research under five major headings, which are as follows:

The first chapter, entitled *On the Nature of the Self: The Problem of African American Identity in 20th-Century Literature*, is devoted to the representation of the relationship between the black self and the white other in the journey of African American authors to the realization of their self-existence, starting by introducing both concepts, the self and the other, regarding African American context.

This section is an in-depth exploration of the black self-interaction with the white other through the lens of double consciousness. It highlights the burden of navigating two realities simultaneously, constantly aware of how one's identity is perceived and constructed. However, the chapter also underscores a significant evolution beyond this duality. The growing awareness of a shared cultural consciousness heralds a new paradigm—the emergence of meta-black identity, a deeper and more complex understanding of the black self in connection to their culture, memory, trauma, and relationships.

The second chapter, *Theorizing and Applying Black Psychology to African American Literature*, provides a theoretical framework to reach the aims of this thesis. Therefore, it serves as the theoretical basis for analysing the selected works. The section starts with Black

Psychology as a general scope and its reading of black identity representation to the specific used theory -The Nigrescence Model by William E. Cross Jr- which follows the black person's experiences from childhood to older stages. Furthermore, this part shows how black psychologists can enhance the understanding of Afro-Americans' lived experiences and how they perceive themselves.

The third chapter, *Negotiating Meta-Black Identity: Dana and Gunnar Navigating a Whole Self through Invisibility and Subjectivity*, is allocated to discuss and analyse the intersection of culture, memory, and trauma of both protagonists. This part contains a comparative reading of how Butler and Beatty have explored the themes of invisibility and subjectivity to underline the essence of the African American lived experience, social relationships, and the question of the self.

The fourth chapter, *The Vanished Other: Exploring Faces of Duality*, analyzes Dana's and Gunnar's interracial and intraracial relationships that shape their lives, psyches, identities, and mental health. It also illuminates the portrayal of mixed-race individuals in African American literature by examining these characters. The "tragic mulatto" is reinterpreted, offering a new paradigm for Black self-identity that challenges Western perspectives. Dana and Gunnar's stories serve as a lens to understand how the presence of the "Other" in racial dynamics is redefined, offering fresh perspectives on self-perception and racial identity formation in modern African American writing.

The fifth and final chapter, *Cultural Trauma and Healing: Mulatto /Mulatta Protagonists and the Process of Reconciliation*, reads the impact of Butler and Beatty's chosen way to present new models of African American characters. It then examines the convoluted relationship between cultural trauma, racial identity, and healing through the journeys of mulatta/mulatto protagonists Dana and Gunnar. It also explores Dana's and Gunnar's racial identity formation from childhood to recent years of experience. It further demonstrates how

Butler and Beatty deal with the tragic mulatta/mulatto archetype differently, either by rejecting victimhood and embracing a meta-Black identity that transcends just racial categorizations or by presenting it in a satiric tragic way where reimagining the New Negro ideal as an African American male.

Chapter One

On the Nature of the Self: The Problem of African American Identity in 20th-Century Literature

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Introduction

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Introduction

Due to the atrocities of slavery, along with various conflicts, the history of African American identity evolved through contradictory debates. One area that has recently come into focus is how this identity reflects its earlier struggles for self-definition and cultural preservation in the face of systemic oppression. As a part of this identity, the representation of self is a specter that haunts African American literature and philosophy discourses. Figures such as Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Jesse Fauset, and many others sought to document the African American self-journey in cultural and political arenas.

1.1 Black Consciousness: The Self and the Other Relationship

The origins of African American literature trace back to Africa, its ancestral land. Since the earliest forms of writing, Africa was a stage where Western and Eastern civilizations projected their fears and fantasies about "the other" (Friedman, 1981). Following the disintegration of the British Empire in the 1950s, which saw many African nations achieve independence from colonial rule, numerous writers examined the historical evolution of European perceptions and actions toward the continent's people (Brantlinger, 1988; Coetzee, 1988; Curtin, 1964; Maccrone, 1957). Europeans used critical theory to examine why they so quickly embraced and succumbed to the allure of empire, particularly the British Empire's role in global expansion (Brantlinger, 1990). Against this backdrop, the voices of the colonized in their quest for liberation remain largely unheard, except for writers such as Steve Biko (1978), Bhabha (1984), and Frantz Fanon (1980). This status arises partly from the historical strategies of exploitation and repression that prevented African Americans from accessing the skills and tools necessary to create the institutionalized knowledge that shapes societal roles. It also reflects the processes of subjectification that led the colonized to undermine their own Indigenous identity in favor of the dominant culture. This silence signifies the unconscious

complicity of "the good slave, the faithful slave, the slavish slave" (Fanon, 1980, p. 17). This dynamic is grounded in the discourse of Black Consciousness, which serves as a means of "identity retrieval and creation" (Butchart, 1993, p. 9).

In *Being Black in the World,* Chabani Manganyi (2011) first addresses the concept of "the other." Hayes (2016) reverses the colonial and colonizing gaze, constituting the African as "the other" through anthropology, ethnography, and psychology. Manganyi turns these techniques back upon the Europeans to reveal how 'in race-supremacist societies [...] the body becomes a medium for the development of racist symbol-systems and fantasies" (Hook, 2008, p. 105). Manganyi's argument, based on a synthesis of object relations theory and existential phenomenology, is a key to understanding how Europeans objectify the African body. He contends that this objectification results from the idealization of rational intellect in industrialized societies, which comes at the expense of emotions and embodied experience. Though repressed, emotions are not removed from the psychic and social landscape. Instead, they silently form the body's externally spatialized, grid-like sociological schema. "This schema is shaped by crossing symbolic axes that associate Blackness with dirt and the body and Whiteness with purity and the mind" (Manganyi, 2011, p. 23).

In *Discourse and the Other: The Production of the Afro-American Text,* both Conteh-Morgan and Hogue (1988) present a fresh approach to studying the social, ideological, and political dynamics of Afro-American literary texts in the twentieth century. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of literature as a social institution, they examine how power universalizes ideas, appropriates literary texts to serve ideological concerns, and continues to oppress dissenting voices. Consequently, the dialectics of the self and the other in twentieth-century African American literature are intensely discussed and influenced by various social, ideological, and political dynamics (Conteh-Morgan & Hogue, 1988). This is particularly evident in the post-apartheid South African context, where the politics of self and others play a

significant role in institutional and cultural spheres (Malan,1995). As articulated by Du Bois, the concept of double consciousness provides a critical theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics, as it illuminates the tension between the African American self and the dominant Western culture (Macleod, 1994). This framework underscores the struggles of identity formation and resistance in African American literature.

The impact of European ideas on constructing the 'other' in African American literature is also a crucial aspect of this dialectic (Butchart, 1993). Thus, many existing critical works about identity in African American literature primarily focus on blackness and the literal portrayal of the self and the other. In her provocative study of prominent twentieth-century African American writers and critics, Sandra Adell (1994) takes an unprecedented look at the relationship between African American literature, criticism, and the complex ensemble of Western literature, criticism, and philosophy. Adell begins by analyzing the metaphysical foundations of Du Bois's famous formulation of double consciousness and how African American writing bears the traces of European philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Marx. She then examines, in the double context of African American literature and European philosophy, the writings of significant authors and essayists such as Richard Wright, Leopold Senghor, Maya Angelou, Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Adell gives a thoughtful analysis of the "double bind" created by conflicting claims of Euro- and Afrocentrism in African American literature (1995). In addition, considering American traumatic historical impact on the African American identity, the discussion of the complexity of the binary of self and other needs further analysis. Thus, as a broader field, psychology has recently begun to be the intersection point of these studies. African American scholars delve into every field to understand and explain the process of becoming 'Black' worldwide.

A substantial body of literature exists on this matter, starting with the works of James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison (Gates, 1985). Henry Louis Gates' influential analysis of the characteristics of this literature culminated in his book *The Signifying Monkey: Unmasking Identity in African American Literature* (1985), a seminal text in African American literary criticism. Gates analyses how African American characters deal with their identity within a society that defines them as 'other.' In *The Signifying Monkey,* Gates explores the sophisticated layers of African American literary expression. Drawing from African folklore and oral traditions, he examines how African American characters navigate their identities within a society that frequently marginalizes them. Gates remarks that the African American tradition, unlike nearly all others, "was generated as a response to eighteenth and nineteenth-century allegations that persons of African descent did not, could not, create literature" (Ryan, 2004, p. 987). In his contemporary analysis, Gates (1985) contends that the African American self is not a preexisting identity but a construct shaped by historical context, cultural forces, and systemic racism . He encourages readers to explore the complexities of African American identity formation, emphasizing that it is not an inherited entity but a nuanced emotional response to individual agency and external constraints (Gates, 1985).

Understanding the self is a primary concern in various philosophical traditions. Nietzsche argues that self-consciousness inherently involves an internal dialogue. In this state of self-awareness, the individual occupies the dual roles of observer and observee (Stolz, 2020). This internal dialogue creates a sense of duality, where one part constantly scrutinizes and evaluates the other. While Nietzsche emphasizes internal duality in self-consciousness, Sartre highlights the relational aspect of self-awareness. Sartre posits that self-perception is fundamentally tied to the presence of the other. In his work *Being and Nothingness,* he discusses the concepts of 'being-for-itself' and 'being-for-others,' suggesting that individual awareness is influenced by how the self perceives others perceiving it (as cited in Dolezal, 2012).

Contemporary African American literary and psychological works resonate beyond literary criticism and intersect with broader psychological inquiries. By examining the self and the other representation, these works illuminate the psychological impact of racialization and the negotiation of identity (Gates & Smith, 2014).

1.2 The Self: An Overview

Identity is not a singular construct, as exemplified by the evolving forms of identity within African American communities. While the identity emerging after the 1960s shared features with earlier forms, it was distinct from those from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Stets and Burke (2000) argue that society significantly shapes identities, making understanding the social world essential for comprehending diverse identities. Cokley (2005) highlights that, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, African Americans were confined mainly to two identity forms: a racialized identity, portraying them as a distinct natural type, and an Americanized identity, emphasizing differences from other Americans as superficial, such as skin color. This understanding of identity lays the groundwork for examining the self, an essential essence influenced by various factors throughout its formation and development.

Recognizing the concept of the self is a challenging accomplishment. Homi Bhabha (1994) proposes that the Self and the Other are not entirely separate entities but somewhat interconnected and defined by their relationship. Self-development begins in early childhood and continues to evolve, significantly influenced by life events that affect an individual's mental and psychological well-being (Brittian, 2012). Pilarska (2014) argues that this viewpoint contends that the self exists before or independently of social constructions and individual self-definitions; thereby, identity formation is an internal factor innate to individuals rather than a result of external interactions. Within this framework, identity is conceptualized as a steadfast and dependable trait that facilitates the recognition of individuals.

Many factors shape one's sense of self. These factors naturally lead to the question: What is the Self? The self is a well-researched concept within social and personality psychology and is of significant interest across various fields, including psychology, philosophy, and social sciences. While debates persist about the existence of the self, there is no doubt that various self-related phenomena, such as self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-enhancement, and self-regulation, are essential subjects in contemporary research. The study of the self extends beyond psychology; philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, fiction writers, and other artists have all been fascinated by the complexities of the self. This interdisciplinary interest asserts the nature of the self and its profound impact on our understanding of human identity and behavior. Swann and Bosson (2010) argue that the self is a reference point, allowing one to perceive the world, interpret surroundings, and document a critical narrative of experiences. Whether through introspective reflection or social interactions, it remains necessary to understand one's identity. Sedikides (2021) further adds that it represents the individual's awareness of their existence, thoughts, emotions, and experiences, emerging from the conception of cognitive processes, self-awareness, and self-analysis.

Keromnes et al. (2019) argue that the existence of the other plays a crucial role in one's self-recognition, as it influences how individuals see and perceive themselves. This includes positive and negative judgments about their own identity.

1.2.1 The Black Self

A heightened awareness of the importance of defining oneself advances identity formations during the historic race and ethnic movements of the 60's and 70's. The philosopher Charles Taylor(1989), in his influential book *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity,* argues, "The self is not something given, but something in the making [...] We become who we are through our encounters with others" (p.41). Here, Taylor emphasizes the ongoing process of self-formation. According to him, the self is not inherited but constantly evolves

through interactions and relationships. Thus, both Bhabha and Taylor appreciate the social dimension of selfhood, suggesting self-perception is constructed through encounters with the "Other." Further solidifying this idea, Miller (2008) argues that the encounter between white and black Americans leads to a realization of historical alienation and the need for a common national heritage.

Distinct from racial categorization, the African American self represents a complex construction. It transcends identity, surrounding historical legacies, cultural expressions, and lived experiences of racism and resistance. This concept acknowledges the ongoing process of self-definition within the African American community, developed by personal tragedies and the collective struggle for social justice (Banaji, 2021). Understanding the back self-necessitates recognizing resilience cultivated in response to adversity while presenting the main factors that help conceptualize the African American self. Additionally, Charles Taylor argues that recognition by the dominant culture is crucial for their self-worth. Within his concept of The *Politics of Recognition*, Taylor critiques traditional liberalism for overlooking the importance of cultural identity for minorities. He highlights that for these groups, self-worth is tied to being recognized and respected for their unique traditions and practices (Taylor, 1989). The absence of such recognition can be oppressive, hindering their ability to see themselves as valued members of society.

Furthermore, Taylor (1989) argues against forced assimilation into the dominant culture. Instead, he envisions a just society that allows minorities to maintain their identities while still participating in the broader public sphere. He genuinely seeks a balance between individual rights and the need for cultural recognition, which he sees as fundamental for a flourishing self in a multicultural society.

Wyne Marvin (1974), in his book *The Black Self*, addresses this dilemma and urges scientific research toward "the development of theoretical rationales, conceptual models, and

adequate definitions of the Black self-concept" (p.74). He further contends that "the emphasis on Black consciousness and the unique quality of blackness signals a changing of the mirror in which the self will be reflected" (p.75). He then focuses on the paradigm transformation in self-perception within the African American community. The emphasis on "black consciousness" and the "unique qualities of blackness" signifies a rejection of externally imposed identities and a move towards self-definition. This shift can be metaphorically understood as a "changing of the mirror." Traditionally, societal norms and dominant narratives have dictated how African American people perceive themselves. This new focus on Black consciousness represents a deliberate reshaping of the reflective surface, reflecting African American self-worth and cultural richness.

While focusing on the "other" in defining the African American self is a prevalent perspective, it is essential to acknowledge Africa's rich history and cultural heritage. Some Afrocentric scholars argue for a more self-determined comprehension of African American identity, one that is firmly rooted in African traditions and philosophies. Molefi Kete Asante (1980), a prominent Afrocentric scholar, also advocates for a self-determined African American identity based on African history and philosophy.

1.2.2 Culture and the Development of the Black Self

Culture refers to the "sum total of life patterns passed on from generation to generation. Culture, thus, includes institutions, languages, values, religious ideas, habits of thinking, artistic expression, and patterns of social and interpersonal relationships" (Hodge, 1975, p, 2). Hill Collins argues that to understand the African American self, it is necessary to seek beyond just skin color; it is about ancestry but also the rich cultural traditions, the shared historical experiences, and the ongoing encounters with race in everyday life. In addition to the forced cultural elements. Collins (1990) states, "black identity is not just about race. It is also about culture, history, and experience" (p. 10). African American culture defines their contribution to

the culture of the United States of America. Their culture is a composition of a rich history of African roots, the experiences of slavery, resistance to oppression, and the ongoing influences of societal, political, and artistic movements. It is a product of various African cultures that were brought to the United States during the slave trade, as well as the experiences of African Americans in this country. In the essays "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown" (1950), "Stranger in the Village" (1953), and "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American"(1959), Baldwin (1959) also develops his idea that the American experience of alienation from European and African culture and history is expressive of American selfhood as a whole. He states: "This depthless alienation from oneself and one's people is, in sum, the American experience" (p.39). Understanding the meaning of this alienation becomes Baldwin's central task as an American writer.

Multiple factors have shaped the African American culture. The problematic aspect is that it has been shaped by the enduring legacies of slavery, segregation, and the civil rights movement. However, it has also been shaped by joy, creativity, and resilience. For Baldwin, racism and segregation represent an American corruption of sins perpetuated during the European conquest of the world (Baldwin, 1959).

When an African American individual grows up within their culture, seeing value in it and deriving self-worth from it strengthens their sense of self, keeps them grounded, and provides self-worth. It also provides an authentic framework from which they can judge other cultures and decide what fits them as African Americans. Origin culture gives African Americans an invaluable sense of rootedness in their African descent that lasts a lifetime. This rootedness fosters a quiet sort of self-pride in one's inheritance. When African Americans appreciate their African culture and original heritage, they activate self-acceptance. The self is not an essential object that instinctively responds to environmental conditions (Johnson, 2020). However, unlike contemporary definitions of culture, collective identity emerges from a shared

collective experience such as colonization, forced labor, and North American slavery (Johnson, 2020).

Since identities are formalized repetitions of performances that imitate and congregate dominant discussions of, for instance, culture, gender, race, and class (Butler, 2002), one's departure from one culture results in a loss of identity and diminished self-awareness. The experiences of people of African descent have shown that cultural identity plays a crucial role in shaping one's self-esteem and overall well-being. Additionally, the absence of knowledge and pride in one's culture can lead to disregarding its significance. According to Marcus Garvey, who is best known for founding the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, going back to a place where one's African American heritage is salient develops a deeper appreciation of one's sense of belonging. Thus, it helps African Americans to maintain their self-definitions. Garvey believes that culture and consciousness are linked, arguing that culture expresses people's consciousness, which is shaped by culture. In his famous work, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Garvey (1967) writes:

> Culture is the outward manifestation of a people's inward thoughts and feelings. It is the expression of their soul, their inner life. It is the outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible grace. The culture of a people is the outward and visible expression of their inward and invisible consciousness. (p.63)

Chabani Manganyi (2011) also assesses the relationship between culture and Black Consciousness in *Being Black in the World*. He states: “It has been said often enough that African cultures were assaulted almost beyond recognition” (p.23).

Marcus Garvey (1967) highlights the strong connection between African Americans and their homeland. His idea has a more significant impact on the representation of the authentic African American self. The African authentic culture, rooted in African tradition, challenges stereotypes and promotes African American self-pride. Nevertheless, the Garvey separatist idea attempts to

fit the real Negro artist into a framework bounded by his self-conception as African, an authentic African whom Du Bois, Fanon, Ellison, and many others demystified. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) explores how dominant cultural narratives suppress authentic identity formation, particularly among marginalized groups. She argues that the dominant white culture erodes self-determination and perpetuates ignorance, leaving marginalized communities weakened and disconnected from their true selves. Anzaldúa writes:

> The dominant white culture is slowly killing us with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people, we have resisted and taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered—we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves. (p. 108)

Both Garvey and Anzaldúa underscore the importance of resisting external impositions on identity and striving for self-representation. While Garvey focuses on reconnecting with African roots as a means of empowerment, Anzaldúa broadens the discussion to include the intersectional struggles of marginalized groups in asserting their authentic selves against .dominant cultural forces

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1996)*, Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity is not only a matter of 'being' but also of 'becoming,' belonging as much to the future as it does to the past" (Hall,1996, p.222). His belief means that our identities are determined not by race, ethnicity, or nationality but by how we interact with the world. Our identities are constantly shaped by our experiences, relationships, and the cultural forces surrounding us about historical periods. Overall, African culture is not only dancing, singing, food, or athletics, but it is also the green collard; the Black man was forced to eat as an enslaved person, then obliged to be a part of his culture out of his will. Garvey's philosophy, emphasizing self-reliance, returning to Africa, and building a strong Black nation, can be seen as a response to collective trauma. The

Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the movement Garvey led, aimed to heal this trauma by fostering a sense of racial unity, cultural pride, and economic independence.

Some literary works with cultural themes have revolutionized the sense of cultural belonging among African Americans and have developed a sense of self-definition. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* revolves around the search for an African American individual's identity. Ellison's nameless protagonist struggles with his self-identity as a black and an invisible man. Through his journey of situating himself as part of society, he maintains his self-awareness and learns more about others, confirming that culture is a part of the African soul. However, African culture is diverse and unique; being within the origin culture means one is always armed by self-pride.

1.2.3 Racism and Black Self-esteem

Race, racism, and race relations affect everyone in the world, particularly African Americans. The struggle for freedom and recognition has weakened African Americans mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The U.S. Census Bureau defines a person's race based on their self-identification of the race or races with which they most closely identify. African American self-esteem is one of the most significant foundations of psychological well-being and identity formation within the African American community. One primary focus of the 1950s and early 1960s was the 'mark of oppression' approach, which posited that Black individuals internalized negative racial images of themselves, resulting in devastating effects on overall self-esteem (Porter & Washington, 1979). This approach highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing one's cultural heritage, history, and personal worth in the face of racism. As a result, younger generations of African Americans carry the trauma inflicted by racism upon their ancestors. These generations inherit this trauma, even though they did not directly experience it or have firsthand knowledge of it.

Thus, African Americans have been impacted by racism since slavery and continue to experience trauma due to oppression, segregation, and injustice (Scott-Jones et al., 2020). Their humanity was institutionally disregarded in the United States, where they were dehumanized and treated as property. As a result, their self-worth was often tied to the labor they performed for their enslavers. African American men and women were legally denied access to education, which made them more susceptible to internalizing negative stereotypes and perceiving white people as superior. Despite these systemic barriers, they strived to develop resilient concepts of self, partly in response to historical injustices. The power dynamic between enslaver and enslaved became institutionalized, perpetuating the notion that white people held greater political and economic power than African Americans. This ideology continues to influence the modern mindset of people of African descent.

In *The Concept of Self: A Study of Black Identity and Self-Esteem*, Allen (2001) defines African American self-esteem by examining how African American individuals perceive themselves and how their identity is shaped. Allen proposes that identity is a dual concept for African Americans. The first is racial self-esteem (personal identity), which refers to an individual's sense of self-worth and personal qualities. He challenges the stereotype that African Americans inherently lack self-esteem, arguing that education, social class, and cultural awareness are essential for maintaining healthy self-worth. The second is personal self-esteem (collective identity), which emphasizes belonging to the African American community and its historical and ongoing struggles (Porter & Washington, 1971). This aspect reflects one's sense of individuality, independent of racial group affiliation, and encompasses a holistic view of the self. Factors such as region, gender, interracial contact, skin tone, and race significantly influence the self-esteem of African American individuals. While these two concepts are distinct, they are often interrelated (Porter, 1971).

Double consciousness, as one of the consequences of racism, has a significant impact on Black self-esteem. While there are notable differences between Du Bois's and Allen's interpretations of double consciousness, Allen presents a more nuanced perspective. He argues that twoness, though it creates internal conflict, can also contribute to high self-esteem (Allen, 2001). Allen (2001) explains:

> People maintain a positive social identity by identifying or creating favorable comparisons between their group(s) and outgroup(s). Thus, individuals will discriminate against or derogate outgroup members relative to their ingroup to create a favorable comparison between their group and the outgroup. These comparisons result in positive social identity or high collective self-esteem. (p. 34)

This process of comparing one's group to outgroups may generate internal conflicts, but it also helps individuals recognize the valuable aspects of their own group.

Furthermore, in her book Rock My Soul: Black People and Self-Esteem, bell hooks (2002) explores the broader implications of double consciousness on African American self-esteem. She observes: "Black folks have been unwilling to break through our denial and deal with the truth that crippling low self-esteem has reached epidemic proportions because it is just not a deep enough diagnosis" (p. 25). This suggests that racism has not only undermined African Americans' self-esteem but has also inflicted profound mental and spiritual harm.

According to Vandiver et al. (2002), African Americans express and internalize emotions in unique ways. They note: "If Blacks accepted being Black, then they were assumed to be psychologically healthy and to have high self-esteem. In contrast, Blacks who accepted the values of white society were believed to suffer from self-hatred and, as a result, low self-esteem" (p. 71).

They also suggest that embracing one's African American identity is linked to psychological well-being and high self-esteem. This perspective aligns with the notion that self-

acceptance and cultural pride are essential for mental health. Although slavery was abolished and enslaved Africans were freed, many African Americans—descendants of those who were enslaved—continue to struggle to reach their full potential and thrive. Judith Herman argues that "like traumatized people, we must understand the past to reclaim the present and the future. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history to maintain high self-esteem" (Herman, 2018, p. 45).

Mbembé (2017) argues that the construction of blackness, which began during the Atlantic slave trade and persists to the present day, has had a profoundly negative impact on Black individuals. Colonialism facilitated the objectification and dehumanization of Black people, fostering a sense of shame about their blackness (Mbembé, 2017). By reducing the Black individual to a "rag doll," this dehumanization perpetuates self-hatred and reinforces the acceptance of white supremacy (Mbembé, 2017). In his book *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembé contends that race has been used as a tool for white people to dehumanize Black individuals both physically and mentally (Mbembé, 2017). Ultimately, racism seeks not only to oppress but also to destroy the soul and self-esteem of Black people.

All in all, the relationship between racism and Black self-esteem is profoundly approaved, as systemic oppression has historically sought to undermine the psychological and emotional well-being of Black individuals. Racism, through its mechanisms of dehumanization and marginalization, creates a pervasive environment where Black people are constantly subjected to negative stereotypes and societal devaluation. This external oppression often becomes internalized, leading to diminished self-worth and a fractured sense of identity. As Mbembé (2017) highlights, the legacy of colonialism and slavery has ingrained a narrative of inferiority, making it challenging for many Black individuals to embrace their cultural heritage and personal worth fully. However, resistance to this narrative has also been a cornerstone of Black identity formation. Movements advocating for racial pride and self-affirmation, such as

the Black Power and Black Lives Matter movements, have sought to counteract the damaging effects of racism by promoting self-love, self-respect, collective empowerment, and the reclamation of Black identity. These efforts underscore the importance of dismantling systemic racism not only to achieve social justice but also to foster healthier self-esteem and psychological resilience within Black communities.

1.2.4 Historical Environment and the Black Self-concept

According to William David Smith (1980), the historical context significantly influences the African American self-concept by shaping how they perceive themselves and their identity. Thus, Self-concept is essentially a social product determined by the attitudes and behavior of others toward the individual (Smith, 1980). He further argues that the traumatic experience of being forcibly removed from Africa and placed in a racially oppressive society has led to a self-image that is often defined by the perceptions and prescriptions of white racists. This historical backdrop has created a discussed relationship between the experiences of African Americans and the societal norms imposed upon them. Smith emphasizes that the self-concept of African Americans is not formed in isolation but is strongly affected by various systems of rejection, including the legal, educational, and social systems. He also claims that significant negative experiences from these systems profoundly impact the self-concept, leading to feelings of inferiority and a struggle for self-acceptance. The historical laws and societal structures that have marginalized African Americans contribute to a self-concept that can be either a "Black self-concept," which fosters acceptance and pride, or a "white self-concept," " which may lead to denial of self-acceptance and acceptance of other Blacks (Smith, 1980, p.362). Overall, the historical context serves as a foundational element in developing the African American self-concept, influencing how individuals navigate their identity in a society that has historically devalued their existence. Feeling less human affects their self-concept. Moreover, the disturbed mentality of African Americans has led to a lack of education,

which may detach them from their cultural heritage. Thus, they find safe refuge in the white dominant culture; as Moore (2005) suggests, "double-consciousness is adaptive as a survival technique, but it can be considered maladaptive because it can generate mental conflict" (p.753). Moore's assertion is based on the idea that the self is shaped by how others perceive us. He says, "It is not psychologically healthy to be denied full expression of your blackness or manhood in a White-dominated society"(p. 754). It also leads to internalized racism, which is when people of color internalize negative stereotypes about their race. The relationship between internalized racism and African Americans' self-definition is never denied and is incontestable.

The idea of Moore suggests that there is a single way to be defined as an African American and that any deviation from this way is unhealthy and unreliable. It is tempting to think that being oppressed is a choice, that African Americans see themselves as inferior not only because of white oppression but also because they see themselves as inferior.

M-Combs (1985) believes that the African American self-concept is a testament to the enduring human spirit forged in the crucible of cultural retentions and historical resistance. He further argues that traditions allow African Americans to express their Blackness proudly. Maulana Karenga (2022) emphasizes the role of African traditions in history, stating that "Nguzo Saba provides a powerful philosophical and ethical framework upon which to ground and shape a positive self-concept and a dynamic worldview." More than traditions, he argues that historical events affect African Americans in their local communities, across the country, or globally, and also impact their own lives. This reflects a strong sense of connection despite their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Cox and Tamir (2022) draw a study to confirm this claim by examining *How Race Is Central to Identity for Black Americans and Affects How They Connect.* They declare:

> No matter where they are from, who they are, their economic circumstances, or their educational backgrounds, a significant majority of Black Americans say being Black is

hugely vital to how they think about themselves, with about three-quarters (76%) overall. (p.5)

Thus, the resulting self-concept is not one of victimhood but of unwavering self-worth, as articulated by Audre Lorde, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde,1988, p.180).

1.3 Du Boisian Double-Consciousness and the Black Self

To challenge the effects of racism, African Americans need to maintain a positive sense of self whilst challenging the colonizer and dominant powers. Leary and Tangney (2012) remind us that "The legacy of slavery and oppression remains etched in our souls. The impacts of history can be witnessed daily in our struggle to understand who and what we are, and in our jaundiced vision of whom and what we can become" (Leary &Tangney, 2012, p.181). According to Du Bois, one of the sequences of slavery is Double Consciousness. Du Bois's idea refers to the internal conflict experienced by African Americans, who see themselves both through their own eyes and the lens of a prejudiced society. It is a struggle between maintaining a personal identity and recognizing the burden of racism and the stereotypes imposed by the broader culture. Du Bois's metaphor of being "born with a veil" captures the essence of double consciousness. The veil symbolizes both the literal and metaphorical barriers that obscure the identity of African Americans. African Americans grapple with their dual roles: feeling like both Americans and African Americans, yet unable to fully reconcile these identities (Du Bois, 1996). He describes double consciousness as:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body[...] this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and more authentic self. (Du Bois,1996, p.4)

On the one hand, Double Consciousness sheds light on the psychology of African Americans. African Americans experience internal psychological conflict, which is a result of "the struggle of reconciling their self-perception with the often-negative perceptions received from a racist society, which leads to feelings of confusion, frustration, and a fragmented self" (Du Bois, 1996, p.41). Thus, this "twoness" is not inherent, accidental, or benign but imposed and fraught with psychic danger. He further adds that this duality resulted either from the trauma of racism or from the false integration. This constant negotiation shaped Black identity, fostering resilience and leaving scars of alienation and self-doubt (Du Bois, 1996). On the other hand, double consciousness maintains African Americans' self-awareness, which leads to a comprehensive perception of race and its impact on African American identity, as Du Bois(1999) states: "this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (p.39).

Modern studies on the African American self and identity have criticized the notion of double consciousness from different perspectives. Adolph Reed (1997) claims that "millions of individuals experience a peculiar form of bifurcated identity, simply by standard racial status [...] seems preposterous on its face" (p.125). Reed further suggests that the experience of duality cannot be uniformly applied to all individuals within a racial group. He argues that identity is a profound concept unrelated to a single shared experience based on race alone. Critics also say that Du Bois's concept oversimplifies the complexity of modern identities and nostalgically longs for a unified, integral self that never truly existed, making it an unattainable ideal. Thus, Darlene Clark Hine (1993) asserts:

> Had Du Bois specifically included the experiences and lives of Black women in his lament, instead of writing, "One ever feels his twoness," he would have mused about how one ever feels her "fiveness": Negro, American, woman, poor, Black woman. (p. 338)

In *On DuBois's Notion of Double Consciousness,* Kirkland (2013) identifies forms of the danger posed by double consciousness."dual/duelist," which is the risk of internally conflicted aspirations and expectations, and a "duplicitous" hypocritical stance. He also warns of the "dyadic" form of double consciousness, which would reflect, via education, the result of an individual coming to an authentic. Non-estranged comprehension involves understanding one's rightful position and identity as a citizen and a person of color and recognizing it about others. Thus, Du Bois's "double consciousness" concept describes only the internal conflict experienced by African Americans who know how others underestimate their self-worth (Kirkland, 2013). This awareness leads them to perceive themselves as a problem within a society that allows or enforces such harmful comparisons. So, African American novels in the 20th century reveal a sense of double consciousness of implying the explorations of the African cultural identity.

The discussion of Du Bois's notion remains relevant today, but it could benefit from incorporating contemporary critiques and reinterpretations. For instance, scholars like Alford Young (2004) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have expanded on Du Bois's framework by exploring how intersectionality—race, gender, class, and sexuality—shapes the African American experience. Young (2004) argues that double consciousness must be understood in the context of modern urban life, where African Americans navigate multiple identities in a rapidly changing social landscape. Collins (2000), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of Black feminist thought in redefining double consciousness, highlighting how Black women experience multiple layers of oppression that cannot be reduced to a single duality.

Michael Eric Dyson (2017) in *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* examines how double consciousness manifests in the era of Black Lives Matter, where African Americans must simultaneously assert their humanity and confront systemic racism.

Dyson argues that the digital age has amplified double consciousness, as social media platforms force African Americans to navigate both their self-perception and the often-hostile perceptions of others in real-time. His idea creates a new vision of psychological strain, as the veil Du Bois described becomes increasingly transparent yet inescapable.

In addition, Tressie McMillan Cottom (2019) in *Thick: And Other Essays* explores how double consciousness intersects with gender, class, and body politics in contemporary America. Cottom highlights how Black women, in particular, experience a "triple consciousness," navigating not only race and nationality but also the gendered expectations imposed by society. Her work builds on Collins's intersectional framework, demonstrating how the complexities of modern identity require a more expansive understanding of Du Bois's original concept.

Moreover, Eddie Glaude Jr. (2020) in *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* revisits Du Bois's ideas through the lens of Baldwin's writings. Glaude argues that double consciousness is not just a personal struggle but a collective one, as African Americans grapple with the contradictions of a nation that espouses freedom and equality while perpetuating systemic racism. He suggests that the current political climate, marked by resurgent white nationalism and racial violence, has intensified the psychological and social tensions described by Du Bois.

1.4 Racial Trauma and African Self-Consciousness

African Americans have long endured the mental and emotional trauma of slavery and racism, dating back to the early 1500s. Over centuries, they were subjected to slavery, sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, white supremacy, police brutality, and exclusion from services accessible to White Americans. Understanding African self-consciousness and the impact of racism on it is necessary for promoting a positive sense of self. Starting from Africa, it covers the legacy of the emergence of this consciousness, beginning with the Black Consciousness Movement, which leads to various readings of African American identity. African/Black

American identity is a form of consciousness borrowed from the colonists as a strategic tool to control further the minds of colonial subjects (Fanon, 1967). Subsequently, Africans who migrate to the United States might possess a hybrid identity with a postcolonial mindset. This reality puts them in front of racial trauma, which has significant impacts on African Americans, individually and collectively (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020).

Cheek (1982) finds that public self-consciousness is more closely related to social aspects of identity, while private self-consciousness is more closely related to personal aspects. Cohen (1994) challenges the Western treatment of the African American self as a micro-version of larger social entities. He emphasizes that the individual's self-awareness is an essential element in shaping social and cultural processes. Vargas (2014) argues that identity is not exclusively formed by self-consciousness but is a protocultural factor that requires cognitive capacities linked to social competence and cooperation.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon makes the compelling argument that the perception of blackness is imposed by a white-dominated society, leading to a deep-seated identity crisis for the African American man. When they assimilate into a world that perceives them differently, they face the harsh realities of racism that lead to racial trauma. African American writers such as Ralph Ellison, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright offer developed portrayals of the African American experience in America, exploring how to maintain African American authentic self. They present the psychological impact of racism, violence, the yearning for belonging, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression.

Working in colonial Algeria, Frantz Fanon offers a unique perspective on the impact of trauma on African Americans from his experience. He argues that for the colonized, including African Americans, trauma is not just a personal experience but a social and political one (Fanon, 1961). Colonial violence, racism, and oppression caused deep psychological wounds

that affected entire communities, not just individuals. He challenged traditional psychiatry, which often viewed the colonized as mentally inferior. Instead, he believes trauma stemmed from the brutal realities of colonialism and that true healing required not just individual therapy but the dismantling of colonial systems (Fanon, 1961). These influences have also led Africans to assume the identity of the colonial masters. Frantz Fanon (1963) argues:

> When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the absolute other of the white man is and will continue to be the Black man. Conversely, only for the white man is the other perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self – that is, the unidentifiable, the inassimilable. (p.195)

He also asserts this notion by thoroughly analyzing the psychological mechanisms that instill inferiority in a colonized culture. He writes that the systemic dehumanizing social mechanisms imposed by the colonists caused the colonial subjects to become like them, thereby ignoring their own culture. Thus, the African American novel, in many perspectives, is a postcolonial one; it is written to present the unequal relations of power based on a binary opposition: "Us" and "them," "First World" and "third world," "White" and "Black," "Colonizer" and "colonized," "Self" and "other," "Powerful" and "powerless," "Torturer" and "tortured," "Enslaver" and "slave," "Civilized" and "savage," "Superior" and "inferior," "Human" and "subhuman" (Fanon, 1963, p.195).

In the context of African American literature, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas posits that the Other is not merely a mirror reflecting the self but embodies the illusion of self-sufficiency (Levinas, 1979). He contends that the self finds its limits through encounters with the Other, thereby establishing the moral fabric of human existence within these relationships of otherness (Levinas, 1979). Both the notion of double consciousness and self-consciousness helped shape the African American identity of the twentieth century. Not only shaping it but also depicting it through literature.

1.5 Recasting Black Identity in African American Literature

Over the years, African Americans have focused on the terminology of their identity and existence because these names are part of their identities. Seeking names in their situation represents the complexity of their self-existence in the white community. These titles reflect their literature and their presence in the society.

African American literature has its specifications, including African American literature for its language and the ideas and purposes behind its writings. The way different genres perceive Africa influences the interpretation of their writings. In a society where African Americans are seen through a distorted lens, their true identities remain unrecognized by oppressors (1952). However, recognizing their history, culture, struggles, and lived experiences in the white community is necessary for comprehending the full scope of their identity.

Some scholars contend that African American literary texts stand out due to their distinctive rhetorical practices, folklore, customs, and traditions rooted in Africa. Others posit that these texts represent an ongoing engagement with the enduring legacy of slavery and segregation. However, both contribute to a deeper understanding of African American presence of the true self.

Harlem Renaissance is considered the spring of the African American voice. It was the moment when African American scholars revived the forgotten texts written by African Americans, considering them within the frame of a literary tradition rooted in the time of slavery. As a result, a new perspective intends to articulate new concepts in literature where the African American voice plays a significant role. More specifically, this genre often portrays the African self as mirroring the psychological experience of individuals experiencing a changing world. There are a few noticeable periods of African American literary tradition: the early period (18th century to early 1920s), the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940), the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Arts (or Black Aesthetic) Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Additionally, there is a postmodern moment in African American literature, which roughly started in the 1970s and continues to the present day (Braxton, 2008). Each period marks significant themes, styles, and socio-political contexts that influenced African American writers, reflecting the African American community's evolving struggles, aspirations, and cultural expressions. One more conspicuous trend within African American literature is African American women's literary tradition, the flowering of which, in the 1970s and 1980s, scholar and critic Joanne Braxton characterized as the "American Renaissance" (Stein, 2009, p.14).

1.5.1 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance, which primarily occurred between approximately 1918 and the mid-1930s, left an indelible mark on American cultural and literary history. While its zenith was during the 1920s, the movement's influence persisted beyond that era, even amidst the challenges posed by the onset of the Great Depression. The Harlem Renaissance was a pivotal period in African American literature, characterized by a reclamation of African American identity and a celebration of African culture. This period highlights the movement's emphasis on racial consciousness and the revaluation of blackness as a human condition (Irele,2000). Smith (2004) also adds that it encounters the reader with the portrayal of the African American experience yet to depict their desire, love, integration, and fantasy, which leads to a truer self-definition.

1.5.2 The Search for Black Self-definition

According to Kundera (1999), historical change unveils a quest for Black self-existence and meaning within specific communities. It represents a fundamental struggle for justice and equality and a realistic portrayal of what it means to be Black in America, transcending mere suffering. Thus, Harlem Renaissance literature envisions a future shaped by the aftermath of racism, which has shattered many African Americans' visions of themselves. Simultaneously,

it seeks to reclaim the past and forge a new present. Once denied ownership of their literary heritage, African American writers have unearthed and celebrated their African roots.

The Harlem Renaissance narratives embodied resilience which gave rise to the concept of the "New Negro." While the "New Negro" represents an abstract idea, the Harlem Renaissance was the artistic movement that breathed life into it. The critic Alain Locke succinctly captured its essence when he declared that through art, "Negro life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self-determination"(1926). This period of cultural and artistic flourishing for African Americans marked a more confident and self-assured Black identity (Hutchinson, 2007). The Harlem Renaissance was also closely associated with the New Negro Movement, which tries to define the African American by themselves (Bernard, 2011, p. 268).

This collection of literary works – fiction, poetry, drama by African Americans, essays on African American art and literature alongside broader social issues advocated, as Locke calls it, a "spiritual coming of age" and sought to declare the growth of a "common consciousness" among African Americans and to show that "the American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro" (Gray, 2012, p. 477), as well as described a new sense of racial pride, personal and racial selfhood, and claimed that blackness is beautiful. Unlike the New Negro, for Locke, the Old Negroes were sambos, pickaninnies, bucks, mammies, and Uncle Toms – stock figures that dominated the cultural landscape of the American South in broadsides, advertisements, and minstrel shows (Bernard, 2011). The Harlem Renaissance tried to reject the notion of the Old Negro and his self-hatred. The positive ones replace the negative African American self-image.

Locke maintains that the movement is not about uniting the cultures and creating new cultural centers but about reinventing the Black Soul. This soul standard cultural artwork for the Harlem Renaissance era is a revolutionary drawing-out community platform involving African and African American art and literature. Lock (1925) portrays New Negro as

"the augury of a new democracy in American culture"(p.83) and observes the New Negro as championing and demanding civil rights. Therefore, his anthology seeks to replace old stereotypes with new visions of African American identity, the new identity, and the post-discrimination identity that resisted humiliation. Locke then argues that African American literature and culture are "means of moving towards social, political, and economic equality"(p.89).

Hence, identity emerges as one of the most explicit themes in Harlem's novels. African American authors identified a book that offers a new identification of what is the African American self, the New Negro self. The "New Negro" identity is characterized by pride, brimming with originality. Since its inception, the quest for self-definition has become prominent for African Americans, prompting them to address the absolute question: Who are they? This process involves introspection, wherein individuals examine their thoughts, feelings, values, and experiences to construct a coherent sense of self. According to Jeffrey C. Stewart's *The New Negro as Citizen* (2007), the New Negro identity not only encapsulated a sense of self-pride and resilience but also emphasized the importance of maintaining African Americans' well-being.

Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows* and his novel *Home to Harlem* provide nuanced portrayals of the complexities of racial identity and the search for belonging in a racially divided society. In Harlem Shadows, McKay's poems often reflect the tension between the beauty and pain of Black life, while Home to Harlem vividly depicts the vibrant yet challenging urban life of African Americans, capturing the struggle for self-definition amidst societal constraints.

Moreover, Countee Cullen's poetry, such as *Heritage* and *Yet Do I Marvel*, also questions identity and self-definition. In *Heritage,* Cullen (1925) reflects on the disconnect between his African heritage and his American reality, asking, "What is Africa to me?"(p.83). This poem captures the internal conflict of many African Americans seeking to reconcile their

ancestral roots with their present circumstances. In *Yet Do I Marvel,* Cullen questions the divine purpose behind the struggles of Black artists, highlighting the tension between faith and the harsh realities of racial injustice.

Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun* explore the complexities of racial identity through the lens of colorism and passing. In *Passing,* Larsen examines the psychological and social consequences of racial ambiguity, as her characters navigate the boundaries of race and identity in a segregated society. Similarly, Fauset's *Plum Bun* enters into the life of a light-skinned African American woman who chooses to pass as white, only to confront the moral and emotional costs of denying her heritage. Both novels highlight the internal and external conflicts faced by African Americans in defining their hidden identities.

1.5.3 The Sixties and the Major Themes

The 1960s witnessed a turning point in American society, politics, and culture. This decade was marked by the flourishing of a counterculture, burgeoning anti-war activism, the rise of ethnic minority movements, and the vigorous pursuit of gender equality through the women's liberation movement and the feminist revolution. The Civil Rights Movement, which ignited widespread social unrest, further accentuated these societal transformations. The assassinations of prominent figures like President John F. Kennedy, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and activist Malcolm X compelled Americans to reevaluate their established value systems critically.

The literature of the Black Arts Movement has been a subject of both criticism and praise. Smith (1991) and Henderson (2005) both highlight the lack of scholarly literature on the movement, with Smith particularly noting the unappealing characteristics of Black art writing. However, Smethurst (2005) argues that the movement significantly influenced American attitudes toward popular culture and public funding for the arts. Traylor (2009) further

emphasizes the movement's impact, particularly in the work of African American women writers, who played a crucial role in reshaping power relations and literary production.

The late 1960s and early 1970s, the Black Arts Movement witnessed a surge in African American literary production. This movement, greatly influenced by the tenets of Black Power self-determination and the rich history of African American expressive culture, aimed to create art for and by their audience. Two landmark publications, *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing (1968)* and *The Black Aesthetic (1971)*, are prominent platforms for this artistic and intellectual outpouring. These anthologies showcased the works of artists and scholars committed to crafting cultural artifacts that resonated with the African community. *Black Fire (1968)* proved particularly impactful upon its 1968 release. Appearing in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination and the subsequent nationwide protests, the anthology's contributors embodied a spirit of rebellion and revolution that resonated with a nation in turmoil. Not far from the Renaissance characteristic, the Civil Rights Movement advanced that identity is formed through rediscovery and celebration of African heritage and self-determination (Gates, 1985).

Artists of the New Negro Movement and ulterior generations of African American writers produced literary works that emphasized Black nationalism and critiques of white racism loudly. However, the terms the “Black Arts Movement,” “Black Arts,” “Black Aesthetic,” and “Black Soul” emerged due to the events above that took place in the middle of the 1960s. Therefore, most artists claimed the specificity of African American art, suggested aesthetic separatism, advocated a nationalistic approach to literature, viewed art as a weapon, and intended to withdraw from the dialogue with Western society (Miniotaitė, 2017).

Richard Wright (1908- 1960), James Baldwin (1924-1987), and Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) try to balance the demands of being an African American writer and various tensions. They present “Black material,” however, at the same time, they tend to move away from racial

focus in literature and try to stress the universal human experience, pointing out the fact that an artist can reveal, or at least attempt to reveal, the experience of all people. Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Ellison's *Invisible Man (*1952) enriched the African American literary tradition with philosophical, existential depth. They highlight themes of alienation, discrimination, and humiliation in Western society; however, at the very center of their fiction is a character's loss of identity and his desperate attempts to discover his true self, and in case he fails to do that, at least "invent" himself. For instance, In his two autobiographical books, *Black Boy* (1945) and American Hunger (1977), Wright traces his life from childhood in his native South to adulthood in the North - a journey in search of identity and the true self. For him, identity was a social and cultural construct, not natural: it had to be won, struggled, and suffered. He believes that all African Americans had been denied similar knowledge. In this novel, he speaks about "the cultural barrenness of Black people," "the essential bleakness of Blacks' life in America," as, according to him, "Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization" (Ellison, 2016, p.495). Wright claims that the most severe blow they received from white society was their exclusion from a sense of fully being in the world. However, the author believed that he had made himself. He realized his blackness, his belonging to the African race when at the same time, he managed to go beyond the restrictions of race. *Black Boy* and *American Hunger* "constitute a great retelling of the American myth of personal reinvention, the making of an identity" (Gray, 2012, p.52). Following Wright, the self and the other relationships in the works of this period highlight the power of African Americans' cultural, social, and political life. All of their works are mainly designed to unveil African American self-suffering realities. Thus, recognizing the humanity and beauty of African Americans was a central tenet of the Black Arts Movements to maintain the African American self's well-being, as Hoyt Fuller (1968), in his work *Journey Toward a Black Aesthetic*, explains: "Part of the struggle has been affirming our unique beauty in a land where everything about ourselves—

our heritage, physiognomy, and determination to survive, has been degraded and ridiculed" (p. 28).

1.6 Major Themes

The central themes of African American literature in the twentieth century are diverse. Yet, the African American individual remains its central focus. Literature highlights the exploration of racial identity, the reconceptualization of blackness, and the preservation of the African American self. It emphasizes the incorporation of fiction and the development of genuine African American voices.

1.6.1 Invisibility

Racism and racial epithets harm the mind of the African American man. Thus, the struggle for a positive sense of the self becomes central in African American literature, reflecting the complexities of navigating a world that often fails to see them. For struggling to be seen, heard, and recognized in a society that perpetuates systemic racism and marginalization (Motyl, 2017), the theme of invisibility starts to hold a prominent area in their literature. In his *Native Son*, Richard Wright stands to reconstruct the presence of the African American self in his narratives, portraying his protagonist Bigger Thomas's invisibility, which fuels his rage and despair, highlighting the dangers of social exclusion on African American self-determination (Onunkwo, 2017). He demonstrates that being invisible is not only about being unseen but about being unimportant, unheard, having no control over his life, and having no self-existence. This sense of invisibility pushes him towards violence, the only way he might feel some sense of power and control. The acts of violence become a desperate attempt to be seen, even in a negative light (Wright, 1940).

Maya Angelou also, through her work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), represents the young protagonist, Maya, who portrays racism that takes a profound psychological toll and forces her to wrestle with how she estimates herself as Coming-of-age

fiction may be the best genre to explain the development of the African American self. Angelou, through her experience, depicts that living in a racist society can lead to a warped self-image. Angelou, at times, internalizes racist ideas about beauty and intelligence, believing she is not sufficient because of her skin color. Internally and externally, African Americans experience a sense of invisibility. They are judged externally by whites, which threatens their self-consciousness internally. Moreover, Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* is about an unnamed African American man who presents the impact and consequences of racism. This is the kind of invisibility; being even unnamed leads to low self-esteem and his loss of identity. Being without a name means no identity, existence, or power. The nameless narrator depicts African American individuals' self-awareness and how the dominant society sees them. At the same time, his self-awareness of the necessity of maintaining self-worth. This duality is a constant source of tension, confusion, and illusion. However, the more the narrator experiences invisibility, the more he proposes self-hate (Shober, 2008). He feels disillusioned when he performs as a white person, never able to be his authentic African American self, the absolute blackness. Shober (2008) contends that this anger may be destructive, but it is also a natural response to the injustice he faces. He adds that Ellison's work also delves into the conflicts and invisibility experienced by African Americans in 1950s America. As a concept, *Invisible Man* is a powerful exploration of the struggle for identity and self-recognition. The protagonist's gradual realization of his invisibility is painful and transformative.

1.6.2 Subjectivity

Throughout history, African American writers have grappled with asserting control over their narratives and presenting their stories to a broader audience. During the Harlem Renaissance, they used fiction to navigate the subjective terrain of their experiences, engaging with issues such as spirituality, social justice, and politics. Subjectivity became a central theme, allowing authors to express their perspectives and emotions. The process of 'becoming African

American' has been a robust theorization of African American subjectivity throughout the African diaspora. For example, Toni Morrison's Sethe defines herself primarily by her role as a mother and her desperate actions to protect her children from the horrors of slavery.

Additionally, Paul D's struggles with his masculinity and self-worth after his dehumanizing experiences as an enslaved person further illustrate how personal histories shape identity (Chakravarty, 2014).

Moreover, throughout his journey, Wright's protagonist struggles for self-realization, which is fragmented and conflicted. His conflict reconciling his aspirations with the negative stereotypes and limited roles causes his lack of self-confidence (Young, 2001). Wright utilizes Bigger's subjective journey to explore how social forces construct and constrain identity.

1.6.3 Interracial and Intra-racial relationships

The term Miscegenation, historically used to describe interracial marriage and procreation, carries a heavy and outdated connotation. Derived from Latin roots meaning 'to mix' and 'kind,' it originated in the 19th century and was often associated with laws prohibiting interracial relationships. Interracial relationships have increased, especially among Blacks and Whites (Ross & Woodley, 2020). They have a significant role in shaping the African American self-image and a positive self-concept as they foster African Americans' sense of belonging (Spickard, 1999). The role of "race mixing," as it is often called, in blurring the lines between the standardized ethno-racial groups is now widely acknowledged. This is a source of strength and resilience in the face of external negativity and societal pressures. Conversely, interracial conflict also contributes to feelings of alienation and internalized racism. Understanding the complexities of interracial and intraracial relationships, which is necessary for the exploration of African American identity, becomes the discussable theme of the twentieth African American novel.

James Baldwin critiqued societal restrictions on interracial relationships, highlighting the hypocrisy innate in such limits. He argues that anxieties surrounding miscegenation were not universally applied but specifically targeted relationships involving African Americans (Baldwin,1961, p. 207). This idea underscores the historical construction of race and society's discomfort with racial integration. In *Another Country,* Baldwin explores themes of self-discovery through intense dialogue. Notably, the forthcoming discussions about race, perhaps the most unfiltered in fiction to date, reveal African American characters voicing their racial frustrations within relationships despite their feelings of guilt and limited empathy (Kiely, 2005).

Literary works like James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah (2013) explore the dimensions of interracial relationships and the personal struggles arising from racial boundaries. Johnson's protagonist, a biracial man navigating both Black and White communities, ignores his authentic identity and chooses to act as white (Johnson, 1912). Similarly, Adichie's Ifemelu confronts the racial depiction of her relationships with different ethnicities (Adichie, 2013). These novels exemplify racial categorization's social and personal consequences and the yearning for connection across racial lines.

1.6.4 Black Racial Identity

Sartre (1943) confirms that identity is a dialectical concept rather than an eternal one. It evolves across space, time, culture, and individual experience (as cited in Dolezal, 2012). When examining origin, culture, identity, and historical transformation, it is essential to shed light on the essence of two concepts: the self, which encompasses both how others and our self-image perceive it, and time, which serves as a crucial link connecting history, and memory (Winston, 2010). Identity comes from the Latin root idem, the same, and has been used in English since the sixteenth century. It has a technical meaning in algebra and logic and has been associated

with the perennial mind-body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke. The meaning of identity in this philosophical context is close to its meaning in ordinary usage, which is given as follows by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED):*

> The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or the fact that it is itself and not something else: individuality, personality. Personal identity (in Psychology) is the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence and the continuity of the personality.

Many perceptions of identity develop one's identifying self under many factors. However, the question of what is identity may never be answered. Erikson was the key figure in putting the word into circulation. He coined the expression identity crisis and did more than anyone else to popularize identity. In his perception, identity is something quite definite but elusive. Erik Erikson (1950) further admits that identity, as he conceives it, is complicated to grasp because it concerns "a process 'located' in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities (p. 232).

Alaine Locke(1925) declares that a man's "Identity [...] consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting Particles of Matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized Body" (p.74). In his book, *The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature,* Robert Langbaum (1977) argues that Lock "uses the word identity to cast doubt on the unity of the self" (p. 25). Nevertheless, identity constitutes the essence of how one expects to investigate self-definition more deeply. However, incorporating an adjective enriches the discourse on identity formation, such as ethnic identity, Muslim identity, Asian identity, Arab identity, Jewish identity, American identity, and the evolution from Negro to African American identity. Robert Penn Warren(1965) highlights the importance identity had assumed by the mid-1960s in his *Who Speaks for the Negro:*

> I seize the word identity. It is a keyword, and you hear it over and over again. On this word will focus, and around this word will coagulate, a dozen issues will shift and shade into each other. Alienated from the world to which he is born and from the country of which he is a citizen, yet surrounded by the successful values of that new world and country, how can the Negro define himself? (p.17)

Asante (2012) declares that racial identity has several elements, including the robust feeling of belonging to a particular racial group, African origin ones here, and the unchangeable membership of the group. He further adds that transnational racial identity is an identity preserved across different nations. In contrast to this, fluid racial identity is an identity that flows easily, evolves, and is influenced by an individual's experiences, surrounding environment, and dominant culture.

African American literature studies racial identity due to the apparent obscurity of African American identity, which has different readings (Zhao, 2008). Davidson (2016) contends that "identity is complex since the very concept of identity" (p. xiv). The way one perceives his entity is shaped not just by culture but also by the individual's inner desire to belong to the surrounding culture and the external judgment he obtains.

Understanding the authentic self is a more sophisticated process for minorities. Tatum Beverly Daniel (2003), in his book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?": And Other Conversations About Race,* describes navigating a racial identity as the process of examining the "personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (p. 16). African American identity formation frequently opposes pre-existing racial scales and established cultural constructions of blackness. These constructions are often defined and interpreted through a Western-centric lens, reflecting the values and experiences of western societies (Allen, 2007; Giroux, 1997).

Sociologist Paul Gilroy (1993) explores the African American self as shaped by ongoing discourse and the dynamic interplay between oneself and others. In *The Black Atlantic*, he asserts, "Black identity is not an essentialist category. It is constantly being negotiated and contested" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 19). Referring to Du Bois's idea, Gilroy's ideas enhance the centrality of African American identity consciousness. African Americans need to feel self-existence regarding their defined identity. In words written more than a century earlier, twoness is experienced as feeling and being both American and Black and, thus, simultaneously inside and outside of mainstream society and struggling with their invisibility. Henderson (2000) notes:

> Du Bois's foresight is evident in his prediction that the color line would be a significant issue of the twentieth century. Similarly, Cruse's pendulum thesis anticipates that the twenty-first-century challenge will be the domestic and international culture line. This foresight underscores the scholarly depth of their analyses and the ongoing relevance of their work. (p. 359)

1.7 Re-Birth of Double Consciousness

Scholars such as Ouseph (2012) and Al-Halbosy (2020) argue that Double Consciousness reflects the writers' struggle to reconcile their African heritage with their American identity. This struggle is further explored in the works of Alice Walker, a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Additionally, Reece and O'Connell (2016) add that the legacy of slavery and ongoing racism are significant factors in the formation of African American identity. Furthermore, Tripathi (2015) extends this discussion to South African literature, highlighting the role of language in shaping post-racial discourse.

Moreover, authors of the modern period assert that the "New Negro" represents the modern generation of African Americans. However, new methods of racism have emerged, thereby altering the impact on the African American self. Consequently, oppression and slavery

continue to affect the African American self, with African Americans navigating continuous trials of assimilation and conflict. They decide when to practice blackness openly and when to maintain their duality.

It is essential to note that the self is equipped to deal with and overcome the effects of oppression, violence, and isolation. The Du Boisan double consciousness conflict arises from the constant awareness of how one is perceived and judged by both their community and the dominant white society. This conflict is rooted in the belief that living in a Western community with full acceptance of the self is impossible. This is not due to inherent differences but because of living in a society that may not accept difference, compounded by the African American self's historical memory of being seen as inferior, less human, and subjugated (Pittman, 2016).

Being Black is an identity acted, which is different from being an African American person, an identity that is chosen—the natural Black. Being a Black person expresses a first-person perspective because "one is a Black person only if one classifies oneself as black and makes choices and formulates plans in light of one's identification of oneself as Black" (McBride, 2018, p.174). The re-birth of double-consciousness refreshes the new Negro identity. Thundering: "I am a Black person, I am African, and I am free to see myself the way I want" highlights a resurgence of this internal conflict in contemporary society. This resurgence can be attributed to various factors, such as the ongoing fight for racial justice and the increasing visibility and representation of African American voices in literature. As African Americans continue to navigate through a society that is still plagued by racial inequality and systemic injustice, they are faced with the challenge of reconciling their inner self and racial pride, which would replace the disabling sense of inferiority and self-hate inculcated by slavery, with external societal expectations. This reflects a kinetic negotiation of a new identity. Thus, the unseen identities of African Americans in contemporary society have gained significant attention.

As a sign of this re-birth, in a 1964 speech, Malcolm X told the crowd that "the cultural revolution" was necessary to "unbrainwash an entire people" (1964). Some literary works published in the rhythm of changing the minds and selves of African Americans had a militant, nationalistic character. For instance, the Muslim poet El Muhajir (Marvin E. Jackmon) ends his poem by saying, "Let there be blackness over this land/let black power shine and shine." Another author addresses a white authority figure by saying, "Man, your whole history / Ain't been nothing but a hustle" (Jackmon, 1999, p.38). Imamu Amiri Baraka (1969) considered the Father of the Black Arts Movement, wrote: "The black man is the future of the world; let black people understand that / they are the lovers and the sons of lovers / and warriors and sons of warriors" (p.14). In his poem "Black Art," he declares: "We are black magicians, black art / & we make in black labs of the heart, we own / the night" (Baraka, 1969). The re-birth of double consciousness with its critiques led to a new wave of themes and methods of African American literature and marked, even before the election of Obama, the first signs of post-racial literature.

1.8 Post-racial Literature and the Re-conceptualizing of Black Identity

In "A dialectical literary canon?" Toth and Nicholls (2020) emphasize that identities, particularly "blackness," are not fixed but are processual and contingent upon political contexts and social struggles. This evolving nature of identity contrasts with the notion of a post-racial society. This concept causes fear and often sparks debate over whether society has genuinely moved beyond racial divisions (Hollinger, 2011). It is often brushed aside amid an emphasis on how it can declare that racism is still a vital problem in the United States and that the physical marks of descent remain highly determinative of an individual's destiny (Putnam, 2006). According to Blackwell, it reflects the societal condition or perspective in which race is no longer seen as a significant factor in social, political, or economic interactions. It suggests that society has moved beyond racial discrimination and prejudice, often implying that individuals are judged solely on their character or abilities rather than their race (Blackwell, 2011).

However, numerous commentators assert that the examination of the racial composition of the prison population or the 2009 arrest of Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. powerfully demonstrates the fallacy of claims regarding a post-racial America (Hollinger, 2011). Nevertheless, the literature includes aspects and themes that indicate post-racial symbols, such as it "focuses on self-definition and on balancing lived experience and heritage in intellectual and daily practice" and fostering "an internal, highly personal consciousness as to how one connects with Other groups today" (Hollinger, 2011). This psychological stress demonstrates that the concept of post-racial literature emerged when advocates of this idea believed that America had transcended racial divisions, discrimination, and prejudice.

The concept of post-racial literature is explored in a range of contemporary works. Platt (2015) discusses the intersection of experimental writing and racial discourses, while Heneks (2018) examines the emergence of a 'post-race aesthetic' in American literature, particularly in the works of minority writers. This aesthetic is characterized by a shift in the representation of race and history and the invention of new forms. Artists such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, and Richard Bruce Nugent refused to have their art confined to what they saw as the limiting criteria requiring that African American literature function only on behalf of "the race." However, "[B]lack literature is more than narratives of victimization. It is more than stories and poems about race. It is wholly American: bold, diverse, and iconoclastic, a joy to read, study and deconstruct" (Blackwell, 2011, p. 1). Jacqueline Blackwell also argues that despite the perception of a post-racial society, essential discussions about race and its historical narratives remain crucial. She wonders: "Are we going to shelve the slave narrative because it is difficult to talk about – and, after all, we have a black president now?" (Blackwell, 2011, p.7)

Despite the contrasted views**,** post-racial literature is a dynamic field constantly evolving. It allows a closer examination of different layers amongst the research group -

focusing on race as a group, gender as a group, and race and gender combined to identify tendencies on a broader scale while still acknowledging self-identities (Carney, 2014). The categorization of post-racial literature into different themes and characteristics is a testament to its evolution. Post-racial literature, with its diverse voices and experiences, moves beyond traditional narratives about racism to explore the complexities of African American identities, intersecting with topics such as classism and sexism. This intersectionality recognizes the interconnectedness of race with other social categories, such as gender, class, and sexuality. African American narratives highlight that race experiences cannot be understood in isolation from any historical period but are influenced by various historical events (Blackwell, 2011).

The exploration of African American identity here frequently concentrates on the complexities of identity formation according to interracial and intraracial relationships and multicultural society. Thus, the dominant role of White characters in African American literature has increased.

1.9 Meta-Black Identity

African Americans reach the point in history where sharing the finite fate of their self-existence becomes an illusion. Navigating the true self in a space that never changes, however, the rebirth of new terms, post-soul, post-black, post-racism, they remain different not only because of their skin but because of their heritage, culture, history, beliefs, and countless others. Saying that they are different does not mean they are not equal, and it does not mean they have to separate or assimilate. Difference is the way of living within a real presence of self. Authors from early nineteenth-century to modern literature try to establish a distinctly African American aesthetic and identity. This issue continues to influence contemporary discussions on race, culture, and self-definition in the United States. Recent works by prominent figures such as

Fred Moten, Tommie Shelby, Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, and Jared Sexton critically examine blackness's metaphysical and pragmatic dimensions in a post-civil rights era.

Using a prefix such as 'meta-' rather than 'post-' evolutions, focus away from overly stringent periodizing preferences. It allows us to determine that African American artists and thinkers have employed techniques described as "meta-" about blackness (Hayman, 2017). This practice can be traced back to Du Bois in the early 20th century. The concept of "meta-black" emerges as a more accurate framework for understanding how African American subjects navigate their identities, listing stereotypical notions of blackness propagated by popular culture and offering models for contemporary blackness. Meta-black identity, or the "new" African American identity, also retained a good amount of an "old" pre-modern racial self. They are blending the current situation, beliefs, and level of awareness with the past segregation, violence, oppression, isolation, and all of the legacy of being inferior.

Today, with the exponentially increasing possibilities for African American identity afforded by the legal gains made during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the continuous shapes of racism, and the literary production made new by the rebirth of double consciousness, African American literature as a discipline, and newness as an identity more generally, seem to be at something of a flash point. While cultural theorist Ahmed Touré (1965) may declare that "We are in a post-Black era where the number of ways of being Black is infinite. Where the possibilities for an authentic Black identity are boundless" (p.75), He (1965)also concedes that "what it means to be Black has grown so staggeringly broad, so unpredictable, so diffuse Blackness itself is indefinable" (p.76). Authors such as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Percival Everett, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Colson Whitehead also depict African Americans' persistent racial barriers, challenging the notion that racial equality has been achieved. Despite all of these facts, the presence of meta-black identity remains limited in the conversations and interactions among African American individuals and the intersection of

race, gender, sex, and class. This limitation is attributed to the birth of new representations of Black identity.

1.10 The Tragic Mulatto: The Unseen

The conflict between reality and dreams has become noticeable in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the presence of variations and the non-accepting of difference, multiple and mysterious concepts of identity and the self appear, and the myth of the post-racism era is challenged. African, Asian, Black, Muslim, Arab, and many others, and despite their different categorizations, they are still considered a minority in the eyes of world powers. The word minority here does not mean the population but the importance, existence, power, and self-control. The flow of racism reaches its highest point. Creating a satisfying character to rescue the rights of the essential identities of African American individuals becomes necessary.

The Tragic Mulatto trope was a very popular film and literature phenomenon and stereotypical fictional character that appeared during the 19th and 20th centuries, starting in 1837(David, 2000). Predominantly, these characters are typically biracial individuals who are almost white slaveholders and an enslaved black woman who depict the internal conflict within the African Americans of being ignored. A mixed-race character who presents her/himself as a member of a different race is a crucial element in narratives of racial identity (Clark, 2016). Despite its historical roots, the mulatto continues to be a vehicle for critiquing oppressive social systems and challenging racial ideologies (Brown, 2015). Countless stories revolve around a mixed-race character who is assumed to be depressed because of the unjust treatment in society or even suicidal because they fail to completely fit into either world (David, 2000).

In the 1959 play Imitation of Life, Peola and Sara Jane, portrayed as cinematic tragic mulattoes, embodied the widely accepted notion that mixed blood led to unhappiness. The sentiment was that their lives would have been different if they did not have even a “drop of Negro blood” (Hurst, 1933, p. 23). Many audiences resonated with Annie Johnson’s question,

"How do you explain to your daughter that she was born to hurt?" (Hurst, 1933). The scene reignited the question: "Were real mulattoes born to hurt?" (Hurst, 1933) Mulattoes, being considered Black, were enslaved alongside their darker-skinned counterparts. It was often said that all enslaved people were "born to hurt" (Hurst, 1933), yet some writers have argued that mulattoes maintained specific honors compared to dark-skinned black individuals. Historian E.B. Reuter (1919) writes:

> In slavery days, they were the trained servants and had the advantages of daily contact with cultured men and women. Many of them were free and so enjoyed whatever advantages went with that superior status. They were considered by the white people to be superior in intelligence to the black Negroes, and came to take great pride in the fact of their white blood when possible, they formed a sort of mixed-blood caste and held themselves aloof from the black Negroes and the slaves of lower status. (p. 378)

This trope was used by abolitionists in order to create a mixed-race but white-appearing enslaved person that would serve as a tool to express sentimentality to readers and to depict enslaved people as more human, as portrayed in *Clotel* (1853), a novel written by the abolitionist William Wells Brown. Stephens (2019) argue that in a race-based society, the tragic mulatto found peace only in death. Even before, Brown (1969) describes the treatment of the tragic mulatto by white writers:

> White writers insist upon the mulatto's unhappiness for other reasons. To them, he is the anguished victim of a divided inheritance. Mathematically they work it out that his intellectual strivings and self-control come from his white blood, and his emotional urgings, indolence, and potential savagery come from his Negro blood. Their favorite character, the octoroon, wretched because of the "single drop of midnight in her veins," desires a white lover above all else and must, therefore, go down to a tragic end. (p. 145)

Literary and cinematic portrayals of the tragic mulatto emphasized the tragic mulatto personal pathologies, such as self-hatred, depression, alcoholism, sexual perversion, and suicide attempts being the most common. As such, it is depicted as the victim of a society that is divided by race where no place for one is neither completely 'black' nor 'white' (Ariela, 2010, p.61). However, this character often faces a tragic end and reflects the challenges of racial identity; there has been a shift in this tradition, with more complex and psychologically rich portrayals of mixed-race characters emerging during the Harlem Renaissance (Jungman, 2015).

Park Jungman (2015) argues that early portrayals, primarily by white authors, depicted mixed-race characters, often light-skinned individuals, as doomed to suffer and die. They are stripped of wealth, social standing, and love, ultimately succumbing to their ostracized status through suicide. Unlike the earlier African American mulatto stereotype, Harlem Renaissance tragic mulatto is a mixed-blood stage character who is portrayed as human beings with psychological and sociological complexity. African American playwrights began to present mixed-race characters with greater complexity. Mulatto protagonists start to express their rage against their mulatto status, which differentiates them from Mulatto in terms of dealing with the death the mulatto characters would face. Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* (1931) explores themes of anger and frustration surrounding this identity. In Hurston's *Color Struck*(1925), the character fights with its mixed heritage but ultimately finds a path forward, suggesting a rejection of the inevitable tragic end. This shift from passive acceptance of fate to active resistance against racism and oppression offered a different perspective on the mulatto experience, one that resonated with the burgeoning sense of self-determination.

The tragic mulatto character experiences the gap between African American and Western communities to demonstrate more than just the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and culture. To present the concept of meta-black identity, the trope of the tragic mulatto has emerged as a significant literary and cultural device. This mixed-race struggle embodies the

contradictions inherent in the quest for a well-expressed African American racial identity. Thus, his conflict with belonging and societal acceptance reveals the nature of his authentic self, challenging simplistic or monolithic literary representations. Through the experience of this figure, we see how interracial/ intraracial relationships impact African American self-growth. The tragic mulatto interrogates more significant issues of meta-blackness label and African American self-perception.

Many African American writers emphasize the importance of studying language and characterization because they know well that documented experiences deliver more explicit messages than unwritten or undocumented ones. This perspective finds resonance in literary forms such as the Bildungsroman, which chronicles the protagonist's journey from childhood or adolescence to adulthood, epitomizing the narrative of self-development and revealing the unseen, veiled, and often unspoken African American self.

Conclusion

Slavery has not only impacted the formation of African American identity but also its depiction through the literature. This part, thus, emphasized the consequences of slavery on the African American self-pride, self-definition, and self-concept, which are, basically, not inherited but socially constructed by and through many factors. This chapter followed the process of African American identity and self. It read DuBoi's Double Consciousness until it reached its modern perceptions. African American literature underwent different changes that focused on their psychology. Finally, some events and circumstances impacted, according to this part, the appearance of Meta-black identity, a new representation of the New Negro in the form of the tragic mulatto character.

Chapter Two

Theorizing and Applying Black/African Psychology to African American Literature

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Introduction

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Introduction

Power and oppression are vital elements that characterize Black people's self-concept, self-image, and the development of their racial identity, with narrating one's identity changes being implicated in entrenched power relations. Even those facets of oneself that one might assume to be the most private and intimate are shown to be significantly influenced by socio-political factors. This chapter reveals that African/Black psychology and literature of the twentieth century are keys to change. It introduces the concept of Black Psychology and discusses its history, nature, and development. Moreover, it explores how Black Psychology has intellectualized Black people's sufferings, mental disorders, pain, memory, culture, and trauma, emphasizing that identity is a protean but indispensable concept. The question of Black identity has been thoroughly debated. One influential framework for understanding the Black racial identity process and the black self-development is the Nigrescence model, introduced by Professor William E. Cross Jr. He posits that an encounter with racism or racial discrimination may precipitate the formation of racial identity, leading to a more resonant understanding of the role race plays in the lives of African Americans.

2.1 Introduction to Black Psychology

Racism is defined as the assumption that some races are, by nature, superior to others. All of the effects of segregation and discrimination revolve around this belief. In his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois declared that "the problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (p. 24). It is not just a color line; racism has become a disease that has plagued and impeded the integration of African culture. People of African origin have endured severe physical and psychological oppression, subjected to whips, manacles, and chains. They were dehumanized, tortured, and treated as less than human. This history of systemic exploitation continues to threaten their psychology.

African American writers offer a clearer understanding of the oppressed experience, drawing the reader away from the realm of dehumanization and back into the fullness of what it means to be human, specifically to be Black. Their works embrace the Black experience culturally, historically, socially, and psychologically. Racism has caused severe anguish and significant consequences for Whites and Blacks in American society. As a result, racism has emerged as a central theme in their books. Despite the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, which freed all enslaved individuals, another form of oppression persisted.

The formerly enslaved became sharecroppers under strict laws intentionally designed to prevent African Americans from becoming landowners, keeping them as peons under the supremacy of white plantation owners (DeGruy, 2005). Beyond this, after the March of 1965 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, another critical discussion of the challenges facing African Americans arose in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, later known as *The Moynihan Report*. The report warned that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was only the beginning, not the end, of African Americans' pursuit of justice. The Moynihan stated:

> African Americans, despite their progress, still faced significant challenges: Negro Americans reached the highest peaks of achievement. However, collectively, in the spectrum of American ethnic and religious, and regional groups, where some get plenty, and some get none; where some send eighty percent of their children to college, and others pull them out of school at the 8th grade, Negroes are among the weakest. (1965, pp, 56-57)

The reality reflects the completely ingrained racial prejudice and discrimination that persisted in American society, a theme widely explored in Black literature. The report acknowledges the long history of mistreatment and oppression faced by Black people, emphasizing that as a collective group, they encounter systemic barriers that hinder their ability to compete equally with other ethnic, religious, and regional groups. The harsh truth is that even enslavers in early

America understood that physical restraints were never as effective as breaking the spirit (Finkelman, 2014).

Racism has a significant impact on mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. Negative stereotypes about Black people can cause feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and shame, making it challenging for them to create a positive sense of self. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, African American adults are more likely than white adults to experience mental illness, yet they are less likely to receive treatment. Beverly Daniel Tatum (2003) examines how racism is harmful and how race affects education and identity. Tatum also stresses that the rise of Black consciousness is vital to healing.

African American psychologists have made significant contributions to understanding mental health, identity development, and the cultural influences on their communities' demeanors. They have also played a crucial role in developing culturally sensitive interventions for Black individuals. Black psychology is a critical lens for understanding the human experience and promoting mental health for all (Baldwin, 1986).

2.1.1 Roots of Black Psychology

Critical African American psychologists Kambon (1998) and Nobles (1986) argue that many core concepts and themes of Black Psychology find their origins outside of mainstream psychology. They claim that the discipline draws heavily from African diasporic intellectual traditions, as exemplified by the works of non-psychologists such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, Steve Biko, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire. These intellectual traditions furnish a foundational ground for the core inquiries of Black Psychology.

2.1.2 Frantz Fanon Significance

The work of the revolutionary French psychiatrist Frantz Fanon has received significant attention, particularly his influential texts *Black Skin, White Masks (1967)* and The *Wretched of the Earth (1968)*. Fanon’s historical significance lies in his understanding of the psychology

of the African American experience under White domination and control. He articulates how systems of racial and cultural oppression have shaped African Americans' self-perceptions and worldviews. He asserts, "The White man is sealed in his Whiteness. The Black man is sealed in his Blackness" (Fanon, 1967, p. 9), arguing that the social constructions of race limit and confine both whiteness and blackness to derogatory definitions of self. In this context, "cultural imposition" might be defined as the acceptance of and subservience to European cultural standards, which dictate what it means to exist as a human while ignoring, rejecting, and opposing the identity associated with being of African descent.

According to Fanon (1967), the only way to change this mindset is to deconstruct these operational definitions and construct new visions of humanity that do not restrict the possibilities and potential of racial and cultural groups based on their color or perceived historical narratives. In his magnum opus, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon *(1986)* argues that the practices of racism and classism employed by colonialists have profound psychopathological influences on colonized peoples. The dominance of the colonizer's culture obstructs the development of an independent sense of identity among the colonized, negatively impacting their psychological growth. Experiencing a state of "depersonalization," colonized individuals seek integration into white culture and aspire to whiteness. Consequently, they find themselves unable to fully celebrate their native culture or adequately assimilate into colonial culture, resulting in a profound loss of identity and self-determination. Fanon describes this experience as a form of psychological trauma. This trauma presented itself in different shapes, including low self-esteem, self-hatred, and internalized racism. Fanon (2004) argues that psychology must evolve to address the specific challenges faced by Black individuals, stating that "Psychology must learn to investigate the specific problems of the Negro. It must realize the meaning of his life, the sources of his neurosis, the origin of his conflicts" (p.114). He contends that traditional psychology is not equipped to comprehend the psychological trauma

experienced by African Americans or to develop effective treatments for it. Fanon believes that African Americans must cultivate a strong sense of their identity to achieve self-awareness and overcome the internalized racism often imposed upon them. A robust sense of blackness enables individuals to take pride in themselves and their heritage, authorizing them to resist and oppose racial oppression. Fanon believes identity is crucial for restoring their rights and reclaiming their humanity. He asserts that the Black individual must rehabilitate their past, revise their history, and create a new anthropology to replace the colonialist narrative (Fanon, 1963).

2.1.3 Steve Biko's Black Consciousness

For African Americans, the path is open for a new level of consciousness. Black Consciousness refers to the awareness of Black people's collective potential. It represents a mindset that encourages them to embrace their true identity and choose a self-determined one (Biko, 1987). Black Consciousness is an assertive affirmation of Black identity, centered on the need for Black people to shift their mentality and liberate themselves from the inferiority complex and low self-esteem long instilled by white oppression (Biko, 1987).

The relationship between Black consciousness and racism is interconnected. For Black Americans to overcome the feeling of African American inferiority, they need to challenge the white mental oppression and gain social identity. In other words, African Americans should dare reject the myths imposed by the white oppressor and adopt much pride, self-confidence, and self-reliance. Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, in his book *I Write What I Like*, states:

> Black consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life. It is not a political movement or party or a black version of white power. It is an attitude of mind that seeks to change how black people perceive themselves. (Biko & Stubbs, 1987, pp.10-11)

In accentuating the idea of minds' freedom, Biko confirms that Black Consciousness leads to several positive changes in African American lives. It helps them to overcome their sense of

inferiority, to develop their own culture and values, and to organize themselves politically to fight for their rights (Biko& Stubbs, 1987). In addition, through his appropriations of African American culture, Steve Biko initiated a transformation in black African identity by continuing to break down the barriers of blackness during the 1970s. Ultimately, he helped to create a unified African American front. However, many African American psychologists have rejected separatism and have agreed to assess the influence of culture on the African American self.

2.1.4 Edward Wilmot Blyden and African Personality

Edward Wilmot Blyden is an Americo-Liberian educator, writer, diplomat, and politician who played a pivotal role in developing Pan-Africanism and African nationalism. Blyden's significant contribution to the field of Black psychology lies in his emphasis on the unique differences in worldviews between individuals of African and European ancestry.

African worldview covers the fundamental beliefs, values, and perspectives that shape how Africans understand and experience the world and themselves. This idea shows that the black person is a result of his community and his pride in his background. Robert Barker (1999) defined worldview as an individual's perception of their relationship with society, nature, objects, other individuals, and spirituality. In addition, Molefi Asante (1987) describes the African-centered or Afrocentric worldview as one rooted in African cultural beliefs, practices, and values. In relation, the African worldview is shaped by African culture (Barker, 1999; Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003). Thus, many prominent Black psychologists like Baldwin (1980) and Myers (1988) maintain that comprehending the African worldview is essential for grasping African/Black psychology. As a result, it is also essential to maintain a robust African personality and a well-structured Black self-concept.

Graham and Al-Krenawi(2003) define culture as "the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, and a way of life of a group of people who share a certain historical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social background" (pp. 9-10). African culture encompasses the

customs, beliefs, values, knowledge, habits, skills, arts, and way of life of African people. Food, dance, language, music, and countless other aspects result from many historical wars, revolutions, and the experiences of African groups. However, each group has its unique cultural aspects. Historically, Western culture was often valued as superior. Blyden (1994) suggests that cultural groups can have distinct characteristics and practices without implying that any group is inherently superior or inferior. He states that Africans and Europeans "are not identical but unequal; they are distinct but equal; an idea in no way incompatible with the Scripture truth that God hath made of one blood all nations of men" (Blyden, 1994, p. 317). In his book *African Life and Customs*, Blyden explains the cultural differences among racial and cultural groups when he posits that "Africa has developed and organized a valuable system for all the needs of life" (Blyden, 1994, p. 10).

Here, Blyden confirms that universal aspects of being human, such as hunger, marriage, thirst, thinking, love, passion, fear of failure, and aspirations, also have cultural dimensions that reflect the uniqueness of the African descent group. For example, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a set of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and expressive styles that emerged through interactions between enslaved Africans and white Americans. It reflects the cultural identity and shared experiences of the group. According to Blyden, these aspects collectively represent the notion of African Cultural Personality (1994).

The idea of the African cultural personality plays a crucial role in Black self-perception. It fosters a positive sense of Blackness, belonging, and cultural pride. Additionally, it instills resilience and strength in the face of adversity. Blyden (1971) argues:

> Racial peculiarities are God-given [...] to neglect them, suppress them, or get rid of them is to get rid of the cord which binds us to the Creator [...] it is God's intention for you that you should be different from all the rest of humanity [...] that he placed you here to

> reveal a phase of His character not given to others to reveal; we must find out what that is. (p. 202)

Blyden's assertion that "racial peculiarities are God-given" (1971) affirms the inherent value of African cultures and traditions. However, it can also be interpreted as suggesting that Africans fundamentally differ from other races, with a distinct societal role. This nuanced examination of Blyden's ideas sheds light on his concept of African identity and his recognition of the unique cultural characteristics distinguishing Africans from Europeans. Furthermore, the deep connection between people of African descent and their spirituality aligns with what modern Black psychologists describe as an African worldview.

Like many other thinkers, Blyden emphasizes the importance of community, collective action, and shared responsibility, prioritizing the "we" over the "I."This contrasts sharply with the Western focus on individualism, which values personal achievement and self-reliance. As Blyden describes it, the African worldview is "co-operative, not egotistic or individualistic [...] We, and not I, is the law of African life" (Blyden, 1994, p. 30).

Blyden's analysis of "traditional" African culture offers insight into the behaviors and modes of self-expression exhibited by people of African descent. For African Americans, especially today, culture serves as proof of their existence, with a resurgence of renewed rituals, dances, and writing styles. However, Black psychologists must avoid the pitfall of viewing African culture as a monolithic entity. Instead, they emphasize maintaining and perpetuating the African personality, which can influence racial identity through self-identification (Cokley, 2018). As people of African descent grow, they may identify as African based on their shared heritage, culture, and values. This self-identification can be a source of strength and empowerment, helping them connect with their communities and foster a sense of belonging. Undoubtedly, this sense of belonging serves to protect their psyche and overall well-being.

Despite these efforts, many questions have been raised about the validity of Blyden's ideas. One such question is, "Does Blyden's worldview analysis of traditional African culture(s) imply that African Americans should dwell in the past and reconstruct historical narratives to feel good about themselves?" (Jamison, 2018, p. 15). Another question is: "Does dwelling on their past culture while living in a modern world help African Americans maintain a positive Black self-perception, or does it contribute to the development of a positive racial identity"?

2.1.5 W.E.B Du Bois and Kobi Kambon

Du Bois's profound intellectual impact has influenced approximately every field of study related to the African experience. Eze (2011) contends that his concept of double consciousness, a metaphor for the psychological conflict that people of African descent endure under white supremacy, is especially relevant. The influence of Du Bois's double consciousness on Black psychology is evident in the work of Joseph A. Baldwin (Kobi Kambon), who has explored the notion of African self-consciousness (Kambon, 1992). Given their intellectual contributions, it is paramount to compare and contrast the ideas of Du Bois and Baldwin to understand their perspectives on the psychological effects of racism on identity better. Du Bois (1996) constructs an insightful analysis of the psychological dilemma people of African descent faced in America. In addition, he confirms that the psychological conflict within the Black psyche could be resolved by enabling African Americans to "merge [their] double self into a better and truer self"(p. 3).

According to Kambon(1992), African self-consciousness "represents the conscious level African survival thrust in African people"(p.54). One's African self-consciousness is formed through their understanding and connection to African culture and experience. However, since African self-consciousness occurs on the conscious level, "it is subject to social, environmental forces and influences"(Kambon, 1992, p.54). Thus, there are

varying degrees of African self-consciousness. Kambon interprets Du Bois's double consciousness among people of African descent as an *intra-psychic* conflict between the European and the African worldview. The psychological wounds experienced by Africans arise from an excessive alignment with the European worldview, which fosters and reinforces an anti-African psychological stance (Neblett et al., 2010).

Although both agree that a duality of cultural forces confronts the African American psyche, Du Bois and Baldwin differ in their views on what characterizes American consciousness in the Black mind. Du Bois suggests that despite the internal conflict between these two cultural forces, it is both possible and beneficial to maintain the cultural and psychological aspects of both African and European orientations. He asserts that Africans "would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. Nor would he bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood also has a message for the world" (Du Bois, 1996, p. 4).

On one hand, it might lead to feelings of alienation and isolation. African Americans are frequently reminded of their difference from the white majority, and this might create a sense of belonging to neither world, resulting in self-hatred and a distorted self-image. On the other hand, double consciousness might also serve as a source of strength, as African Americans who recognize their dual heritage can use this awareness to develop a stronger sense of Black identity, as Reed (1992) suggests:"double-consciousness and all the suffering resulting from it are a source of strength and black pride" (p.97).

Kambon (1992) believes the adoption of the European paradigm in the Black psyche and mental health process is just a result of internalized racism. African Americans find themselves, in one way or another, obliged to coexist within Western traditions to belong and to resile. However, it might cause a lack of pride. In Kambon's interpretation, "the two unreconciled strivings are seen as unreconcilable"(Jamison, 2018, p.18). For him, the merging

of the African psyche with European values, attitudes, and beliefs, especially under conditions of white supremacy, results in what he refers to as “cultural misorientation” among people of African descent (Kambon, 1992, p. 37).

Notably, while Du Bois supported the idea of integrating aspects of African and Western identity, he did not believe that embracing a European psychological orientation required individuals of African descent to abandon their cultural integrity. Instead, he opposed unquestionably adopting Western values and emphasized the significance of reclaiming African originality. Du Bois stresses the significance of recognizing and celebrating the contributions made by people of African descent to world history. He comments:

> Are we to assume that we will simply adopt the ideals of Americans and become who they are or want to be and that we will have, in this process, no ideals of our own? That would mean we would cease to be Negroes as such and become white in action if not completely in color. (Du Bois, 1973, p. 149)

As a result, Kambon highlights the dangers of cultural assimilation and the importance of preserving one's African cultural identity. He argues that adopting the ideals and culture of the dominant group would lead to a loss of identity and a suppression of one's unique heritage (1992). However, Du Bois (1973) emphasizes the importance of retaining one's “memory of Negro history” and “racial peculiarities” as essential elements of self-definition and collective identity (p. 149).

However, many authors and critics have written about the relationship between African origin culture and the development of the black self; it seems logically approved. The relationship between the importance of one's culture and the development of self is pivotal in shaping individual identity. Culture, as a dynamic system of shared beliefs, practices, and traditions, provides the context through which individuals interpret and navigate the world. From early socialization, cultural influences contribute to forming a unique cultural identity,

influencing self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Language, a fundamental aspect of culture, acts as a vehicle for expressing cultural identity. The adaptability to diverse cultural contexts contributes to the development of a flexible and nuanced self-concept.

From this standpoint, it is evident that similar to Blyden, Du Bois and Kambon laid a foundational framework that has been further developed within African/Black psychology. This framework offers a theoretical model that emphasizes the extent of self-definition, cultural authenticity, and the liberation of the African mind as critical elements in the broader battle for the emancipation of African people.

2.1.6 Aimé Césaire

Aimé Césaire, a key figure in the Négritude movement, is an example of non-psychologists whose ideas have influenced contemporary psychologists. When examining the broader scope of Africana diasporic and postcolonial psychology, it is crucial to understand colonization and decolonization, particularly concerning the African mind (Césaire, 2000). Césaire addresses the psychological oppression faced by African America people, particularly "Antilleans" (Césaire, 2000). He states "our struggle was a struggle against alienation. That struggle gave birth to Negritude" (Césaire, 2000,p. 89). Césaire emphasizes that their struggle was not merely against external forces but also against the internal alienation they experienced from their African heritage. This alienation stemmed from the pervasive assimilationist pressures that instilled feelings of shame and inferiority among African American individuals. He states:

> If someone asks me what my conception of Negritude is, I answer that above all it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness[...]that atmosphere in which we lived, an atmosphere of assimilation in which Negro people were ashamed of themselves, has great importance. We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we

> developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that black people were searching for their identity. (Césaire, 2000, p. 91)

Césaire considers Négritude as a means to counteract the damaging effects of racism by fostering self-awareness and self-pride. He believes that by adopting African roots, African Americans could reclaim their self and overcome the psychological burdens of oppression. Négritude, according to Césaire, is "concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness" (Césaire, 2000, p. 91), emphasizing the importance of tangible experiences in fostering an authentic African American identity. Expressing the ideas of all Africans, Césaire recognizes the African American innate desire to reclaim their identity, which the oppressive forces of colonization and assimilation had eroded (Césaire, 1997). He believes that Négritude could provide a pathway to self-discovery and empowerment, which allows Africans to say: "here we are" without feeling inferiority.

All in all, Césaire's insights on the psychological oppression and the role of Négritude in combating it continue to resonate today. His writings serve as a reminder of the importance of self-acceptance, cultural pride, and the ongoing struggle against racial injustice.

2.2 Definitions and Schools of Thought

2.2.1 Definitions

Historically, the treatment of enslaved individuals was severe and degrading. They were often beaten, whipped, worked to exhaustion, deprived of food and water, branded, mutilated, raped, and flogged as forms of punishment and as a way for enslavers to assert dominance. These treatments, in one way or another, have affected the psyche of contemporary African Americans. Additionally, these experiences have been considered both implicitly and explicitly in the field of Black psychology. Halloran (2019) describes the psychological effects of this abuse as leading to feelings of anger, depression, and low self-esteem. The discriminatory practices of western oppressors elicited dramatic behavioral responses among African

Americans, creating a sense of dissonance that affected personality and hindered the development of the African American self (Burrowes, 2019).

Desperately, traditional theories developed by white psychologists are often based on the experiences of white people and also by white people and may not apply to black ones. Their theories may have been developed with a narrow view of culture, often focusing on white norms, values, and experiences. As a result, they might not adequately address how racism, discrimination, historical trauma, and cultural identity influence the mental processes and behaviors of Black individuals. These theories might overlook the specific challenges and strengths that emerge from navigating a society characterized by systemic racism and structural inequalities, so they need psychological methodologies that involve acknowledging the significance of cultural diversity, being open to learning from different cultural perspectives, and recognizing that experiences and expressions of well-being can vary widely across different racial and ethnic groups. This is because people of African descent have faced different cultural experiences, histories, and ways of viewing the world than white /European people. For that, Joseph White (1970) states, “It is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the lifestyles of Black people using traditional theories developed by white psychologists to explain white people” (p. 45).

Since 1974, *the Association of Black Psychology* has published *The Journal of Black Psychology. Where many African and African American scholars were* discussing the psychology of Blackness; and trying to reject the myth of the *One Psychology.* A first, to start with, what does it mean, Blackness? The answer starts from the very early stage when a child notices that he is different in color from another community group. Different issues related to race begin at an early age. Kimberley Leary, an African-descended professor, points out that people can openly discuss topics like murder, family problems, and feelings of hatred. However, they often shut down when it comes to discussing negative racial thoughts. This is strong

evidence of how racism impacts the well-being of African Americans. In the American community, conversations about race were rare. According to Jama Adams, an expert in African American studies, the reality behind this silence is that America lacks a dialect or thoughtful framework for discussing race (Adams, 2020). As a result, Black Psychology was founded as a vanguard group to assert that race is a critical subject that must be openly discussed (Cokley& Garba, 2018).

When exploring African Americans identity, it is essential to focus on their personality. Nobles contributes to this discussion by defining Black Psychology as a comprehensive study encompassing psychological, social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of African American life, surpassing the definition provided by the *Association of Black Psychologists* (ABPsi). In one hand, Wahbie Long (2016) criticizes the Africanization of psychology, attributing its failure to an unhelpful obsession with defining "African". Long's perspective advocates for a more nuanced and context-specific approach, moving beyond essentialist notions of African identity(Long, 2016). On the other hand, Baldwin's assertion challenges the notion that African American's survival is solely attributable to external factors, emphasizing their inherent resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming adversity. In other words, the Africanization of psychology is necessary for African American's survival, as he emphasizes the importance of reclaiming their cultural identity and psychological frameworks. Baldwin (1979) states:

> Black people, despite their history of overcoming adversity, are generally viewed in the role of reactors rather than actors, of the manipulated rather than the manipulators. It therefore seems to be a basic and prevailing assumption in Euro-American social science that Black people have survived in this society not by their collective sophistication and ingenuity, but rather by mere coincidence, faulty and haphazard methods or some gift of benevolence from Euro-American society. (p. 54)

As Black Psychology might be defined as a direct reaction against these psychological effects, African American psychologists would also have to investigate the question of "What is Black psychology?" More than just defining it, many other critical questions were raised. Among them, "Is Black Psychology a particular psychology that is culturally specific to people of African descent?" "Is there a need among people of African descent to develop psychological theories that address their particular needs?"

In recognition of the diverse historical experiences and cultural expressions within and between peoples of African ancestry, one of the accepted definitions is provided by Louis Williams (1978), who proposes that:

> Black Psychology is the psychological consequence of being Black. In this work, problems and issues of psychology have been presented from a variety of operational viewpoints, including those of Eastern, African, Western, and Afro-American experience. While the approach to psychology adopted in this treatment owes very little to each of these and other viewpoints, it centers on a general principle of the uniqueness of the Black Experience. (p. 3)

Here, he suggests that Black Psychology is a critical manifestation of unifying African principles, values and traditions. It is the self-conscious "centering" of psychological analyzes and applications in African realities, cultures, and epistemologies.

Supremely, defining Black Psychology is a gargantuan task as it is not static. African American psychologists went through several conceptual stages in their attempts to articulate what they meant when discussing it. Nevertheless, there are a variety of ways to define the field. In the first edition of the *Journal of Black Psychology,* William Smith "(1974) defines it as "the study of Black behavioral patterns. It deals with the total behavior in all situations of African Americans throughout the world"(p.5). In addition, standard psychology textbooks, mainly Viney's (1993) *A History of Psychology: Ideas and Context,* define it as the systematic study of

the human mind that seeks to describe, explain, predict, and control behavior. Thus, based on Smith's and Viney's definitions, Black Psychology and Traditional Psychology are similar in that they both seek to understand the human mind and behavior.

Nevertheless, Black Psychology has a specific focus on the experiences of African descent life experiences and tragedies. This focus allows Black psychologists to consider these people's unique challenges and stressors. However, numerous Black psychologists advocate that such an orientation is Eurocentric in nature in that it assumes that "traditional" Eurocentric Psychology (psychological tools and concepts) applies to all cultural groups and is thus universal in its scope and content (Akbar, 2001; Kambon, 1998).

Despite the lack of substantial empirical evidence in the literature to affirm the existence of Black Psychology, Smith (1974) argues that "it is erroneous to assume that because Black Psychology has not been completely developed that it does not exist"(p. 8). Joseph White, nonetheless, addresses both issues of developing a Black Psychology and the applicability and non-applicability of Traditional Psychology in his revolutionary paper *Towards A Black Psychology*. He subtracts:

> It is vitally important that we develop, out of the authentic experience of black people in this country, an accurate workable theory of black psychology. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the lifestyles of black people using traditional theories developed by white psychologists to explain white people. (White, 1980, p.5)

White contends that Traditional Psychology is based on white norms and values. This means that it often judges African Americans as being abnormal or deficient. He challenges African American psychologists to develop a new theory of Black Psychology based on African origin people's norms, culture, and values. This new theory would not judge African Americans based on Western standards but would celebrate their unique strengths, perspectives, and values. For White, the development of Black Psychology would not view African Americans as inferior

but reflect the uniqueness of their psyche that developed as a result of their particular experiences based on different types of oppression in the United States (White, 1970). In this vein, Clark, McGee, Nobles, and Weems provide another definition of Black Psychology, which is:

> The recognition and practice of a body of knowledge which is fundamentally different in origin, content, and direction than that recognized and practiced by Euro-American psychologists. The differences between African psychology and Euro-American Psychology reflect the differences between Black people and white people or, in terms of basic culture, between Africans and Europeans. (Nobles, 1974, p. 9)

Joseph Baldwin (1986) attempts to expand this definition and construct cultural parameters for the definition of Black Psychology. He conceptualizes it as "a system of knowledge concerning the nature of the social universe from the perspective of African Cosmology which provides the conceptual-philosophical framework for African/Black Psychology"(p. 23). Baldwin's (1986) definition might be summarized as "it is nothing more or less than the uncovering, articulation, operationalization and application of the principles of the African reality structure relative to psychological phenomena"(p. 245). He insists on the need for a psychology centered on African people's experiences and perspectives. He advocates for a field not merely a derivative of Western psychology but a critical and developing discipline that draws upon the richness of African thought and culture.

Focusing on the development of the African American' understanding of African American self-perception, especially in the post-racism era, African American psychologists focus on the African American personality. Baldwin's work emphasizes the role of African-American history and culture in shaping the development of Black personalities. Molefi Asante, who has been identified by *Utne Reader Magazine* as one of the one hundred leading thinkers in America, writing, Asante is a genial, determined, and energetic cultural

liberationist whose many books, including 1980's *Afrocentricity* and 1987's *The Afrocentric Idea*, articulate a powerful African-oriented pathway of thought, action, and cultural self-confidence for African Americans (Kentake, 2020). Asante maintains that Africans had been moved off-center in terms of most questions of identity, culture, and history. His ideas sought to place Africans at the center of their narratives and to reclaim the teaching of African-American history from where Europeans had marginalized it. Acknowledging African-American history, he proposes the concept of "P*sychological Africanity,"* a framework that integrates African cultural values and traditions into understanding Black Psychology. Joseph Baldwin believes that Western Psychology, while flawed, might offer valuable insights if reinterpreted through an Afrocentric lens. In the conclusion of his groundbreaking article *African (Black) Psychology: Issues and Synthesis*, he mentions:

> We may conclude, based on this analysis, that African (Black) Psychology is therefore proactive as well as reactive, and it is most certainly political. Notwithstanding its reactive aspects, however, its thrust is clearly toward proactivity, that is, self-definition and self-determination. African Psychology seeks to reaffirm the human essence of "Africanity," and in so doing will affirm its centrality in the Natural Order. (Baldwin, 1986, p. 54)

Nevertheless, Khatib cautions that culturally relevant theoretical orientations and studying the life experiences and history of people of African descent are necessary but insufficient requirements for Black Psychology. He states that "the historical, social, and cultural context out of which Black Psychology emerged calls attention to the need for a Black Psychology to at least involve itself with an examination of the relationship between Blacks and Whites" (Khatib, 1980, p. 54). Here they are in conjunction with Chrisman and Hare (1970), who confirm that "Black Psychology has been defined as the study of the behavioral patterns of

black people in a social environment that is manifestly antagonistic and unhealthy. Black Psychology thus undertakes a dual task"(p.28)

Chrisman and Hare both underline the critical role of Black Psychology in dismantling the harmful effects of racism on the mental health and well-being of African American individuals and communities. Grayson (2020) also confirms that historical dehumanization, oppression, and violence against African Americans have fostered structural, institutional, and individual racism, leading to a deep-seated mistrust of the healthcare system.

Maulana Karena (1992), a prominent scholar and activist in African-American studies, defined Black Psychology as a "psycho-historical"endeavour to understand the psychological impact of African-American history and culture on the Black psyche. He states: it is "the critical and systematic study of the thought and practice of African people in their current and historical unfolding"(p.83). He then emphasizes the importance of examining the collective experiences of Afrivan American people (Karenga, 1992).

Na'im Akbar, a distinguished scholar and psychologist, posits that traditional Eurocentric psychology distorted the African definition of psychology from the study of the soul to the study of behavior. In *Akbar Papers In African Psychology (2004)*, he defines it as a "paradigm shift "that moves away from Western individualism and materialism to embrace a holistic understanding of the human experience, emphasizing collective consciousness, interconnectedness, and spirituality. He believes that Eurocentric psychology had failed to adequately address the unique psychological challenges faced by African Americans, particularly those stemming from centuries of racism and oppression.

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) defines Black Psychology as "the scientific study of the experiences of Black people, from an Afrocentric perspective"(Belgrave & Allison, 2019). This definition emphasizes the importance of understanding African Americans' experience from their perspective rather than from the perspective of Western

culture and society. African Americans should play the role of the patient and the psychotherapist since they are the ones who feel paranoid, traumatized, neglected, and invisible (Grayson, 2020).

When focusing on the matter of identity, Nobles' definition emphasizes the importance of understanding the whole person, not just their psychology or experience. He states:

> Black psychology is something more than the psychology of the so-called underprivileged peoples, more than the experience of living in ghettoes or having been forced into the dehumanizing condition of slavery. It is more than the 'darker dimension' of general psychology. Its unique status is derived not from the negative aspects of being black in America, but rather from the positive features of basic African philosophy that dictate the values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors of Africans in Africa and the New World. (Nobles, 1980, p. 23)

Similarly, in article *Four (African) psychologies*, Kopano Ratele (2017) argues that African Psychology should move beyond simply describing and documenting the experiences of African people. He affirms that African Psychology should do more than describing the othered terrain. He also contends that Black Psychology is often seen as a way to document people's experiences on the margins of society and to point out how their experiences differ from those of people in the center (Ratele, 2019). Thereupon, Contemporary Black Psychology examines social conditions that contribute to disparities among different groups, and it is concerned with the perspectives of marginalized individuals and communities who have not typically been represented in literary works.

Although Black Psychology is defined from different and variable angles, the main focus is that it is a necessary field that should exist; as Nobles (2015) states, "there is a need for African-centered psychology that responds to the needs of African communities" (p. 3).

2.2.2 Schools of Thought

Maulana Karenga's (1992) seminal work, *Introduction to Black Studies*, plays a crucial role in establishing Black Psychology as a fundamental area within Black Studies that concentrate on the circumstances and consequences on African Americans. Black Psychology, like other modes of inquiry, is composed of various schools of thought that reflect the particular theoretical orientations of its practitioners. Karenga delineates three distinct schools of thought within Black Psychology: traditional, reform, and radical.

The Traditional School criticizes White psychology but still incorporates Eurocentric psychology with minor adjustments (such as eliminating racial bias). It does not recognize separate Black psychology but rather believes that universal human behavior principles from traditional European psychology apply to Black individuals, except for racial bias. Notable Black psychologists in this category include Kenneth and Mamie Clark, Robert Guthrie, and Claude Steele.

The Reform School challenges racism in White psychology and acknowledges the existence of a distinct Black Psychology. While critical of White psychology, it also recognizes valuable aspects that can be integrated with Black Psychology. Prominent African American psychologists in this school are Joseph White, James Jackson, Curtis Banks, Margaret Beale Spencer, and Faye Belgrave. According to Karenga, they:

> Stand as bridges between the traditional and radical schools, attempting a synthesis of the social and discipline criticism of the traditional school and the demands for and development of new models and professional engagement from the radical school. (Karenga, 1992, p. 329)

Reformers developed theories around the African American self-concept using a reconstructionist method, where they corrected the errors around African American attitudes from the Traditionalist school. Reform school leaders challenged the racism and limitations of White psychology and recognized the existence of a distinct Black Psychology(Cokley &

Garba,2018). While the reform school's analysis begins with the enslavement period up until contemporary times, the radical school argues that an authentic psychology of African Americans must go beyond the shores of the "New World" to discover the African roots of this American fruit (Nobles, 1974).

The Radical School, in contrast, adopts an African-centered framework, placing African culture and philosophy at the forefront of Black Psychology. Its primary aim is to transform Black individuals' attitudes toward themselves without seeking validation from White perspectives(Karenga, 1992). Notable African American psychologists in this category are Asa Hilliard, Wade Nobles, Na'im Akbar, Kobi Kambon, Linda James Myers, and Cheryl Grills.

2.3 Methodological Approaches

Along with the three schools of thought are three methodological approaches that have characterized the work of Black psychologists committed to addressing the limitations of White/Eurocentric psychology. First identified by Curtis Banks (1982), the methodological approaches are deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction.

Deconstruction criticizes and identifies the errors and weaknesses in traditional Wester Psychology. This approach critiques the deficit and racist narratives promulgated by Eurocentric psychological theories. The deconstructionist approach "attempts to expose the error and weaknesses found in general psychology" (Nobles, 1986, p. 75). Several seminal works in Black Psychology have employed deconstruction methods to challenge entrenched Eurocentric psychological theories such as Curtis Banks, Joseph Baldwin, and Robert Williams led this ideological departure, aiming to establish a more authentic and non-deficit-based psychology for African Americans.

Banks (1976) notably critiqued the notion of "*White preference in Blacks*", arguing that empirical evidence failed to demonstrate its existence convincingly. Through meticulous analysis, he revealed that the majority of studies indicated either no preference or a preference

for African American representations, undermining the pervasive belief in White preference among African Americans.

Baldwin (1979), in his article titled "*Theory and Research Concerning the Notion of Black Self-Hatred: A Review and Reinterpretation*, furthered this deconstructive work by challenging the concept of "*Black self-hatred*," revealing methodological errors and inconsistencies in existing literature. He highlights the cultural distinctness of African Americans and criticizes studies that failed to acknowledge this, ultimately characterizing the notion of African American self-hatred as folklore and racist.

Additionally, Banks and McQuater, Ross, and Ward (1983)challenge Eurocentric theories linking Delayed Gratification and Locus of Control to African American's self-concept. Their critical review of the literature debunked the stereotype that Blacks preferred immediate gratification due to a sense of powerlessness, highlighting theoretical and methodological flaws in existing research.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a large body of literature inferred that group differences in intelligence were mainly due to race (Alland, 2002). Robert Williams (1971) tackled the issue of *intelligence testing*, arguing against culturally biased assessments that favored White Americans. He developed the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (1975) to demonstrate the cultural bias inherent in mainstream intelligence tests, ultimately challenging the notion of Black intellectual inferiority.

These works represent foundational contributions to Black psychology, systematically dismantling long-standing deficit-oriented notions and advocating for a more accurate and culturally relevant understanding of African American experiences.

Reconstruction focuses on correcting the errors and/ or falsifications about African American attitudes and behavior. This approach aims to reconstruct traditional Eurocentric

understandings of human behavior into culturally sensitive psychological models of Blacks. It also involves four ideas.

The first one is the *Black self-concept*. In his influential work *Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self-Concept,* Wade Nobles, ABPsi founder, challenges Eurocentric notions of the African American self, advocating for an African-centered perspective. Nobles (1976) contends that to achieve true liberation from oppression and White domination, African American psychologists must reject colonialistic and scientific approaches to conceptualizing the African American self. He states, "For the oppressed to be really free, he must go beyond revolt, by another path; he must begin other ways, conceive of himself and reconstruct himself independently of the Master"(p.15). Drawing upon the premise that the African psyche is rooted in traditional African principles, Nobles (1976) argues for a distinct African-based conceptualization of the African self, highlighting inherent philosophical differences between European American and African values. He furthrt emphasizes the African belief of " I am because We are, and because We are, therefore I am" (p. 20) confirming the interdependence and collective identity inherent in African self-conception. Ultimately, Nobles calls for the global embrace of traditional African tenets to reconstruct the African American self-concept. One's self-definition as an African individual depends on the corporate definition of one's people rather than on one's uniqueness, one's individuality, or, in the case of African Americans, one's oppression, isolation, harrowing, and traumatic experiences (Nobles, 2015). Thus, Nobles called for embracing traditional African principles within Black Psychology and beyond to empower African Americans and communities. In doing so, he initiates the reconstruction of the "so-called Negro self-concept" (p.75) and introduced a more accurate, empowering, and authentically African self-conception.

Referring to the seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*(1903), Du Bois poignantly captured the complex experience of Black identity conflicts, describing it as a "double-

consciousness," where individuals must reconcile their identity as both American and Black, navigating conflicting ideals and perceptions. Building upon Du Bois's insights, William Cross (1971) proposes one of the earliest models of Black racial identity development. Over time, Cross's model evolved in response to empirical research and theoretical critiques, incorporating concepts such as Afrocentricity and Multicultural Inclusivity.

Cultural mistrust: Amidst the Civil Rights Movement, scholars in Black Psychology investigated the interconnectedness of race relations, mainly focusing on how racism influenced interactions between African Americans and White individuals (Benkert et al., 2006). One avenue of inquiry was the concept of 'cultural paranoia', first introduced by Harvard psychiatrists Grier and Cobbs (1968) in their work *Black Rage*. This term describes the mistrust that African Americans harbored toward Whites due to experiences of racism and oppression. However, African American scholars contested the use of "paranoia," arguing that it pathologized adaptive behavior and reflect Eurocentric standards of normative behavior (Terrell et al.,1981). Francis Terrell and Sandra Terrell proposed an alternative term, "cultural mistrust," which they believe more accurately depicted the nonpathological response of Black individuals to systemic racism. The Terrells (2009) rejected the notion of paranoia and argued that what some scholars perceived as paranoia was, in fact, a reasonable response to ongoing experiences with racism. Their contribution extended beyond semantic debate; they developed and validated the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI), the first scale to measure cultural mistrust (Irving & Hudley, 2005). The CMI assesses the extent of mistrust that African Americans hold towards Whites across various contexts. Meta-analytical findings by Whaley confirms the predictive validity of the CMI, showing that higher scores correlated with behaviors such as premature termination rates and poorer performance on intelligence tests when administered by White examiners. Since its inception, the concept of cultural mistrust and the CMI have

remained pivotal tools in elucidating the psychology of Black-White interactions, providing insights into the process of race relations in the United States (Whaley, 2002).

Construction, the last one, focuses on creating new psychological paradigms for understanding the African American experience. Views traditional Eurocentric psychology as offering little to nothing that can be applied to the lives and experiences of Black/African. Contrary to the aforementioned assumptions, people of African descent, on their own merits, have always been and continue to be innovators, pioneers, and creators (Potter et al., 1994; Potter, 2013). Indeed, despite facing overwhelmingly obstacles in a perpetually oppressive society,African Americans have not only survived but have continued to thrive in all aspects of life. In addition to deconstructing and reconstructing the errors of Eurocentric Psychology, Black Psychology has also been intentional about constructing new theories that accurately reflect the spirit of African agency and scholarship. Nobles asserts:

> The ability to reveal or expose the truth of African reality will determine which of these apparent camps has more utility of continuing the advancement of the discipline.The reader is cautioned against placing the contributions of Black thinkers into artificial and premature divisions. (Nobles, 1986, pp. 87-88)

Two other exemplary constructionists are Linda James Myers and Kobi Kambon who relied on three main basics.

African Worldview: This orientation highlights the importance of understanding the behavioral, mental, and spiritual tendencies of African people within the context of African philosophical thought. Kambon (1980) highlights the relevance of worldview systems and their racial origins, positing that race constitutes a primary factor shaping definitional systems or worldviews. Racial identity among African Americans implies a shared history, belief system, and culture, thus underpinning a distinct worldview.

In*Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to Optimal Psychology,* Linda James Myers (1993)offers a humanistic perspective on the African worldview.While acknowledging fundamental philosophical differences between African and European worldviews, Myers asserts that the optimal African worldview might unite humanity and give African Americans their emotional rights. Myers(1993)emphasizes the perceptual basis of worldview, suggesting that one's perspective shapes one's reality. She contrasts Eurocentric and African worldviews, noting the former's emphasis on the finite and material and the latter's focus on the infinite and divine. Myers advocates for adopting an African worldview as a means to transcend mental slavery and foster holistic well-being. However, her conceptualization of the African worldview differed slightly from Kambon's. Through these contributions, both Kambon and Myers advanced the discourse on African psychology.

African self-consciousness*:* In his seminal article *African Self Consciousness and the Mental Health of African-Americans,* Kambon (1984) critiques the prevailing reliance on Eurocentric frameworks, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), to assess mental health concerns among African Americans. Instead, he develops an alternative model, the Africentric Model of Black Personality, which offers a culturally relevant lens for understanding African American mental health.

Central to Kambon's model is the concept of the African personality, which he posits as the biogenetic core of individuals of African descent. Within this framework, he identifies two key components: African self-extension orientation and African self-consciousness. The former represents an unconscious expression of African spirituality and wholeness, while the latter pertains to the extent to which African Americans embrace Africentric principles. Kambon argues that mental health disorders arise when socialization processes promote a non-African cosmology, such as that prevalent in European American society. However, he suggests that embracing an Africentric worldview can mitigate or prevent such disorders.

Cultural misorientation: Kobi Kambon's contributions to psychology extend beyond his work on African self-consciousness. He has also developed the cultural misorientation paradigm and its corresponding scale. Cultural misorientation is conceptualized as a psychological disorder characterized by the internalization of the European worldview among individuals of African descent (Kambon, 1992). Kambon emphasizes the damaging effects of adopting a culturally incongruent and anti-African worldview.

2.4 Racial Identity Theories

Racial identity broadly refers to how individuals define themselves in relation to their race or ethnicity (Woo et al., 2019). It is often described as a balance between racial group membership and personal desires for positive relations with the broader society (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995). While earlier models treated racial identity as a unidimensional concept, scholars now view it as multidimensional, encompassing various aspects of self and group identification (Marks et al., 2004; Sellers et al., 1998).

Groundbreaking research in the 1970s, led by scholars such as William E. Cross Jr., Jean Phinney, and Robert Sellers, significantly advanced understanding of racial identity. Cross' revised Nigrescence model, Phinney's multigroup model of ethnic identity, and Sellers' Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) provide frameworks for exploring how individuals understand their racial heritage and navigate societal challenges.

2.4.1 The Nigrescence Model: The Process of Becoming Black

Racial identity is the most essential part of the African Americans' self-perception. In addition to what was mentioned earlier, racism is the belief that each race or ethnic group possesses specific characteristics and different qualities that distinguish one group from the other in matters of superiority or inferiority. African Americans were denigrated, and all negative characteristics have been attributed to them. Being psychologically unhealthy impelled African Americans to proceed in the search for their truer identity. This process of searching

for identity might be compelling, leading perhaps to a positive self-definition or at least serving as a buffer against racism and oppression (Parham&Parham, 2002). Eventually, African Americans recognize that a complete cultural assimilation would mean the loss of their self-image (Adida, 2023).

A key psychologist that has contributed to the Reform school is William E. Cross, Jr., Ph.D. (1940 – present), one of America's leading theorists and researchers on Blackness and racial-ethnic identity development. Cross developed The Nigrescence model which describes the process of becoming Black/African and developing a racial identity (Cross, 1991). According to Cross (1994), Nigrescence covers most African Americans sufferance from the melancholy of white supremacy and racism.

Cross provides a five-stage model of Black racial identity development from low racial salience to a positive acceptance of African American identity and commitment to fighting racial oppression (Cross, 2001).The prevailing framework of Black racial identity development stems primarily from the development theory of Cross and Millions (Hocoy, 1991). Hocoy (1999) claims that "Cross's model of racial identification have had empirical validation both experiential and quantitative"(p.3). Currently, it is the most basic framework for understanding the racial identity development of African Americans. The five-stage model is founded in theory called Nigrescence, a French word meaning "the process of becoming Black" (Cross, 1994, p. 120). According to Cross (1994), the nigrescence model attempts to capture the stages African Americans experience when experiencing a significant racial shift. This model involves five stages: Pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

Pre-encounter is the first stage of the racial identification model. At this stage, African Americans have absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the notion that "White is right" and "Black is wrong."Though the internalization of

negative Black stereotypes may be outside of his/her conscious awareness, the individual seeks to assimilate and be accepted by Whites and actively or passively distances him/herself from other Blacks. Cross (1991) points out that the encounter "need not to be negative" (p. 197) for the event to have an impact and steer a person towards Nigrescence. What matters is that the encounter has a significant impact and is the catalyst to spur change in their thinking (Ritchey, 2014).

Encounter, the second phase, is characterized by a conscious awareness that the White worldview is no longer viable and that African American one might find a new identity and use that self-awareness to maintain an authentic African American self (Barnes et al., 2014). According to Cross (1994), the encounter stage is precipitated by a series of events that force the individual to acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life and his inner thinking, spurring them to re-evaluate the relationship between them and the dominant side. The events that occur in the individual life make him/her never deny the contradictory relationships, either interracial or intraracial ones. The encounter stage is characterized by unlimited conflicts where the African American entity is composed of a mixture of feelings such as confusion, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, and anger. The person here has to search for their own self-identity in relation to their ascribed racial status in society. Faced with the reality that he or she cannot indeed be White, the individual is forced to focus on his or her identity as a member of a group targeted by racism (Appiah, 2020).

Immersion-Emersion is the third stage, where there is a simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one's racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness. Parham (1989)explains that "At this stage, everything of value in life must be Black or relevant to blackness. This stage is also characterized by a tendency to denigrate White people, simultaneously glorifying Black people"(p. 190). The individual here actively seeks out opportunities to explore aspects of history and culture with the support of peers from their racial

background. Professor Asante's research delves into Black history and related ideologies, aligning with previous racial identity development models. His work suggests a lessening of anger towards white culture during this phase. This idea occurs as the individual focuses inward, exploring their racial background and identity (Asante, 2012). This exploration results in an emerging security in a newly defined and affirmed sense of self (Cross, 1991).

The fourth stage is the internalization stage, which enables African American individuals rooted in a positive racial identity to actively perceive and rise above race. According to Cross, this stage leads to a fresh self-awareness and a drive to enhance the African American community's image. At this stage, many individuals volunteer and initiate programs to improve perceptions of the African American community (Doan et al., 2022). While still maintaining their connections with African American peers, the internalized individual is willing to establish meaningful relationships with Whites who acknowledge and are respectful of his /her self-definition. The African American individual is also ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups. The Black one also begins to realize his/her social group and standpoint about whiteness. This prompts the individual to connect with others in the same situation or who understand how it feels to be a minority (Asante, 2012). Ultimately, the dissonance between the old self and the new emerging self is resolved.

The Internalization-Commitment Stage represents the final phase of the model. During this stage, individuals find a way to translate their "personal sense of blackness" into a plan of action or a general commitment to the concerns of the Black community, which is sustained over time (Cross, 1991, p. 220). Cross (1991) further notes that "consequently other than to repeat what has already been said about internalization, a more differential look at internalization-commitment awaits the results of future research" (p. 220).

African American identity development model assists African Americans in shedding poor self-worth and moving toward embracing a positive Black self-definition (Benjamin et al.,

1998). This transformation occurs when someone achieves a healthy racial identity. Racism, domination, and privilege are ingrained in society, leading to experiences of "racism and race-related stress at the cultural, individual, and institutional levels" (Johnson & Arbona, 2006, p. 1). These challenges are faced not only by African Americans but also by individuals with subordinate identities. Thus, cultivating a healthy racial identity is crucial for all students, regardless of their race:

> Healthy racial identity development is achieved when Blacks progress through a series of linear stages commencing with degrading thoughts and feelings about themselves and other Blacks accompanied by idealized beliefs about Whites, and ends with internalized positive feelings about themselves, other Blacks, and other racial groups. (Benjamin et al.,1998, p. 96)

In addition, in his revised identity model, Cross (1995) posits that racial identity encompasses various attitudes, including:

1) **Assimilation:** A stronger identification with being American rather than Black.
2) **Miseducation:** Acceptance of negative stereotypes about Blacks.
3) **Self-hatred:** Intense self-loathing due to one's Black identity.
4) **Anti-White responses:** Reactions to the dominant culture in the United States.
5) **Afrocentricity:** Adherence to African-centered values.
6) **Multiculturalist inclusivity:** Black self-acceptance and willingness to engage with other cultural groups.

Cross (1995) states that these attitudes significantly impact African Americans' self-perceptions and experiences. First of all, assimilation occurs when individuals prioritize their American identity over their origin identity, potentially disconnecting from their cultural roots (Patrizi, 2022). Then, miseducation leads to accepting negative stereotypes about African Americans, which harms their self-esteem and perpetuates harmful biases. Internalizing and

accepting these stereotypes may lead to self-doubt and hinder their personal growth. Concerning self-hatred, Joseph Baldwin (1979) contends that the Black self-concept largely depends on interactions, particularly racist interactions. Thus, the self is intensified by social racism that affects mental health and overall well-being. Anti-White responses, which are reacting negatively to the dominant culture, can be a coping mechanism against racism (Brown et al., 2002). According to Wilson (2020), self-hate is manifested in "people whose contempt, attitude of dislike toward their ethnic, familial and cultural characteristics are such that they often seek to push those characteristics out of their consciousness"(p.11). Afrocentricity, embracing African-centered values, fosters pride and challenges Eurocentric norms. Finally, multiculturalist inclusivity, African American self-acceptance and engagement with other cultural groups contribute to a more prosperous, interconnected identity (Cross, 1991).

Each person faces different social and psychological experiences, which might affect the process of identity development. According to Erik Erikson (1970), only some people will necessarily go through every stage in developing an identity framework. Many authors expressly acknowledge that the stages might also be cyclical, that people might revisit different stages at different points in their lives. Within these stages, multiple forces affect the emergence of each stage's characteristics (Orenstein, 2022).

2.5 Key Elements Shaping Black Self-perception

Black psychology is a vast field of study that has been used to comprehend African American's self, mind, feelings, and overall self-perception. Culture, history, memory, place, time, and traumatic events are essential foundations for shaping the African American self. These elements interconnect to create the unseen identity, resilience, and shared experiences.

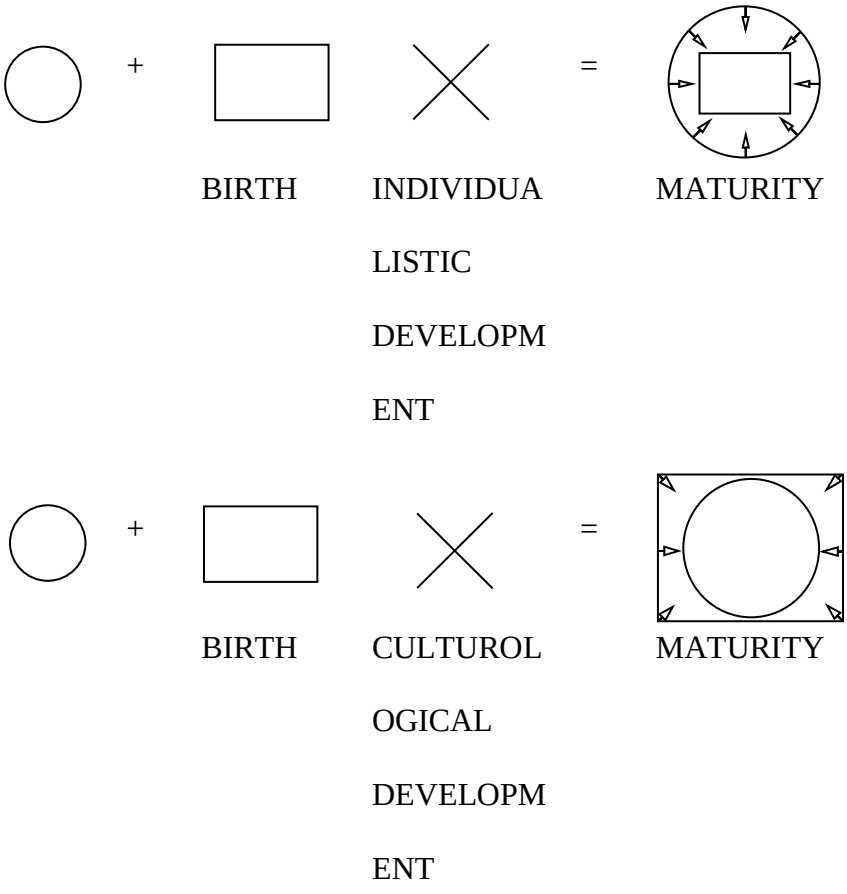
Wilson (2020) aptly points that, "a people who have no sense of history, no sense of how they were created by history and circumstances then have no sense of how and why they behave the way they do"(p. 240). The absence of historical awareness among a populace results

in a deficiency in recognizing the formative influences of past events and societal contexts on collective identity. Therefore, an informed grasp of the historical continuum, encompassing the struggles, triumphs, and enduring contributions of African Americans, are indispensable for understanding their selfhood and facilitating the cultivation of resilience and pride within the community.

Culture covers threads of tradition, art, language, and shared experiences. Recognizing the importance of these cultural aspects is necessary. Black is Beautiful Movement of 1960 is emerged to explain a broad embrace of culture in the African American self-definition. It emphasized the importance of embracing and affirming African American identity.African American writers explored themes of self-acceptance, self-love, and cultural pride in their works. On one hand, the rhythm of American culture resonates with the beat laid down by its founding principles. These principles, etched into the nation's DNA, guide the contrapuntal flows of knowledge that echo across time and space. They recognize differences as an essential element of American identity (Jones, 2015). African American culture has shaped America's soul, from the spirituals of enslaved ancestors to the expressions of contemporary writers.

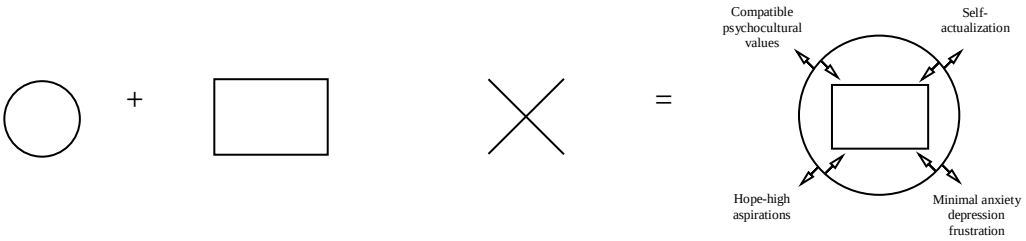
On the other hand, in *Toward a Theory of the Unique Personality of Blacks: A Psychocultural Assessment* (1972), Mosby contends that cultural forces are more influential than genetic factors or origin culture and that identity is shaped by the dominant culture, which is white culture. Mosby (illustrates the development of African American personality in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

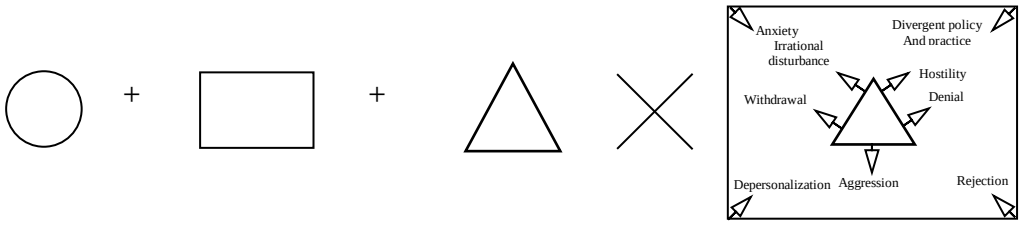
Figure 1: Mosby's Illustration of Personality Formation (Mosby, 1972, p. 45)



×	Time growth	Large Size	Dominance
○	Individual	Small Size	Inferiority
□	Culture and its institutions	⇨	Direction of Influence

Figure2: Mosby's Racial Comparative View of Personality Formation (Mosby, 1972, p. 53)





Black Individual of Minority Culture

○	Black individual	△	Black subculture
○	White individual	×	Time, growth, interaction
□	Larger American culture	+	Additive Influence

Mosby (1972) conceptualizes identity as developing in a psycho-cultural framework of oppressed individuals. African Americans develop within a culture that teaches that all their behaviors, beliefs, and characteristics are inferior, maladjusted, and inadequate. Thus, African Americans internalize a sense of inadequacy. Mosby (1972) contends that the dominance of White culture opposes the positive aspects of African Americans' innate subcultural influences. Figure 1 shows an individual's development when culture is the prevailing force. Figure 2

shows the difference in personality development between different individuals. Mosby further affirms that African Americans are condemned to unavoidable and unresolvable conflict and struggle for a satisfying identity or self-image because patterns of depersonalization and conflict in social values. She concludes that the African Americans' struggle is ended only by death, leaving the problem as a legacy for the next generation.

In the past two centuries, African Americans were sold as property for cheap agricultural labor. Their families in America and Africa were forcibly separated, husbands from wives and parents from children. This displacement brought significant changes to their lives. Beyond physical relocation, which altered their places, lands, and environmental surroundings, the effects extended into their emotional and social worlds. Displacement reshaped their feelings, attitudes, and values, profoundly impacting their identities and communities. It encompassed more than physical movement, carrying deep social, emotional, and cultural repercussions for those uprooted from their homes and families. The legacy of this historical injustice continues to shape societies today, highlighting the need to acknowledge and address its consequences.

Traumatic events faced by African Americans, such as racism, oppression, and isolation, are encompassed within the concept of historical trauma. Historical trauma refers to a series of events that occur to a group of people who share a specific identity (Sebola, 2021). These events disrupt traditional ways of life, culture, and identity. In T*he Trauma Question,* Roger Luckhurst (2008) states, "trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory, and selfhood that have saturated Western cultural life" (p. 23). For African Americans, historical traumas include slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow laws, and segregation, along with their long-lasting consequences, which have been inherited by subsequent generations (Halloran, 2019).

Conclusion

With its diverse ideas, treatments, methodologies, and approaches, Black Psychology is a powerful means of resistance, renewal, and connection for African Americans. It links their culture, history, identity, and future to their well-being, offering a pathway to liberate the African American mind from the destructive effects of racism. As Akbar asserts, “I'm trying to get you free.” This chapter has explored how Black Psychology can be applied to redefine and analyze our understanding of the African American mind and approach to mental health, progressing through the stages of African American identity development. It also examined how Black Psychology and the Nigrescence Model might provide deeper insights into the relationship between the self and the other.

Chapter Three

Negotiating Identity: A journey Through Ancestry and Navigating A Whole Self

Chapter Three: A journey through Ancestry and Navigation A Whole Self

Introduction

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Conclusion

Introduction

Reasons behind writing, choosing plots, characters, genres, styles, themes may differ between African American authors, however they share the same inner desire of changing something in their society. Despite the fact that Butler and Beatty did not have the same historical background

This chapter endeavors to approach psychological status of both protagonists, Dana and Gunnar, in two different novels, namely *Kindred* and *The White Boy Shuffle,* and cast light on their development of their racial identity and well-being by taking into account the previously tackled notions including self, identity, personality, memory, culture, and trauma.

3.1 Why Kindred?

Slavery, racism, segregation, isolation, and many painful aspects of everyday life in America, directly or indirectly, are the reasons behind Black literature. Whenever a new novel appears, whether it succeeded or not, pain and anger are central themes. However, as mentioned before, the modern era seems optimistic; somehow, cutting the edge of the near history has never occurred. Butler remembers her last year at the college as "very strange because we had assassinations for midterm and finals," referring to the murders of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. Butler locates the origin of *Kindred* in a student's comment from this period:

> I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people. He said, "I would like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long., But I cannot because I would have to start with my own parents." (Rowell & Butler, 1997, p.51)

Butler was a member who played an important role in the formation of the Black Cultural Nationalist US organization founded by Ron "Maulana" Karenga. Like elsewhere in California,

Black college students were frequently "at the forefront of radicals" (Murch, 2010, p.99). Born out of this moment, Kindred is a novel that enacts a literary encounter between Butler's generation and the past. Butler transports her 1970s protagonist, Dana, back to the antebellum past, where she faces life-or-death decisions regarding her ancestors that are only rhetorical to Butler's classmate. *Kindred* is Butler's attempt to resolve conflicting views on the period's politics, or what she calls "some 1960s feelings" (Kenan, 1991,p. 497). The writings here reflect all aspects of life, and since politics is the hope light for some African American authors. The political orientation of *Kindred* is located in Butler's experience of the late 1960s. Scholars frequently note it, but few engage directly with Butler's contribution to political debates that erupted within the civil rights and Black Power movements in that turbulent year and intensified over the subsequent decade. While considerable scholarship has concentrated on "the novel's jarring juxtaposition of the antebellum past with its 1970s present," Philip Miletic contends that the "present" referenced is "an atemporal" one. In this context, scholars such as Sarah Wood provide minimal explanations of what aspects of the literature and rhetoric of the "contemporary scene" capture Butler's attention. However, Wood (2007) gestures toward such a reading, arguing that "*Kindred* can be read as Butler's response to the ideological disparities that emerged within the black protest movements of the 1960s" (p. 87); but, as Miletic observes, does not "detail those ideological disparities"(p. 264). Seeking to fill this hole in scholarship, Miletic contextualizes *Kindred* in the political rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s and places Butler within a continuum of the "growing black female activism and literature of the 1970s" as evidenced by the publication of *The Black Woman* (1970) which included feminist critiques of Black Nationalism by Frances Beal and Toni Cade Bambara. Before Miletic's article (2016), the most sustained analysis of *Kindred's* relationship to the period's movements came from Ashraf Rushdy (2001), who reads *Kindred* as a palimpsest novel responding to the political moment of the 1970s. Rushdy argues that Butler rejects the emphasis on "purity" in cultural

nationalist and New Left ideologies of the 1960s—even as she evinces sympathy for their militant radicalism.

Kindred may not be read in the same way by all. However, it is undoubtedly juxtaposed with criticizing the white norms of putting her people on the edge. Moreover, Like many of her radicalized generation, Butler initially cannot understand her mother's failure to resist the racism she experiences daily openly. She explains:

> My mother did domestic work, and I was around sometimes when people talked about her as if she were not there, and I got to watch her going in the back doors. I spent a lot of my childhood being ashamed of what she did, and I think one of the reasons I wrote *Kindred* was to resolve my feelings because, after all, I ate because of what she did. (Kenan, 1991, p. 496)

Butler reflects on her childhood experiences of feeling ashamed of her mother's domestic work, which involved enduring people's disrespect and using back doors.

Kindred is a novel born out of dual interlocking histories, the history of Black radicals who provided its political "germ" and of Southern migrants like Butler's mother for whom such radicalism seemed impractical if not dangerous, whose daily acts of resistance Butler seeks to narrativize and recover from invisibility. Butler complicates contemporary debates about strategies of resistance.

Human psychology is one of the essential themes in all of Butler's works. African Americans' belief about their mental health and human psychology, especially their people psychology, motivates them to be more creative. Indeed, the legacy suffering they have is more motivational. Butler chooses science fiction to transmit her beliefs about her ancestry, history, present, and future. In an interview with *The Black Scholar Magazine*, she introduces that freedom is the reason behind choosing science fiction; she says: "It is the freest genre in existence" (p.14). In answering the question about projecting an alternative ideal society, Butler

clarifies that she did not write Utopian science fiction because of her belief that imperfect humans cannot create a perfect society. She focuses on writing what she feels compelled to write without worrying about fitting into specific genres. She mentions her challenge with *Kindred*, which did not fit traditional science fiction or fantasy categories, lacking scientific elements and typical fantasy tropes like magic or medieval settings (Butler, 1989).

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* is considered the postmodern slave narrative according to the use of a time-travel device. Timothy Spaulding (2005)defines the postmodern slave narrative as "that proliferating sub-genre of late twentieth-century novels of slavery that violate the conventions of narrative realism. He explains that "the break from realism in recent narratives of slavery disrupts the governing protocols of historical representation, in particular calling into question the positivist truth-claims of modern historiography"(pp, 18-19).

3.2 The Unseen Struggle: The Self and the Invisible Pain

Exposure to racism can lead to devastating psychological consequences such as feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, rejection, loss, depression, and hopelessness, and daily experiences of continuous racism that have built up can compromise psychological well-being. This reality is never neglected. The loss of identity that black people face is still the main proof. The story of Dana starts even before the publication and even the novel's writing. It is the story of a Black woman with White ancestors shifting with her body and emotions between the past and the present and to the future, with her imaginations, dreams, and predictions. Butler's *Kindred* offers the first-person perspective of the African American female protagonist, Dana Franklin, a late twentieth-century woman forced to confront her familial history in slavery. The novel is set in California in 1976, the bicentennial of the United States Declaration of Independence, whose proclamation of human rights is reflected in its credo, "all men are created equal." It is also the year that marked the decade that declared interracial marriage constitutional in America, a significant event since the protagonist is recently married to her white husband,

Kevin Franklin. Moreover, within her ancestors, the white, the other, Dana waves between independent, confident, visible -relatively- woman and old, ashamed, neglected, subjugated one.

According to Gunnar, the story begins in *The White Boy Shuffle,* from his memories, beginning with stories about his ancestors told to him and his sisters by their mother during childhood. This includes the tale of Euripides Kaufman, a free black man present at the Boston Massacre, who dodged the bullet that killed Crispus Attucks. Long lives with racism puts Blacks on a long path of self-concept struggles and self-image delusion. These struggles cannot be seen since they are practiced as daily life conditions. The protagonists ' invisibility will be discovered through the intersection of many events, characters, and emotions.

3.2.1 Dana in the Present, Dana in the Past

Octavia Butler's neo-slave narrative *Kindred* was written in 1979. It was written in the aftermath of the controversial Moynihan Report (1965), which pathologized black families and called for a reinstatement of black patriarchy. Publishing her novel on slavery, Butler critiques 1960s Black nationalist discourses stemming from the Black Power Movement, which posit the ancestors as "defeated" and "holding the young back" with their acquiescence to white supremacy. The prologue starts with the fear. Dana, the picture of the black woman, is not only fearful of losing her arm but of losing what makes her feel that she is a part of the new society. Kevin: "I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone. When the police released Kevin, he came to the hospital and stayed with me so that I would know I hadn't lost him too" (Butler,1979, p.9). However, this is the end of the novel. In the present, Dana is trying to heal from trauma, which involves not only physical recovery but also emotional and psychological healing. Kevin's support contributes to this process. This continual resistance shows that Dana is in the encounter stage. She closes her eyes to remember an intentional revisiting of her past events: "I closed my eyes again, remembering

the way I had been hurt, remembering the pain" (Butler,1979, p.10). Memory in the encounter stage is a powerful tool for understanding past experiences. In Black psychology, memory can be both healing and distressing. Remembering past trauma allows individuals to process their emotions, but it can also re-trigger pain. Here, despite her struggles and losing her left arm over a year, Dana starts to prompt questions and reflection about her racial identity.

Whereas her real struggle was in the past, in Maryland, with Rufus, Dana also faced a kind of anxiety, as a writer, with Kevin, which also teased her "hidden self" to show up. Buz reacted to Kevin and Dana as "Chocolate and Vanilla," even though Buz's words did not traumatize her ostensibly, they prompted the feeling of "he always did that. Started a 'joke' that wasn't funny, to begin with, then beat it to death" (Butler,1979, p.25). The myth of a post-racial society blurs in the eyes of Dana. She has only one relationship, which may make it accurate. "Nothing else will do it" (Butler,1979, p.25). Dana always hid the reality that her society refused her.

Concerning her experience, at her first visit to Maryland, Dana experiences a psychological loss and identity crisis since she has no connection with her former self, i.e., her ancestors, Rufus, mainly. Without being attached to the past, the present and the future will not be enriched; thus, they will be meaningless. Through stories, the individual can identify with his past ancestors; thus, his sense of stability will be firm, just like Dana reveals, "I recalled things that I hadn't realized I'd noticed" (Butler, 1979, p.16). With her ancestor, Dana made an intense conversation that would make her quest for her identity again. The conversation causes low self-esteem in Dana's inner beliefs of certainty.

> Just a strange nigger, She and Daddy both knew they hadn't seen you before.
>
> That was a hell of a thing for her to say right after she saw me save her son's life.
>
> Rufus frowned. "Why?"
>
> Your mother always calls black people niggers, Rufe?

Sure, except when she has company. Why not?" (Butler,1979, p.25)

This casual use of the word "nigger" signifies a lack of recognition of Black people's full personhood, effectively rendering them invisible as unique individuals with their own experiences and dignity. Dana's significant and positive action is overshadowed and nullified by racial prejudice. Dana's heroism is not seen or valued; instead, her identity is reduced to a racial slur. Rufus's confusion "Why?" in response to Dana's challenge indicates a lack of awareness or recognition of the harm caused by the word. This lack of recognition is a form of invisibility. Dana's feelings, perspective, and humanity are invisible to Rufus. He does not see the problem with the racial slur because he does not see Dana as fully human with their own experiences and dignity. After this conversation, Dana moves between the pre-encounter and encounter stages while comparing her past with Rufus and the realities of their present interactions.

3.2.2 The Self of the Antebellum South

Butler talks about antebellum South slavery from the perspective of a modern woman wearing pants and suits, Dana, who settled in post-Civil Rights Movement California in 1979. The shift between a free, independent woman in California and an enslaved woman in Maryland creates a series of misunderstood feelings and self-definition of Dana to herself, her ancestors, and even her present.

However, she was forced to travel back in time to Maryland in the early 1800s and felt and witnessed the brutality of slavery; she truthfully needed this for her self-discovery. Butler represents the miserable and painful life of African American women in one of the most challenging periods of Maryland when they were marginalized racially and sexually by white people. The whites abused black women and created physical and psychological pains. African American women became the subject of this colonization, and they were marginalized by this imperial power and also its patriarchy. Dana observes, "Strangely, they seemed to like him,

hold him in contempt, and fear him all simultaneously." How can they feel these contradictory emotions? How would you feel toward Rufus if you were in their situation? (Butler,1979, p. 229)

Butler describes African American women in 19th-century America through the eyes of Dana, who lived under dire circumstances. African American women were double colonized, first by the patriarchal domination in which African American men themselves under the notion that women take a lower position than men in society. Secondly, black women were colonized by European colonizers who controlled the land based on their rules.

Being in a time where it is dangerous to assert herself makes Dana acutely aware of the systemic injustice and brutality of slavery. This awareness shapes her self-concept by deepening her understanding of African Americans' historical struggles, strengthening her resolve to endure and resist however she can, even if temporarily sacrificing her sense of self. This awareness was not always a good thing for her as she started to make her real personality invisible: "I closed my eyes and saw that the table was gone, and I was standing in the middle of the room wearing a long dress" (Butler,1979, p.221) Dana's abrupt transitions between times render her invisible in one era while she exists in another, mirroring her social invisibility.

Dana's understanding that she is no longer in her own time is crucial to her self-concept. She admits: "I could recall feeling relief at seeing the house, feeling that I had come home. And having to stop and correct myself, remind myself that I was in an alien, dangerous place" (Butler,1979,p.190) she forces herself to acknowledge the stark differences between the 20th century, where she has more freedom and rights, and the 19th century, where her identity as a black woman puts her in immediate danger.

Dana internally ensures the necessity to suppress her true self and conform to the oppressive norms of the Antebellum South to ensure her survival. This temporal displacement challenges her sense of belonging. This indirectly impacts her modern identity even though she

did not realize this change:“ To me, it’s getting more and more believable. I don’t like it. I don’t want to be in the middle of it. I don’t understand how it can happen, but it’s real. It hurts too much not to be. And my ancestors, for Godsake!” (Butler,1979, p.46)

Dana’s acceptance of her ancestry, despite the brutal and dehumanizing realities of slavery, shows a her understanding of her history. When she acknowledged the past and its impact on her present, she could demonstrate an integration of historical experiences into her modern racial identity. Her idea, “The ease. Us, the children. I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery” (Butler, 1979, p. 101), reveals her growing self-awareness of how oppression and racism operate, not only through physical violence but also through psychological conditioning. This awareness strenghtened her critical engagement with the past, recognizing how strongly entrenched systems of power may shape both collective and individual identities.

In the Antebellum South, while she is facing the trauma of being enslaved and the memory of her real life, she struggles with the harsh realities of slavery as she meets her ancestors on the plantation. Her interactions with her proud, free African American ancestor and the white planter who forces her into slavery force her to confront the brutality of the past. Dana’s awareness of her vulnerability as an African American woman becomes more pronounced during the encounter stage, particularly as she confronts the realities of slavery in the historical context of the antebellum South. Through her reflection, “I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery” (Butler, 1979, p. 95), Butler highlights her understanding of psychological mechanisms that perpetuate oppression. Butler here insists on Black woman vulnerability which becomes more pronounced when she observes the lasting impact of traumatic experiences. Dana’s precarious position is revived when she noted, “The whip was a part of the plantation’s regular life. It was an instrument of punishment and control” (Butler, 1979, p. 97).

3.2.3 Dana, the Hidden Self

Dana, the enslaved woman in Maryland, in some perspectives, is not fundamentally different from a free woman in California. However, her reactions to the brutal realities of slavery starkly highlight the intense physical and psychological trauma inflicted upon her. Dana's experiences reflect the broader struggles faced by a woman, exemplified by the character Buz, who symbolizes the futile attempts to escape the grasp of enslavement through mere passive resistance like closing her eyes, breathing deeply, and making soft comments.
In Dana's harrowing encounter with Rufus's whipping during one of her last trips, she describes her reaction: "I closed my eyes and tried to keep the pain distant, to convince myself that it was only a figure of speech. I had never heard of anyone being whipped to death, though I suppose it could happen. A beating, after all, could kill. Then, I heard the whistle of the whip and the full-length crack of it against flesh" (Butler, 1979,p. 61). Her reaction highlights the raw brutality of physical punishment and its psychological impact on Dana, illustrating the profound trauma such violence inflicts.

The shared reactions between Dana and other characters to the oppressive environment are noted when Dana reflects, "In fact, she and I were reacting very much alike" (Butler,1979, p.36). This comparison reveals the universal nature of the suffering experienced under slavery, bridging the experiences of enslaved and free women.

Further exploring the psychological effects of violence, she said:"He beat me until I tried to make myself believe he was going to kill me. Surely, he would kill me if I didn't get away, save myself, *go home!*" (Butler,1979, p.176) illustrates the enduring impact of Dana's physical abuse. Dana reveals how trauma has conditioned them to constantly anticipate pain, highlighting the long-term psychological scars left by such a situation. Then, Dana's self goes through different conflicts. While comparing her reactions with those of her white ancestor, Rufus, she becomes shocked at her new self. Dana wonders about Rufus' reaction when she is

suddenly in his room, she thinks that "he did seem surprisingly at ease with me much calmer than I would have been at his age about the sudden appearance of a stranger in my bedroom. I would not even have still been in the bedroom" (Butler,1979, p. 21).

Dana's modern perspective contrasts with the boy's historical context, highlighting the differences in their reactions. Rufus' calmness is just an adaptation to the constant threat of violence and instability in his environment. In contrast, Dana, coming from a different time with different societal norms and protections, would react with fear and avoidance. Dana's observation of Rufus' reaction reflects her cultural competence and awareness. She compares her childhood self with Rufus' self. She finds her hidden self as a Black woman living in a society that practices racism somehow different than her new environment.

Dana's reactions appear to align most closely with the encounter and immersion-immersion stages because she is deeply affected by the traumatic events she witnesses and begins to recognize and internalize the pervasive impact of slavery on her identity, psyche, and mental health.

3.2.4 Dana's Self-discovery

When she is on the plantation, Dana also reaches the immersion-emersion stage of her racial identity. She fully immerses herself in the plantation community and with her African American mates, sharing the same food, the same place, and the same suffering. She embraces her African American identity and culture. Her acute sense of Black pride contributes to her self-esteem. She recognizes the resilience and strength of her ancestors; however, their subjugation: "I was beginning to realize that I could afford to take things more slowly to learn more about my family" (Butler, 1979,p.124). The sense of self is often related to the community and collective identity. Dana's realization goes with a broader sense of belonging and interconnectedness that is a central belief among African Americans. Taking the time to learn about one's family may enhance her individual sense of being part of a larger collective

community. Dana's growing recognition of the importance of understanding her heritage and the strength she derives from this knowledge reinforces her sense of identity and pride in her ancestry. Reaching this stage of self-awareness allows her to engage with self-acceptance. Dana does not only accept herself in the present, but rather, she accepts herself in the Antebellum South. Dana either discovers herself, according to Alice, her mirror in the South; Alice, however, is Rufus's sex slave. When he is with Alice, Rufus says: "Behold, the woman, he said, and from one to the other of us. "you really are only one woman" (Butler,1979, p.228). However, Alice reacts differently to his idea and denounces the truth. Instead, Dana discovers her past when she asks: "Alice Greenwood. How would she marry this boy? Or would it be marriage? And why hadn't someone in my family mentioned that Rufus Weylin was white?" (Butler, 1979, p.28).

3.3 Constructing Self: Well-being and Subjectivity

Dana's journey of constructing herself goes through two main stations: the first is in California, and the second is on the plantation. Her process involves reconciling her modern identity with the realities of slavery, leading to an evolving self-perception. Dana's need to adapt to survive in the past forces her to adopt new behaviors and ways of thinking. This adaptation challenges her modern sense of self, as she must navigate the social hierarchy and power dynamics of slavery. Witnessing life on the plantation brings Dana to a new understanding of history that she cannot get from historical texts alone. Dana recognizes her wellness when she says: "Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn't say them, couldn't sort out my feelings about them, couldn't keep them bottled inside me" (Butler, 1979,p. 123). Dana's skepticism about whether she truly lives in freedom reflects her trauma and the systemic oppression she faced, which affected her well-being. This doubt casts the possibility of true freedom as a recognition of the pervasive and enduring nature of racial injustices. In a conversation, Dana contradicts her doubt as she wonders:"What others?" "The ones who make

it. The ones living in freedom now." "If any do." "They do." "Some say they do. It's like dying, though, and going to Heaven. Nobody ever comes back to tell you about it. (Butler, 1979, p. 129)

This longing shows Dana's resilience and hope, which persist despite systemic barriers. The belief in the existence of those who have "made it" embodies the collective aspiration for progress and liberation. Dana compares freedom to dying, and going to Heaven reflects her real understanding of true freedom. Heaven here is used as a metaphor that insists on the deep-seated belief that systemic change is incredibly difficult and that those who achieve it are rarely able to return and share their experiences. This belief results in Dana's psychological trauma and well-being. Thus, she must start navigating her whole and real self through both periods, past and present.

3.3.1 Dana as a Subject

Dana's dizziness almost has one purpose, which is to save Rufus. If at any point during her trips, Dana fails to save Rufus's life, or if she refuses to, for that matter, if she kills him before this signal event can take place, then not only will Dana immediately cease to exist, but so will the entire "black" side of her family line fail to come into being. As she realizes, "I was the worst possible guardian for him, a black woman, sent to protect him whether I wanted to or not" (Butler, 1979, p.68). This compulsion to save Rufus is not just about preserving his life but ensuring her and her ancestors' existence. Dana acknowledges the stakes: "If I was to live, if others were to live, he must live" (Butler, 1979, p.29). Her survival is intricately tied to his, underscoring the paradox of her predicament: "I had to save him if I was to save myself and my family" (Butler, 1979, p.29). Although the black woman has to reaffirm both her color and her sex if she is to present herself as a subject, the possibility of emancipation lies in solidarity, not with black men, but with other women, Alice, for instance, as the prefatory quotation from the Alice Greenwood begins to "realize that he loved the woman to her misfortune. There was

no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one" (Butler, 1979, p.124).

The normalization of physical and sexual violence against African American women had profound psychological effects, including trauma, internalized oppression, and identity struggles. Butler's mentioning of this event assures the psychological and historical trauma that causes chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, all of which adversely affect self-image. African American women such as Dana and Alice might see themselves as perpetual victims, impacting their ability to view themselves as agents of their own lives. A Black woman struggles to develop her self by eliminating the differences that hinder her from belonging to that group, while simultaneously confronting racism, ethnicity-based discrimination, and gender inequality. These intersecting oppressions create a web of challenges that Afro-American women must navigate, further complicating their journey toward self-determination and authentic identity.

3.3.2 Dana Between Displacement and Memory

Trauma, pain, and suffering cannot be invisible; however, they appear in different forms. Displacement is one of these forms. Displacement results in all kinds of loss. Dana's losing a left arm and a year are not only the results of slavery, struggles, and racism but also the results of displacement, the invisible pain of being unacceptable, being displaced in a place where you do not belong, one of the worst and harsh forms of slavery. Yet, in *Kindred*, it comes in the form of time travel, but the consequences in Dana's self-image and self-esteem are clear. However, Maryland is, in fact, the land of Dana, but she does not fit the circumstances of living there. Butler expresses this nonacceptance by the return of Dana to California each time she feels danger.

Dana's sense of alienation and disconnection from a familiar and safe environment. The concept of "home" often extends beyond a physical place to include a sense of cultural,

historical, and communal belonging. The longing to return home reflects a deeper desire to reconnect with one's roots and cultural identity, which can be crucial for psychological well-being. Thus, displacement can significantly impact one's identity and self-perception. The phrase "I don't know, but I can't stay here" suggests a struggle with current circumstances and a desire for change as she navigates a sense of identity that is continuously shaped by external pressures and her internal resilience. The displacement may prompt a re-evaluation of self and the creation of new narratives of identity and belonging. Then she starts to look for a place where she can feel agency, "I came out of his room, my new refuge, when he wasn't in it, and hurried down the stairs" (Butler, 1979, p.146). The temporal displacement challenges

Dana's modern sense of self, causing her to reconcile her contemporary identity with her ancestral past. She states, "I was shaking with fear, and my mind was racing, trying to figure out where I was when I was" (Butler,1979, p.15).In the same circumstances, Alice Greenwood accepted being treated and owned by Rufus despite her marriage to Isaac. She is home. Dana's sense of identity reaches internalization with a connection to the place where she feels her internal conflict intensifies. She is in a conflict with her dual identity as a time traveler from the future and a black woman in the past. Dana's memories of her time in the past seem to be a way for her to survive. Her act of remembering the oppressive environment of the antebellum South helps her recognize her self-worth. She notes:

"I felt strangely disoriented. For a moment, I thought Rufus was calling me again. Then I realized that I wasn't really dizzy, only confused. My memory of a field hand being whipped suddenly seemed to have no place here with me at home" (Butler, 1979, p.116).

Dana's memories of these traumatic events are subjective. They haunt her, affecting her emotional well-being and physical health. Her missing arm serves as a constant reminder of her past struggles.

3.3.3 Dana's Realization of Internalized Oppression

Butler masterfully focuses on the relationship between power and identity formation within the context of slavery. This power causes Dana's oppression. But the protagonist, Dana, is not the only African American woman whom *Kindred* places in the position of sexualized and racialized oppressed woman. Other than Dana, the novel inscribes a total of four women who are trapped within the cycle of sexual and physical abuse that characterizes the daily experiences of enslaved women. They include Alice and her mother, Tess, a barren field slave, and Sarah, the plantation's cook. A brief look at the ramblings of the self-alienated house slave, Tess, provides an example. Fearful of being sent to work in the harsher conditions of the fields after the senior Weylin has tired of her and casually passed her off to the overseer, Tess is depicted as being so racked with anxiety over her fate that she is driven to refer to herself in the second-person. In complaining to her fellow bonds women about her fate one morning, Tess cries out uncontrollably: "You do everything they tell you, and they still treat you like an old dog. Go here, open your legs; go there, bust your back. What they care! I ain't supposed to have no feelings!" (Butler, 1979, p.182).

The novel intensifies the impact of this distress by disseminating abuse among four distinct characters, ensuring that Dana's witnessing of each character's scenes transforms the narrative into a shared experience between her and her ancestors. The novel deliberately constructs a scenario that is hard for readers to ignore, particularly through the vivid imagery it employs. This challenge in averting one's attention is further exacerbated by Dana's persistent attempts to rescue Alice from Rufus's control. Such ostensibly selfless acts may mislead into considering Alice's narrative as more central to the novel than Dana's. However, a closer examination reveals that Dana's motivations are far from purely altruistic; they are consistently guided by personal interests and anxieties regarding her identity as a modern, free Black woman.

Dana realized the internalized oppression when she tries hard in preserving Rufus's life, Alice, and other women characters. Despite the hardship oppression, she repeatedly saves them for her existence. This internal conflict reflects the impact of slavery, where survival often necessitated compromising one's own agency and well-being. Dana's actions reveal the insidious impact of oppression on self-perception and decision-making.

3.3.4 Dana's Duality and Self-existence

In almost all African American literary works, the extent to which racism destroys one's identity, especially those who internalize the racist stereotypes created by the white society. Butler portrays the two historical settings as uncanny doubles, thus blurring the boundaries of time and space. She emphasizes these traumatic experiences and tries to expose readers to the devastating impacts of these events and how they destroy the blacks' sense of selfhood. Butler shows the double consciousness, which highlights the intimate connection between past and present; she also claims that the present is the double of the past.

Dana's time-travel experiences introduce this temporal duality. She oscillates between two vastly different time periods and identities. In the present, she is a free woman with rights; in the past, she is a vulnerable slave. This duality forces her to adapt, survive, and confront the trauma of slavery. In addition, Dana's shift between her identity in the past and her identity in the present causes conflicting emotions. She discovered presently and figured out her present scenes, just like the one with Buz. Dana feels compassion for Rufus, her ancestor, even as he mistreats her. She offers herself as a sacrifice. She admits:

> Maybe that was why we didn't hate each other. We could hurt each other too badly and kill each other too quickly in hatred. He was like a younger brother to me. Alice was like a sister. It was so hard to watch him hurting her, to know that he had to go on hurting her if my family was to exist at all. (Butler, 1979, p.180)

Her duality, compassion versus self-preservation, shapes her actions and decisions. Dana's conflicts with watching one "sibling" hurt another points to deep internal conflict and moral dilemmas. This reflects the broader struggles faced by Black individuals when navigating harmful behaviors within their community, especially when these behaviors are influenced by external oppressive forces. These conflicting emotions impact her self-esteem.

Dana's question, "It was as though I didn't exist for her, as though I wasn't real" (Butler, 1979, p.222), reflects her own agency and the choices she makes. Butler deftly connects individual consciousness with social history and invites readers to meditate on the relationships between identities. She maintains the mechanisms of resilience and healing within Black communities. How do individuals and communities cope with feelings of invisibility? What cultural practices and community supports are available to reaffirm one's sense of existence and worth? When she summarizes the struggle within her self-concept in her experience of doing more than her effort. She confirms that the African American woman struggles for her femininity, sexuality, existence, and belonging in Dana's relationship with Rufus:

> I was the worst possible guardian for him, a black to watch over him in a society that considered blacks subhuman, a woman to watch over him in a society that considered women perennial children. I would have all I could do to look after myself. But I would help him as best I could. (Butler, 1979, p.68)

Butler then indicates the awareness of the long-term and intergenerational effects of slavery and oppression. She examines the importance of collective well-being as Dana says: "To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To reassure yourself that you're sane" (Butler, 1979, p. 264). Dana's duality is a struggle for autonomy in a world that seeks to strip her of it. She battles to maintain her sense of self as a free woman while adhering to the subservient roles expected of her. Butler shows this duality according to the feeling of fear when Dana experienced it, "I had been afraid that my mind would play tricks on

me, that I might not be able to believe what I had seen or experienced, that I might wake up at home in my own bed and know it had all been a bad dream" (Butler, 1979, p96). Butler reveals Dana's struggle to maintain her sense of reality, fearing that her experiences might destabilize her mental state.

As a post-racial woman, Dana possesses a clear sense of herself. Strengthened by her racial pride, her personal responsibility, her free will, and her self-determination, Dana embraces her ability to define herself in both her past and her present. However, she has struggled with self-image in the past. Choosing to define herself instead of accepting the definitions of others, she eschews societal expectations in following her ideas and emotions.

3.4 Why *The White Boy Shuffle*?

The answer to the interviewer's question, "I have always felt that—and this is my narcissism. I am your target audience. But I don't feel pandered to," is: "It must be really hard to be you. And I was like, What, why, what are you talking about?", shares an excellent statement that potentially summarizes Beatty's interest in human psychology and his black people's sufferance. This interaction highlights Beatty's nuanced understanding of identity and empathy, illustrating his ability to engage deeply with complex emotional and social issues while challenging conventional expectations of audience and representation in literature. However, Beatty refuses in many interviews that he never write in accordance with any movements; the extreme cut between the author and the historical situation seems impossible. Notably, as L.H. Stallings discusses in *Punked for Life: Paul Beatty's The White Boy Shuffle and Radical Black Masculinities* (2009):

> Beatty deconstructs outdated models of black individuals through the lens of satire, boldly acknowledging the difference between black male interventions in the U.S. and challenging conventional expectations. (Stallings, 2009, p. 99)

Mark Anthony Neal further extends this analysis in S*oul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic (2002)*, linking the protagonist's internal struggle to the broader cultural construction of blackness.

His debut novel, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pioneered new ground for authors aiming to create an alternative literary tradition that derives its vigor and expression from outside the conventional American literary establishment. However, he has consistently remained independent, unaffected by the pressures or affiliations of any particular literary scene or movement. From the very beginning of the work, he says:

> Unlike the typical bluesy, earthy, folksy denim- overalls noble- in- the- face- of a cracker- racism aw shucks Pulitzer- Prize-winning protagonist mojo magic black man, I am not the seventh son of a seventh son of a seventh son. (Beatty, 1996, p.05)

In a literal sense, *The White Boy Shuffle* deals with diaspora as a spatial condition of dislocation, as the main character is an Afro-American young man whose mother came to Hillside as a last chance for her children to re-position their blackness. The novel's protagonist, Gunnar, who is the narrator, takes notice of Africans they encounter in Santa Monica and the Hillside, respectively. This novel, and since it was written in a period of fundamental change the black attitudes, beliefs, principles, and the implicit meaning of protest literature what is needed is a whole new system of ideas, as Poet Don L. Lee expresses it:

> It's time for Du Bois, Nat Turner, and Kwame Nkrumah. As Frantz Fanon points out, destroy the culture, and you destroy the people. This must not happen. Black artists are culture stabilizers, bringing back old values and introducing new ones. Black Art will talk to the people and, with the will of the people, stop impending protective custody. (As cited in Neal, 1968, p.30)

Beatty, however, denied earlier disciplining by any literary or political movement; he expresses what Neal denotes: "The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the

Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood" (Neal, 1968, p.29). Thus, he focuses on the relationship between art and politics. It emphasizes the creation of art that reflects and celebrates Black experiences, history, and culture. On the other hand, Black Power is more concerned with the art of politics. It advocates for political empowerment and social change for Black communities.

The White Boy Shuffle ostensibly proffers a new model for African American personality, a role filled by the protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman. Yet the cheeky tone with which Gunnar, as the frame narrator, characterizes such a person, shuffling between different feelings.

3.4.1 Invisibility and Self-Perception in in Gunnar's Self Journey

Gunnars recognized that "race is just a social construct, a way for people to categorize and separate themselves. But at the end of the day, we're all just human beings" (1996, p.89), which was not enough to feel completely satisfied with being in a different skin color with a different cultural background. According to Gunnar, his self-journey starts with stories about his ancestors, who were told to him and his sisters by their mother during childhood. Gunnar, through his description:

> Mom raised my sisters and me as the hard-won spoils of a vicious custody battle that left the porcelain shrapnel of supper-dish grenades embedded in my father's neck. The divorce made Mama, Ms. Brenda W. Kaufman, determined to make sure that her children knew their forebears. (Beatty, 1996, pp. 5-6)

He recognizes the effort of his mother to instill knowledge of the family's cultural and historical background. Beatty then advocates for the empowerment of African Americans through an understanding of their history and heritage. Knowing one's roots helps in the formation of a positive identity and combats the effects of systemic racism.

However, Gunnar moves through many events that make him reshape his self-perception, and Beatty focuses on Gunnar's relationship with his mother. The mother's role in

raising Gunnar and his sisters resembles the strength and resilience often attributed to African American women in Black Psychology. Thus, Beatty unveiled the role of Gunnar's family, particularly the mother, as a source of strength and self-definition. This relationship is crucial for Gunnar's psychological well-being and development in African American communities. Therefore, his awareness of his mother's perception leads to self-awareness of his position with his sisters. Despite the fact that Gunnar does not show his full acceptance of his mother's decisions, she is, according to Beatty, the kernel of self-change of the protagonist between Gunnar's self in Santa Monica and Gunnar's self in the Ghetto since she is in the internalization-commitment stage of identity.

3.4.1.1 The Invisible Self: Gunnar in Santa Monica

Gunnar's story begins in Santa Monica, California, where he lives with his mother and sisters. His real story of feeling different starts when his mother tells him about his real ancestors. Despite growing up in this community, Gunnar feels isolated and culturally invisible, believing he is part of the cultural group yet not fully accepted by it. His childhood can be described as culturally white in many contexts, leaving him caught between different cultural and ethnic groups. The bildungsroman of Gunnar starts from his different ways of assimilation, initially at his school.

At his new school, "Mestizo Mulatto Mongrel Elementary, Santa Monica's all-white multicultural school" (Beatty, 1996, p. 31), Gunnar struggles for acceptance. Beatty shows this sufferance through his school's name, which humorously highlights a contradictory message about diversity and inclusion. Within the predominantly white community, Gunnar is labeled as the "cool black kid," a tag that functions as a "versatile identifier used to distinguish the harmless black male from the Caucasian juvenile while maintaining politically correct semiotics" (Beatty, 1996, p. 31), indicates Gunnar's isolation. Double consciousness is relevant here, where Gunnar navigates multiple identities in a racially stratified society. A Black student

in such an environment might feel the tension between his cultural heritage and the dominant white culture of the school, leading to internal conflict and a fractured sense of self.

Gunnar's sense of cultural isolation in his large and small community is compounded by his limited interactions with other African Americans. Apart from his family, the only African Americans he knows are a few celebrities. He reflects on this by stating, "Only black folks whose names I knew were musicians and athletes" (Beatty,1996, p. 39). This lack of connection to his cultural heritage intensifies his struggle with identity and acceptance.

Gunnar navigates a complex landscape of identity and belonging. He toys with various notions of how he is supposed to act and be within his community and race. During his first thirteen years living in Santa Monica, Gunnar is considered an outsider, even by his own mother, due to his skin color. This period is marked by his struggle to understand and fulfill the expectations placed upon him by society. Until he coined it as the "moved into the red zone" (Beatty, 1996, p.7). Then, his sense of being an outsider is reinforced by the limited interaction he has with other African Americans. When Gunnar fails to recognize his out-group status, he states, "I felt like I'd been outed and exposed by my worst enemies, white kids who were embarrassingly like myself but with whom I had nothing in common" (Beatty, 1996, p.197) where he presents his complex identity struggle. Gunnar feels exposed and betrayed by white kids who are similar in some ways but fundamentally different in others. At this stage, Gunnar is somewhat detached from his Black identity. He does not fully engage with racial issues and often feels like an outsider. He is still in the pre-encounter stage.

Being in this stage has been shown "I'd stand still for a few seconds, vainly snapping my fingers with as much hope of catching the beat as a quadriplegic hobo latching onto a moving boxcar" (Beatty, 1996, p.38). This suggests a struggle with his identity and belonging, where Gunnar is fighting to reconcile similarities and differences with another racial group. He is punished and encounters another environment where he is considered an insider by others but feels no

immediate personal affiliation. The feeling of being "outed" and "exposed" reflects the sense of discomfort. This label reflects his complex position of being both an insider and an outsider. He is superficially recognized and distinguished by his race, yet this recognition is laden with stereotypes, contributing to his internal conflict and sense of cultural invisibility. Therefore, his belief of the white kids as "worst enemies" also reflects the internalized perception of harm from the dominant racial group. The use of "embarrassingly like myself" (Beatty, 1996, p.43) suggests Gunnar's internal conflict, possibly rooted in internalized racism, where similarities with the white kids evoke shame due to societal conditioning that privileges whiteness.

However, with the pain of isolation, Beatty uses satire to avoid the nostalgia, romanticization, and dramatization of Gunnar's past that makes it impossible for him to move forward and create new models for fear of eliminating the memory and influence of previous successes. Gunnar gives his mother a strong reason to move them from Santa Monica, where he and his siblings are seemingly unaware of their ethnic affiliation or perhaps too aware of their cultural background and their affiliation to the Santa Monica community. These perceptions are illustrated in their response to their mother when she suggests going to an all-black camp, as they exclaim "Noooooo" before explaining, "Because they're different from us" (Beatty, 1996, p.41). They refused to attend an all-black summer camp because the children there "are different from us," which makes her recognize the problem of identity. The issue of identity is further remarked on by Gunnar's mate, as he suggests that Gunnar should rather join Concoction, the "organization of mixed-race kids who felt ostracized by both white and colored students" (1996, p. 205). Despite feeling of isolation and the invisible impact of racism shown by the emotional response 'feeling exposed and embarrassed' (Beatty, 1996, p.197), which includes feelings of alienation, low self-esteem, and heightened sensitivity to social dynamics involving race, Gunnar spends more time in the pre-encounter stage of his racial identity

however, the existence of his sisters who are between internalization and internalization-commitment and his mother who is in the internalization-commitment stage.

The other face of Gunnar, who makes a strong effort to fit into the white society around him, exemplifies his pre-encounter stage. His endless tries to navigate his white environment by conforming to the dominant culture's expectations, often at the expense of his racial identity, he admits: "I didn't want to be the fly in the buttermilk, so I mimicked my classmates, trying to fit in by being the class clown and all-around good sport" (Beatty, 1996, p.73). His actions then demonstrate the African American man's desire for belonging and acceptance. In the context of Black psychology, this also touches on the pressures to conform to the dominant cultural norms to avoid alienation or discrimination.

3.4.1.2 The Self-Discovery: Gunnar in the Hillside

Gunnar lives in a predominantly white neighborhood only during the first part of his life and is acclaimed as the "cool black guy" (Beatty, 1996, p. 31). After a dispute about cultural heritage and blackness, Gunnar, the narrator, and his family– consisting of his mother and two sisters – moved to Hillside, chosen by his mother, which is a predominantly African American neighborhood, plenty of whom sharing the same ideas, heritage, and feelings. Gunnar started the second round of his self-discovery. Gunnar's moving to West Los Angeles, which he called ghetto(Beatty, 1996, p.37), particularly in a predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhood called Hillside, or "the hood" as he calls it, forces him to confront his racial identity more directly. He is then quickly made aware of the contrast between his own worldview and the worldview of his new neighbors. Gunnar describes, "Moving to Hillside was like moving to another planet. Suddenly, I was surrounded by people who looked like me but seemed like strangers" (Beatty, 1996, p.53). His shock and the realization that he is now in an environment where he is no longer the racial minority, yet he feels out of place due to his previous lack of connection to his culture. Gunnar's new environment exposes him to the harsh realities of

racism and violence, which are foreign to his experiences in Santa Monica. These experiences shape Gunnar's growing awareness of the systemic nature of racism. It guides and moves him from seeing racism as an isolated incident to understanding it as a pervasive issue that affects the entire Black community. Thus, he moves to a new step in his Nigrescence journey as he says, "It wasn't just me; it was all of us. The way the teachers looked at us, the way the store owners followed us around, it was like we were all guilty of something just by being Black" (Beatty, 1996, p.125). This move, either in the place or in his personality, exposes him to his Black neighborhood struggle and the accompanying cultural shock. Gunnar's awareness of his people's pain, described as the collective experience of being treated with suspicion, contributes to group trauma, a concept in Black psychology that refers to the shared psychological impact of systemic oppression on a community. However, within Gunnar's experience, there is also potential for resilience. Recognizing that these experiences are shared fosters solidarity and collective coping mechanisms within his Black community. As a result, he begins to embrace his Black identity more fully, integrating it into his self-concept. He recognizes this as he mentions: "I stopped trying to fit in and started to stand out" (Beatty, 1996, p.128). In addition to his recognition of his full transition from being a kid to being a man," I wasn't just a kid from Hillside anymore; I was a Black man in America, and I was going to make sure everyone knew it"(Beatty, 1996, p.137). Beatty signifies Gunnar's acceptance and embrace of his racial identity by marking a significant step in his self-discovery.

Gunnar's encounters with racism scenes in the Hillside force him also to confront his real black identity and the realities of being Black in America. He discovered that living in a white-centrist neighborhood hinders his reality, so he described it as a real taste:"I got my first real taste of what it meant to be Black in America when a cop pulled me over for riding my bike at night without a light. 'Where you are going, boy?' he snarled, and I knew then that things were different here"(Beatty, 1996, p.137).

This experience also reflects one of the forms of racial trauma. Beatty describes the psychological distress caused by racial discrimination either in Santa Monica or in the Hillside. The fear, humiliation, and anger Gunnar experienced during such interactions have long-lasting effects on his mental health, contributing to anxiety and paranoia. Gunnar's experience also relates to double consciousness, which also guides Gunnar's self-discovery, where he must constantly navigate his identity within a society that views him through a lens of prejudice and discrimination. The realization that "things were different here" reflects an acute awareness of the social realities and racial dynamics that govern interactions between himself and authorities.

The reality of racism in An African neighborhood also leads Gunnar to a cultural mistrust, where he develops a heightened skepticism towards institutions and individuals from the dominant culture. While this mistrust is a protective factor against further discrimination, it also creates barriers to seeking support and resources. These result two sides in Gunnar's self-concept as he believes the development in his racial identity when he says: "I was a colored kid in Santa Monica, but to my friends, I was just another surf bum who had to ride his bike to the beach because his mother wouldn't buy him a car" (Beatty, 1996, p.101). Being perceived as "just another surf bum" has positive and negative psychological implications. On one hand, it suggests his level of social acceptance and belonging, which is crucial for mental well-being. On the other hand, Gunnar's awareness of his racial identity might lead to feelings of isolation or internal conflict, especially if his friends are unaware of or indifferent to the racial challenges he faces.

The change in environment forces Gunnar to confront his racial identity more directly. He realizes that assimilation into White society is a kind of illusion. His interactions with peers in Hillside' "Nick and the other guys" (Beatty, 1996, p.72), and the recognition of racist treatment, catalyze his movement to the encounter stage.

3.4.1.3 Gunnar's Subjectivity: Personal Desire and Collective Expectations

Although Gunnar's childhood is different from that of the majority of other African Americans, Beatty illustrates through his relationships with his schoolmates, teachers, and others how this "culturally white" upbringing does not eliminate or prevent prejudice and racist approaches. Despite his attempts to fit in and be accepted, Gunnar's African American identity is starkly highlighted at his predominantly white school, where the racist attitudes of the adolescents and employees shine through in several situations, reinforcing the established hierarchy. This latter exemplifies the counterpart of collective expectations, the white one, towards Gunnar. The conversation between Gunnar and a schoolmate when he challenges him to name the capitals of any country in the world reflects this collectiveness, but when Gunnar goes beyond the Eurocentric focus, the schoolmate cannot answer and frustratingly demands, "Well, ask me some real countries" (Beatty, 1996, p. 171). Gunnar confronts the schoolmate about what such "real countries" might be, explicitly addressing the issue of not recognizing countries as "real" because there are no "real people" living there, a label Gunnar appropriately translates to mean "white people" (Beatty, 1996, p. 172).

Concerning his personal desire, Gunnar's early life in Santa Monica is marked by his continual attempts to carve out a unique identity in a predominantly white environment. His desire to fit in and be accepted by his peers is evident in his efforts to assimilate into the local surf culture. During this pre-encounter stage of identity development, Gunnar's personal desires revolve around being seen as an individual rather than being defined by his race. However, being defined through his race was beneficial for him at certain points. His activities and friendships reflect his attempts to establish a personal identity separate from societal racial categorizations as he says: "To reach a level of consciousness that permits one to peak at the divine, one must sacrifice individual idealism" (Beatty, 1996, p.191) that shows that individual idealism is his personal goals, aspirations, or beliefs that are centered on the self. This idea

aligns with the black psychology perspective, implying a shift from self-centered ambitions to a broader, community-focused mindset.

As Gunnar becomes more integrated into the Hillside community, he learns to balance his personal desires with the collective identity and expectations of the Black community. This is particularly evident in his interactions with peers and his development as a poet and basketball player, showcasing his journey from seeking individual acceptance to embracing a shared cultural identity. Basketball, then, unifies Gunnar's personal desire and his community's collective expectations. He gives the game more attention when he becomes aware of collective racial expectations. And his personal desires become ways to express both his individuality and his connection to the broader Black experience. Thus, the move introduces him not only to his individuality but to a community where his race is a central aspect of his identity, contrasting sharply with his previous experiences. However, Beatty believes that personal desire, whatever it is, maintains the well-being of African American individuals since it is the treadmill that emphasizes his racial identity, like in Gunnar's perspective about basketball when he sees it as a life-changing:

> Scoby laughed and asked me if my mother had given me enough money for basketball shoes. I pulled two hundred dollars from an envelope marked Basketball Paraphernalia and fanned the crisp twenty-dollar bills, wondering if it was enough to change my life. (Beatty, 1996, p. 88)

Basketball is not just a sport but a cultural touchstone that may offer pathways to social mobility, respect, and recognition. The investment in basketball shoes is symbolic of Gunnar's aspiration to achieve these forms of socialization. Gunnar's self-concept, then, is evolving as he navigates personal goals and collective expectations and norms of his community.

3.4.1.4 Gunar's Well-being and Subjectivity

Gunnar experiences a cultural clash when his mother whisks him from a comfortably white, urban neighborhood and friends to the mostly black and poor hood, according to him. After experiencing a cultural confrontation with his new neighbors in which both experience "bafflement turned to judgemental indignation," he returns home and declares: "Ma, you moved to the hood!"(Beatty, 1996, p.176). This declaration profoundly highlights Gunnar's belief in the definition of culture, which is not defined just by race and country. Gunnar's belief is exposed to the harsh realities that he faces on the Hillside. He dares to go outside and asks someone for directions to a store but receives comments on his speech and clothes. Gunnar's reaction to his experience is:

> I walked to the store, not believing that some guy who ironed the sleeves on his T-shirt and belted his pants somewhere near his testicles had the nerve to insult me over how I dressed. I returned to the house, dropped the bag of groceries on the table, and shouted, "Ma, you done moved to the hood. (Beatty, 1996,p.51)

Beatty describes that Gunnar is bewildered by the comment of a boy from the neighborhood and again suffers from an identity crisis due to his moving to Hillside. Despite the fact that he faced an identity crisis when he was in the white community. Gunnar further feels misrecognized and suffers from identity issues when his scrimmage coach divides the team as per their look into two squads during practice:

> He divided us using some arbitrary criterion. White sneakers vs. black sneakers, kids who'd never been to the dentist vs. those who had. That day, it was dark, and the bottom one was cranberry red, so I was a bit confused and asked Coach which team I should play for. Coach Shimimoto said that it was a blessing to be able to play for both sides and made me substitute for whoever was tired. It was strange. (Beatty, 1996,p.144)

Unconsciously, Gunnar's coach divides the team using different criteria, but now he divides based on their black vs. red lips. Gunnar's upper lip is dark, and his bottom lip is cranberry red. It creates a problem for Gunnar and he asks his coach which team he will play for. Beatty here explores the identity crisis in Gunnar's life based on his appearance. Gunnar feels "I need more scendental approach to locating my soul"(Beatty, 1996, p.53) explaining his desire for a deeper, more profound understanding of himself beyond the external aspects of community.

Gunnar's longing for a transcendental approach shows his need to understand his inner self, which aligns with Abraham Maslow's perspective of self-actualization, which involves realizing one's full potential and seeking personal growth and fulfillment. For many African Americans, understanding and embracing cultural heritage might be a source of strength and resilience. Gunnar's quest for finding his soul covers the history, traditions, and values of the African-American community to gain a deeper sense of identity. Gunnar's state of mind and soul attract him to his immersion/immersion level of racial identity. "Soon it was time to try out my new sneakers, new basketball and new haircut" (Beatty, 1996, p. 92) signifies this moment of transformation for Gunnar. His new sneakers, basketball, and haircut are significant cultural symbols within his community, particularly among youth. They represent more than just physical or appearance changes; they are markers of identity, status, and belonging. Gunnar's change symbolizes his attempts to balance his identity with the collective expectations of his community. On the one hand, his internal struggle involves maintaining his unique identity while adopting cultural symbols that facilitate acceptance and belonging within his peer group. On the other hand, the new sneakers, basketball, and haircut are tangible ways in which Gunnar conforms to the collective expectations of his community. These items help him navigate social acceptance and respect within the cultural context of Hillside.

3.4.2 Gunnar, the Poet

Gunnar, the mulatto boy, grapples with the weight of his genealogy and ancestors. He relies on his body and feelings as key sites of self-definition through his commitment to his respective sport, basketball. His young adulthood as he shifts social and physical environments from sports jock to poet, from Santa Monica to the hood, and then from there to an upper-class white high school, and finally to college in Boston. Gunnar strikes up a friendship with Nicholas Scoby when he is paired with the "thuggish boy" in a reading of William Shakespeare's *Othello* (Beatty, 1996, p. 66), which leads to his commitment as writer and poet where he believes "Sometimes, the best way to challenge the status quo is through art. It is a powerful medium that can inspire, provoke, and push boundaries" (Beatty, 1996, p.78). However, the emergence of his poetic talent was after his failure as a dancer; it revived his awareness about his true self, the self of a black poet man. He believes: "My poetry became my weapon, my way of speaking out against the injustices I saw around me. I wasn't just writing for myself anymore; I was writing for all of us"(Beatty, 1996, p.98). He recognizes that his poetry is not just for himself but for the entire community, which signifies a deepening understanding of his racial identity and his role in the collective struggle against injustice. By using his poetry to address injustices, Gunnar embraces his identity as an African American man in America. This reflects the internalization stage in which he develops a strong, positive identity and a commitment to social justice. Gunnar's shift from individual expression to collective advocacy illustrates then the importance of solidarity imposed by Beatty. Gunnar's poetry becomes a tool for clarifying his hidden self and empowering the community.

The relationship with poetry reflects Gunnar's self-growth and his evolving sense of social responsibility. His realization that he writes for his whole community underscores his self-change from self-centeredness to a broader concern for his community. This change indicates Gunnar's development into a socially conscious individual who recognizes the

interconnectedness of his fate with that of his community. It marks a significant step in his psychological and moral development. Gunnar is just like many African American figures, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and James Baldwin, who have all used their literary talents to confront social issues and advocate for civil rights. Gunnar's actions resonate with this historical legacy, suggesting a continuity of cultural resistance and resilience. He admits, "It's corny, but I think poems are echoes of the voices in your head and from your past. Your sisters, your father, and your ancestors are talking to you and through you (Beatty, 1996,p. 79), and he has a secure and positive sense of his Black identity. He recognizes the importance of his heritage and feels connection to his original community and ancestors. The reference to poems as "echoes of the voices in your head and from your past" (Beatty, 1996, p. 79) signifies a profound connection to his cultural and familial history. Thus,he recognizes and values the influence of his ancestors and family members in shaping his identity. Gunnar then demonstrates a secure and positive sense of his Black identity, an integrated cultural heritage, and a recognition of the collective influence of his family and ancestors on his identity, which are key aspects of the internalization-commitment stage of his self.

Conclusion

To comprehend the psychological fusion between Black and White individuals, this chapter examined the reactions, behaviors, and perspectives of African American male and female characters toward themselves as individuals and their encounters with whites as a collective entity. On the one hand, Dana foregrounds the importance of place, homeland, and neighborhood in shaping distinct understandings of Blackness or Afro-descendant identity. On the other hand, Gunnar reflects the presence of psychological differences within characters as a notable feature, exploring psychological realities through satire, poetry, basketball, and even dance.

Both Dana and Gunnar, considered African-descended or mulatto characters, experience the pre-encounter, encounter, and immersion-emersion stages as they face real and frightening challenges. Dana's development of racial identity is deeply tied to her sense of belonging and connection to her roots, which is evident in her emphasis on community and place. Her journey through these stages is marked by an evolving understanding of her true self in relation to her heritage and the people around her.

In contrast, Gunnar's development of racial identity is explored through his expressions of art and sport. His use of satire, poetry, basketball, and dance is also a means to navigate and critique the development of self. Gunnar's progression is characterized by his creative responses to his experiences and the social expectations placed upon him.

Ultimately, both characters illustrate their invisibility and subjectivity in diverse pathways.

Chapter Four

The Vanished Other: Exploring Faces of Duality

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Introduction

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Introduction

Butler and Beatty each represent the conflict of racial identity development and historical trauma from different perspectives. They offer distinct yet complementary views on interracial and intraracial relationships and the intersection of memory, culture, and survival in the African American experience. The prominence of white characters in modern African American works raises an important question: Could this be seen as a form of reconciliation or a survival strategy for African American authors in response to how they have been represented in Western literature? However, their protagonists, Dana and Gunnar, move approximately through the same experience of marriage, yet the differences in their historical contexts, cultural conflicts, trauma, and mental health shape their racial identity development in profoundly different ways.

4.1 Miscegenation Between Tragedy and Self-Discovery

Miscegenation, defined as the interbreeding of people considered to be of different racial types (such as Black/Mulatto and White), is a prominent theme in African American literature, particularly in later works. This concept is often explored through the lenses of tragedy and self-discovery, reflecting the complex social, cultural, and emotional ramifications of interracial relationships within a racially stratified society.

With the rise of post-racial ideas, interracial marriage became increasingly common due to the social assimilation of African Americans. However, its impact on the individual sense of self continues to be a significant area of exploration. Butler employs the device of time travel to offer, from a psychological perspective, a meditation on the nature of relationships and freedom. By creating a metaphorical marriage between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she bridges past and present, as seen through the experiences of her heroine and her relationships.

In *Kindred*, Butler examines ideologies of white superiority and patriarchy, particularly in the context of power dynamics and miscegenation. These themes are embodied in Dana's interactions with Kevin and Rufus, highlighting the reality of race, gender, and historical power relations.

4.1.1 Dana and Kevin Marriage: Identity and Self-growth

Dana, the mulatto woman based on her race, and Kevin, the white man, married after a series of events and feelings that led to various changes in Dana's personality. Butler expresses the late twentieth-century woman through Dana, who is forced to confront her familial history in slavery and her marriage with a white man as an African-origin woman in her present. Dana's marriage story is set in California in 1976, the year that marked the decade that declared interracial marriage constitutional in America, a significant event since the protagonist is recently married to her white husband, Kevin Franklin. Butler explores the mixed-race relationship between an African American woman and a white man in the 1970s, reflecting the socio-political tensions related to racism and sexism. Both experiences challenged her sense of self and her notion of freedom.

However, they were in the present, and intraracial relationships were interpreted differently. As described by Dana, Buz, the agency clown, interpreted Dana and Kevin's collaboration as 'nonsense': "You gonna write some poor-nography together!" (Butler, 1979, p.55). On the other hand, Dana sees Kevin as a friend. She said: "I learned more about my new writer friend. Kevin Franklin, his name was, and he'd not only gotten his book published, but he had made a big paperback sale"(Butler, 1979, p.55).

Dana operated in a predominantly white space, common in the pre-encounter stage when individuals might not yet have a strong sense of their Black identity as central to their self-concept. However, Butler portrayed Dana as an empowered agent in her contemporary environment. Dana acted of her own volition. Her twentieth-century environment did not

suppress, commodify, or abuse her self-identity. Dana embraced her right to choose her partner. Dana's choice of Kevin, the white man she married despite the misgivings of their respective families, was not subversive or coerced.

During one of Dana's trips through time and space, her husband accidentally traveled back in history with his wife. This situation led to a series of harrowing predicaments for the mulatto-white couple. Here, Butler offers two significant illustrations of Dana's desires and interest in her relationship with Kevin. The first occurred after her first trip to nineteenth-century Maryland. In a remembrance, Dana recalled her first date with Kevin and the aftermath of that date when she remembered: "Sometime during the early hours of the next morning when we lay together, tired and content in my bed, I realized -that I knew less about loneliness than I had thought and much less than I would know when he went away" (Butler, 1979, p. 57). The second illustration occurs when Kevin and Dana are reunited after Dana's sudden return to the present leaves Kevin in the nineteenth century. The chronological differences between past and present in time and between California and Maryland revived Dana's self-discovery of herself as a Black woman. They were still separated when she returned to the past, as Kevin had left the Weylin plantation. Kevin's separation lasted five years; for Dana, it lasted eight days. After safely returning home, Dana initiated a comprehension reunion with her husband despite the pain of her recent self-dissonance inflicted while in the past. Of their homecoming, Dana recollected that Kevin "He did. He was so careful, so fearful of hurting me. He did hurt me, of course. I had known he would, but it did not matter. We were safe. He was home. I had brought him back. That was enough" (Butler, 1979, p.191).

At a point, Kevin becomes stranded in the nineteenth century, unable to return to the twentieth century without the aid of his wife, whose power to transport herself and others across time and space keeps the novel shrouded in mystery. In light of the miscegenation visible throughout the enslaved communities, it is ironic that Kevin and Dana were assigned and

expected to maintain separate sleeping quarters since it was clear, by nineteenth-century standards, that Dana was Kevin's concubine. Despite the horrific nature of the couple's ordeal, they returned to their own time with a newfound sense of understanding and knowledge. Such insight not only concerned their separate identities as an African American woman and a Western man but also concerned recognizing how their relationship as an interracial couple was deeply connected with the past.

By insisting on maintaining their status as husband and wife as long as they were in the historical past, although some individuals continued to know them only as enslavers and enslaved persons (Rufus's mother and father, for example), Dana and Kevin managed to exhibit the type of subjective duality that Butler suggested was familiar to some interracial couples. Negotiating this duality was sometimes tricky, especially for Dana, but Butler described it as a way to safeguard their matrimonial bond.

When Kevin and Dana were in nineteenth-century Maryland at the same time, the only way for them to be together was to make a public pretense of being master and enslaved woman, playing along with the prevailing belief that a Black woman was the sexual property of a white man. However, as Dana realized, the more often one played such a role, the nearer the pretending came to reality: "I felt almost as though I was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for my supposed owner. I went away feeling uncomfortable, vaguely ashamed" (Butler, 1979, p. 97). Moreover, she feared that Kevin began to fit into the white, male, Southern routine too easily.

In the end, Dana said: "I did not realize how much I missed [Kevin], how I depended on the sense of identity he gave me until I felt alone in another century with no identity at all" (Butler, 1979, p.189), where Butler expressed a profound sense of identity loss when Dana separated from Kevin, acknowledging how much her identity was interconnected with his

presence. Dana's realization highlighted how relationships and external perceptions often shaped her identity, particularly within oppressive systems.

4.1.2 Dana and Rufus: Historical Trauma and Resilience

The novel's central action revolves around Dana, an African American woman who is mysteriously transported across time and space to save the life of her white male ancestor, Rufus Weylin. According to the novel's Wellsian logic, Rufus must survive enough to father Dana's maternal family line with an enslaved woman. If, during any of these trips, Dana fails to save Rufus or chooses to kill him before this event takes place, Dana and her entire maternal lineage will cease to exist. Through this precarious rule, Butler introduces a complex power structure that complicates the victim-oppressor relationship. Through Dana and Rufus's interactions, Butler revises the politics of slavery by blurring these distinctions. She emphasizes the psychological entanglements and emotional dependencies within the institution of slavery. This relationship shapes Dana's sense of identity, agency, and survival and reveals how historical trauma ripples across generations.

Dana describes her relationship with Rufus through a symbolic lens when she reflects, "We had fifteen full days together this time. I marked them off on the calendar, June 19 through July 3. With some kind of reverse symbolism, Rufus called me back on July 4" (Butler, 1979, p.244). By evoking the democratic ideals of the Declaration of Independence, Dana's experience is a reverse symbol of an enduring, undemocratic reality. The second time Dana is transported into the past, she asks Rufus how he visualized her before she appeared. He responds, "I could see part of the room, and there were books all around, more than in Daddy's library. You were wearing pants like a man, the way you are now" (Butler, 1979, p.145). Rufus's perception of Dana reflects her modern identity. However, their relationship is also central to her self-discovery, as he embodies her link to both her ancestry and the traumatic legacy of slavery. Butler introduces Dana's preoccupation with her mixed-race lineage when

Dana saves Rufus as a child and learns he is her "several times great grandfather" (Butler, 1979, p.28).

Rufus's connection to Dana is further complicated by his triangular relationship with Alice, another enslaved woman who becomes both his object of desire and the mother of his children. Butler describes this relationship as "an excruciating relationship, one compounded by rivalry, passion, guilt, love, lust, punishment, pride, power, and implacable hatred" (Butler, 1979, p.272). The triangular entanglement between Dana, Rufus, and Alice epitomizes the painful legacies of slavery, as a volatile mix of emotions and power struggles marks it. These relationships force Dana to confront the harsh realities of her lineage and the complexities of her identity development with the influence of historical trauma.

When Rufus tries to protest by telling Dana that "Niggers cannot marry white people!" such a thing is impossible since "it is against the law"(Butler, 1979, p.60), Dana knows that if she wants Rufus's help in the future, should she return, then she had better tell Rufus as much of the truth as she understands it herself. "It is here," she says. "But it is not where we come from"(Butler, 1979, p.60). Dana's relationship with Rufus symbolizes the internal conflict of balancing her present-day knowledge of racial equality with the powerlessness and vulnerability she faced in the past. This dissonance creates a psychological fragmentation, where Dana is forced to navigate multiple versions of herself, one who is strong and independent and another who must submit to survive. Dana always reminds Rufus not to call her "nigger" and carefully explains to him that "[W]here [she and Kevin] come from, whites and Blacks can marry"(Butler, 1979, p.61). According to Butler, Rufus represents the source of trauma that is transformed for future generations, as he is the representation of the violence of slavery. Dana's relationship with him confirms the trauma of enslavement, which is not confined to the past but reverberates through time, shaping the identities and psyches of African

Americans in the present. Per this, Dana's ability to maintain a sense of self in the face of Rufus's dominance reflects a form of cultural resilience.

In the storm part, Dana might make readers cringe when she confesses her inability to love her master and rapist, Rufus, or she may make them blush by forcing them to confront the uncomfortable reality of a woman caught in a powerless and abusive relationship, where survival blurs the lines of morality and autonomy. Dana's lingering smile serves as a haunting example of the unexplained, painful feelings that African American women encapsulate the emotional scars left by oppression. Through this scene, Butler emphasizes that the problem transcends mere racial binaries of Black and White; it is rooted in the continuous appropriation of culture and the falsification of history.

Butler promotes Dana's feelings towards Rufus the very first time she sees him as an adult, and he is getting a beating from an enslaved man named Isaac. Dana saves him for both her and Kevin's sake. Once she knows Rufus will survive, she realizes that Rufus had raped Isaac's wife, Alice, who was also his childhood friend. Rufus's behavior reflected the norms of that time, and Dana must understand how Rufus viewed Black women differently than White ones. To Rufus, Alice had no right to resist. He says, "I would not have hurt her if she had not just kept saying no" (Butler, 1979, p. 123). Dana replies, "She had the right to say no," but Rufus's antebellum behaviors prove his belief that he has no rights. Rufus smiles at the thought that she will be punished for what happened. Because Alice helped Isaac escape, she would be enslaved if caught, and Rufus could wield his power more freely. Dana's inner monologue mirrors her fear: "If Rufus could turn so quickly on a life-long friend, how long would it take him to turn on me?" (Butler,1979, p.123). Dana's relationship with Rufus is based on their limited trust. Throughout the novel, Rufus repeatedly breaks Dana's trust until Dana must defend herself from his physical and emotional influence over her. This relationship reflects

Dana's self-definition as a Black woman whose relationship with her master is different from other women.

Shuttling between the two White men in her life, Dana is aware not only of the blood link between herself and Rufus but of the double link of gender and race that unites Rufus and Kevin. The convergence of these men in Dana's life not only dramatizes the ease with which even a "progressive" white man falls into the cultural pattern of dominance, but it also suggests as well an uncanny synonymy of the words "husband" and "master." However, the conflict between two white men is not the only challenge that faces Dana, But a brutal conflict of a Black woman with White men.

4.2 Dana and Alice: Two Faces of The New Afro-American Woman

The relationship between Dana and Alice resembles the interracial friendship that leads to Dana's identity fragmentation. The time that Dana starts to recognize that all Black Americans are enslaved in the historical past, Rufus interprets Alice in another way: "Alice is my friend", "She's no slave, either" ,"She is free, born free like her mother. (Butler, 1979, p.28)

Dana and Alice are not only the same in their destiny as black women but also the same identity fragmentation experience. For Dana, traveling between two worlds forces her to confront the fragmentation of her identity as a modern, independent back woman and as someone forced to navigate the conditions of enslavement. On the other hand, Alice represents a woman whose identity is shaped entirely by the reality of the plantation system, where her status constantly undermines her sense of self as property to Rufus. Dana and Alice are not the only black women whom Butler places in the position of racialized bondage. Other than them, Butler inscribes a total of three women who are trapped within the cycle of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse that characterizes the daily experiences of enslaved women. They include Alice's mother, Tess, a barren field enslaved person, and Sarah, the plantation's cook.

Dana’s and Alice’s resistance reveal two contrasting approaches to survival under slavery, shaped by their perspectives and psychological resilience. Butler shows Dana’s resistance by leveraging her modern perception and relationships, allowing her to reassure her self-concept without internalizing the ideology of white supremacy. Also, Dana’s repeated efforts to help Alice escape and her ability to return to the present symbolize psychological resistance. In contrast, though equally significant, Alice’s resistance is more tragic and subdued. The experience of rape, as depicted in Rufus and Alice’s forced relationship, is compared with the consensual interracial desire represented by Dana and Kevin’s marriage. Alice’s defiance against Rufus and her attempts to escape reflect her desire for autonomy. Still, the relentless physical and psychological assaults, mainly through sexual and psychological violence, erode her will to continue resisting. Her painful experience is introduced by Dana when she wonders, “His mind was on Alice. She was stronger now, and his patience with her was gone. I had thought that eventually, he would just rape her again—and again” (Butler, 1979, p.163).

Alice's eventual suicide, though devastating, represents her final act of agency in a world where all other options have been stripped away. While Dana's resistance allows for some escape and resilience, Alice's resistance, shaped by the brutal immediacy of her circumstances, confirms the tragic limits imposed by the institution of slavery. Both forms of resistance highlight the psychological consequences of oppression, with Dana's survival offering a glimpse of hope and Alice's fate illustrating the devastating consequences of slavery. The crucial reality in *Kindred* is that Dana, who closely resembles Alice, eventually becomes vulnerable to Rufus's poisoned affections following her maternal ancestor's tragic suicide.

This difficulty of Dana and Alice’s relationship is compounded by the fact that Dana continually places herself in the service of rescuing Alice from Rufus’s grasp. These seemingly self-sacrificing gestures lead to the assumption that Alice’s story is the other face of African American women’s self-consciousness. Again, however, Dana’s efforts are hardly selfless;

instead, they are marked throughout by self-interest and anxiety about her dual identity, a mulatto woman who is married to a white man or a black enslaved woman that she has been unable to confront except by traveling back in time.

For the nineteenth-century enslaved woman, few possibilities for self-definition existed, and, indeed, the improvisation of self was tantamount to a revolutionary act. Alice's life exemplifies the typical life of the enslaved black woman, for she has no uncompromising options. Even though Alice follows the condition of her "free" mother, who advises her to marry a "free" man, slavery still engulfs Alice and later her progeny. After Alice's enslaved father was beaten and sold for visiting his family, her mother, speaking from her own experience, cautions Alice that "marrying a slave is almost as bad as being a slave" (Butler, 1979, p.156). Although freeborn, Alice forfeits her freedom by assisting her enslaved lover's thwarted escape. Rufus purchases her because of his complex feelings for her, but his overriding feelings are physical lust and bodily possession.

Unlike Dana, Alice's concubinage causes her a plethora of emotional responses. All of these factors inform her perception of selfhood as a unique subject. For example, she hates her inability to protect herself by slaying Rufus; she loathes recognizing and appreciating the relative advantages concubinage affords her and despises that she may one day become accustomed to her odious condition. Tragically, the opportunity for Alice's private self to develop or to find expression never materializes. This lack of personal development is indicated in the doubling of Dana and Alice, for Dana symbolically represents what Alice might have been in a freer society. Alice's life, for example, is a cautionary tale for Dana. Butler does not use the character of Alice only to give another image of Dana but also to highlight Dana's duality as an African American woman. She physically resembles her as Rufus sees her: "You know," he said, peering at me, "you look a little like Alice's mother. If you wore a dress and tied your hair up, you'd look a lot like her." He sat comfortably beside me on the bed"

(Butler,1979, p.30). In some ways, then, Dana's empathy toward herself and her ancestors allows her to keep such a close guard over her ancestor, Alice Greenwood, the mother of Hagar.

Despite their differences in personality, Dana and Alice both represent different aspects of the "strong Black woman" stereotype. Butler portrays their relationship as a deep connection that enables each woman to carry on the other's legacy. This inheritance is not about legitimizing property or personal identity but rather about fostering an awareness of the other's enduring presence. This power is pictured through Butler's focus on kinship recognition when Dana reflects: "I could feel her, hear her, even see her at times. We were tied to each other somehow beyond any real understanding, both of us caught in something that went deeper than our differences, deeper than time" (Butler,1979, p.74).

4.3 Slavery and Dana's Struggle for Self-esteem

Slavery is viewed as a systematic intrusion on the African American's development of self. Dana's journey through time repeatedly challenges her sense of self. As a black woman living in a pretended post-racial period in her twentieth-century life, Dana is an individualistic and self-reliant black woman. She begins with a strong sense of independence and self-worth, as shown when Kevin offers to support her financially so that she can concentrate on her writing. Dana rejects his offer as she remembers, thinking of her aunt and uncle, that even people "who loved [her] could demand more of [her] than [she] could give-and expect their demands to be met because [she] owed them" (Butler, 1979, p.109). Another scene where Butler confirms Dana's self-worth is when she refuses Kevin's lunch offer: "Listen, I have been on that kind of diet." "I'm all right," I lied, embarrassed. "I do not want anything" (1979, p.56).

Dana works various jobs through the agency, which is not typically identified as women's work, to support herself while she writes. Their aunt and uncle "wanted me to be a nurse, a secretary, or a teacher like my mother. At the very best, a teacher." (Butler,1979, p.56). Attempting initially to satisfy her guardians, Dana enrolls in such classes but consciously

chooses to discontinue them and forge her way despite financial repercussions. Consequently, she works with a blue-collar temporary placement agency that she ironically calls “a slave market” (Butler,1979, p.52).

However, Dana rejects gender-specific societal expectations when forced upon her in the twentieth century. Dana chooses to define herself instead of accepting the definitions of others. She challenges familial and societal gender expectations to be a writer even though she only writes short stories and some newspaper articles. According to Butler, her dislike of secretarial work also surfaces in her relationship with Kevin, her “Kindred spirit”(1979, p. 57), who is also a writer. Kevin naively asks her at the beginning of their relationship to type a manuscript for him. The first time, she reluctantly consents out of a misplaced sense of duty; the second and third times, she categorically refuses. Being true to her sense of self, Dana chooses what she will and will not do. She refuses to accept roles that place her in a subordinate position. As a post-racial black woman, she consciously nurtures her private self. She freely creates herself in ways unimaginable and unavailable to her predecessors, as her trips to the past amply reveal. When she lives in the past, however, Dana learns firsthand why her ancestors were unable to resist their enslavement and why they had to conceal their individuality.

When Dana is transported to the Antebellum South, she starts internalizing a society where her freedom is yanked, and she is reduced to property. This causes her internal battle between maintaining her dignity and adapting for survival, illustrating the tension between self-esteem and the dehumanizing effects of slavery. Dana’s ability to retain some control over her situation despite the horrors she faces is a testament to her resilience and self-awareness. However, the scene of children who were playing a game of selling enslaved people makes her rethink her situation. Children said:

> I’m worth more than two hundred dollars, Sammy!” she protested. “You sold Martha for five hundred dollars!”“You shut your mouth,” said the boy. “You ain’t supposed to

> say nothing. When Marse Tom bought Mama and me, we didn't say nothing." I turned away from the arguing children, feeling tired and disgusted. I wasn't even aware that Kevin was following me until he spoke. (Butler, 1979, p.99)

This conversation between the two children, where they argue over their relative "worth" in monetary terms, confirms the way slavery reduces human beings to mere property. Also, it shows how the enslaved, from a young age, internalize their commodification, measuring their value in terms of their market price. The children's understanding of self-worth is tragically distorted by the context of slavery, where their value is tied to their physical labor and the whims of their masters. With this dialogue, Butler highlights that enslaved children are not treated as individuals with personal value but as objects whose worth is quantified. This devaluation directly impacts their self-esteem, as their sense of identity is related to their worth to others, not who they are.

Dana's reaction to this dialogue reflects her hate for her historical past. Dana shook her head, saying: "My God, why can't we go home? This place is diseased"(1979, p.99), which reflects her revulsion at the brutal realities of the past. Then, it reveals the psychological and mental results of slavery. Dana sees slavery as a diseased system, one that corrupts not only the physical and emotional well-being of the enslaved but also their understanding of self-worth. Dana's reaction is also a powerful reflection of how slavery erodes her self-esteem within the coming events of the novel. Witnessing the children argue about their value in monetary terms forces her to confront the extent of dehumanization inherent in the institution of slavery. The children's lack of self-acceptance of their circumstances is excruciating for Dana, as it demonstrates how normalized this degradation has become for those born into slavery. This scene lasts for a long time in Dana's mind. She shakes her head, rubbed her hand across her brow, saying:"I know some of those kids will live to see freedom, after they've slaved away

their best years. But it will be too late when freedom comes to them. Maybe it's already too late (Butler, 1979, p. 100).

For Dana, who comes from a time where slavery is viewed as a moral atrocity, this moment serves as a harsh reminder of how history has treated Black bodies as disposable. Her reaction—her horror, disgust, and desperate desire to return to the present—reflects her internal struggle to reconcile her modern sense of self-worth with the brutal realities of the past. Dana's profound emotional reaction to this scene also reflects the novel's broader theme of historical trauma. Her desire to escape represents a physical need to flee the past and a psychological need to preserve her sense of identity and self-esteem. In the antebellum South, maintaining self-worth is nearly impossible for those enslaved because their humanity is constantly denied. For Dana, the past represents a place where self-esteem is continually under attack, and her reaction illustrates her growing fear that prolonged exposure to this world might erode her sense of self.

Butler, through this scene and its reaction, emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of slavery on self-esteem. While the children argue about their worth in dollars, Dana's disgust reflects the modern perspective that human beings cannot be reduced to commodities. Her wish to leave this "diseased" place is tied to the broader theme of the novel—how slavery's legacy of dehumanization and commodification lingers and impacts both personal and collective identity across generations.

Similarly, Rufus's character depicts how power distorts self-esteem. Although he shows solidarity as a child, by adulthood, he gains entitlement as a white male master, which overrides his self-esteem. Rufus's controlling nature, especially towards Alice and Dana, reveals his deep-rooted insecurity. Instead of the healthy self-image he should have, Rufus finds acceptance through dominance and possession, reflecting the toxic effects of slavery. Rufus affected Dana's self-esteem through his treatment of her ancestor, Alice. Initially a free woman, Alice is eventually enslaved and forced into a relationship with Rufus, which makes Dana

wonder about it when she says: Alice Greenwood. How would she marry this boy? Or would it be marriage? (1979, p.29). Over time, Alice's spirit is crushed, and her sense of self-worth diminishes as she is deprived of agency over her body and her life. Alice's eventual suicide is a tragic reflection of her lost identity and self-esteem, mirroring the destructive power of slavery on an individual's sense of self.

Despite all these reasons and struggles that affect Dana's self-esteem, she insists through her modern personality that she maintains her dignity. Butler depicts this challenge through the following scene:

> I thought that could be me—standing there with a rope around my neck, waiting to be led away like someone's dog!" I stopped, looked down at him, then went on softly. "I'm not property, Kevin. I'm not a horse or a sack of wheat. If I have to seem to be property and accept limits on my freedom for Rufus's sake, then he also has to accept limits—on his behavior toward me. He has to leave me enough control of my own life to make a living look better to me than killing and dying (Butler, 1979, p.247)

When Dana says, "If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom," she acknowledges the necessity of conforming outwardly to survive within the antebellum South. She reflects on her moving into an early immersion-emersion stage. However, Dana draws a line in her psyche and refuses to allow external judgments to define her authentic self. In addition, she confronts the harsh realities of racial oppression, leading her to assert her humanity and reject the notion of being seen as property. While she is not entirely immersed in a radical rejection of white society, she insists on maintaining self-control, which shows the psychological strength needed to resist internalized oppression. Dana's ability to retain her sense of self despite external pressures is a powerful depiction of resistance and self-preservation.

Butler applies critical portrayal to 19th- and early 20th-century representations regarding interracial and intraracial relationships. In identity development, she exposes the hidden interconnections between cultural discourses of marriage and miscegenation. Through her protagonists, she reaches that critical focus on race, which has created a blind spot around the possibility that questions of relationships circulated simultaneously with race.

4.4 Redefining the Black Self: Gunnar between Two Cultures

Beatty explores African American identity from the psychological impact of historical disconnection in the African American community. Through his protagonist, Gunnar, he speaks to a comprehensive sense of historical disconnection experienced by many African Americans, notably in the post-Civil Rights era. Gunnar encapsulates the upset of cultural memory and the alienation from one's roots that has occurred due to centuries of systemic oppression, colonialism, and forced assimilation. Gunnar indicates that "No one knew enough to be embarrassed at not knowing our histories, much less those of any of the poster board Negro heroes on the walls" (Beatty, 1996, p.11), where he focuses on the profound alienation that no one is embarrassed by their ignorance of Black history. Beatty confirms this alienation using irony, "the only person ever to run away into slavery," to critique the absurdities of Black racial identity formation and self-concept when the culture is distorted history. Beatty clarifies the impact of the post-civil Rights era on his identity and the collective identity when he mentions the reversal of enslaved individuals running away from bondage into freedom serves as a metaphor for how African Americans, especially in the post-Civil Rights era, might feel dissonance by the expectations of society. The expression "running into slavery" symbolizes how oppression conditions African American individuals to seek comfort in familiar forms of subjugation rather than risk the unknown of true liberation.

Gunnar held significant enjoyment in appearing to be a misguided tool of the white establishment in order to poke fun at the New African Politicized Pedantic Yahoos, which

indicates the post-Civil Rights era. Beatty represents this era as it is characterized by disillusionment with the gap between the African American legal victories of the Sixties and racism. Beatty reveals that the optimism of the Civil Rights Movement has vanished, and African Americans are still fighting with new forms of oppression. This disillusionment fuels Gunnar's confusion about the actual African American identity. Especially when he would appear confused and eager for enlightenment until called upon:

> You, the proud young warrior obviously of Watusi stock, what white propaganda infests your fertile African mind?" "How can a bunch of people like yourselves be so fucking stupid?" In Afrocentric slapstick, an offended neophyte would smash a bean pie in my face and ban me from the promised land". (Beatty, 1996, p.96)

The satirical exchange reflects the psychological toll of racial disillusionment in the post-Civil Rights era. The clash between traditional African heritage and the everyday struggles of African Americans reveals the sense of identity confusion.

When Scoby first introduces Gunnar to jazz, he tells Gunnar his plan to listen to the entire canon alphabetically, but "No faux African back-to-the-bush bullshit recorded post-1965" (Beatty, 1996, p. 67). Beatty critiques the movement's results, especially its later incarnations, as "faux" and commercialized because of cultural displacement with how African Americans were trying to reconnect with their past in ways that lacked genuine depth.

Gunnar Kaufman, as he assimilates to a new environment, he recognizes the challenge inherited by him just of being an African American man, even if he is a light-skinned Mulatto. After a dispute about cultural heritage and blackness, Gunnar's decision to follow his mother's steps to move to Hillside reveals his self-recognition, which he insists on when he says, "Me is born and raised there on a piece of land owned by his father while he works for the LAPD as a "Nigger whisperer" (Beatty, 1996, p.20). Beatty depicts Kaufman's cultural mistrust when he

protects himself in this context; this refers to the skepticism or wariness that African Americans feel toward dominant (often white) society.

On one hand, Gunnar's experience of cultural mistrust is rooted in his awareness of the societal expectations placed upon him as an African American man, even though he is light-skinned. Recognizing his cultural heritage and racial identity is central to his self-definition. Gunnar's move to Hillside, a more racially diverse neighborhood, marks a shift in his self-recognition. It reflects his alignment with his African American identity, not his authentic one but the one he seeks, and the complicated relationship he has with a culture that externally is his culture, but internally, he struggles to accept it. The decision to move is Gunnar's way of individuality and heritage, stepping into an environment where he feels more aligned with the Black experience, even as his father works as a "Nigger whisperer." This role highlights the stress between integration and survival.

On the other hand, Gunnar's cultural mistrust here might reflect his rejection of the white-dominated space he previously occupied and his growing awareness that assimilation might not be the solution to self-acceptance. Instead, he embraces his Blackness, even though the systemic forces of racism still surround him, evidenced by his father's role within law enforcement. Gunnar's journey illustrates how cultural mistrust shapes his self-recognition and leads him to question how he fits within both Black and White communities, ultimately choosing to align more with his inherited cultural identity despite the challenges it brings.

Beatty starts his novel with this problem when Gunnar declares the harsh reality of assimilation in the Western community; he states: "In the quest for equality, black folks have tried everything. We have begged, revolted, entertained, and are still treated like shit. Nothing works, so why suffer the slow deaths of toxic addiction and the American work ethic when the immediate gratification of suicide awaits?" (Beatty,1996, p.2). Gunnar emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's unique cultural and historical experience. He recognizes

that traditional understanding of Black African culture addresses African Americans' challenges. Through his declaration, Gunnar centers the need for a loud speech to consider the impact of chronic stress, discrimination, and the internalization of underestimating societal messages. Beatty uses the adjectives toxic addiction and the American work ethic to describe the Western culture and to ensure that its impact of psychological oppression is not inherited but also faced by the modern generations.

4.5 Gunnar's Friendship: Intraracial relationships and Self-concept

During the first part of his life, Gunnar lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, where he was praised as the "cool Black guy" (Beatty, 1996, p. 31). Beatty portrays Gunnar's childhood as distinct from that of many other African Americans, but despite this cultural difference, Gunnar still faces the same racial prejudices. Through the remarks of his classmates, teachers, and others, Beatty demonstrates that Gunnar's "culturally white" upbringing does not shield him from racism or discriminatory treatment.

At the predominantly white, multicultural school, a doctor conducting physical exams on the children advocates for a "colorblind" approach, suggesting people should avoid saying things like "Black people are lecherous, violent, natural-born criminals" (Beatty, 1996, p. 35). The doctor's remarks, though framed as promoting equality, reveal underlying racist stereotypes. His subconscious prejudices serve as a symbol of the broader white community's implicit bias, where such harmful beliefs are often disguised under the guise of neutrality.

Beatty uses verbal irony to highlight the tension between what is said and the deeper, prejudiced meanings behind the words. Through this irony, Beatty confirms the pressure that Gunnar experiences as he recognizes the contradictions between self-acceptance and underlying racism. This reflects Gunnar's self-awareness as he becomes increasingly attuned to the subtle and overt biases that shape his interactions with others. Ultimately, this awareness

drives Gunnar to seek his authentic self in his intraracial relationships and a deeper understanding of his place within a racially charged environment.

Beatty engages with the critical memory of race men and race leaders in African American culture and history. Gunnar's experiences of friendship vary across different contexts. He embodies multiple identities: as a working-class African American, a gang member, and a student in higher education. Throughout the novel, there are moments when Gunnar and his friends confront strategies of selfhood that revolve around concepts like "cool-posing" or being "punked for life." These experiences demonstrate the confrontation of Black racial identity. Gunnar, at his first experience of high school, does not entirely recognize the reality of his racial identity:

> I opened the steel front door and stepped into the deserted vestibule, looking for some middle school guidance. There was none to be found. No signs directed me towards fall registration. I walked through the metal detector and went looking for the Dean's office to pick up my schedule. (Beatty 1996, p.64)

His reaction symbolizes a sense of disconnection. He is physically present in this new environment but is searching for direction, which indicates a lack of self-understanding and self-acceptance. This situation indicates Gunnar's pre-encounter stage, where the search for the Dean's office might be seen as a metaphorical search for acceptance and belonging within an environment where he may feel like an outsider.

Gunnar is included in a local gang called the Gun Toting Hooligans, who ironically never used guns, for as the narrator notes, "Who'd suspect a gang called Gun Totin' Hooligans in a vicious gangland lassoing?" (Beatty, 1996, p. 111). Beatty chooses "Gun Totin' Hooligans" as a name to reflect with stereotypes that evoke images of violence and criminality, which reflects the actual situation at that period. He highlights how personal and collective identities, even names, are often developed through societal judgments and prejudices. These judges

underline the African Americans' failure to assimilate because it bolsters negative racial stereotypes and seemingly substantiates ideas about their racial inferiority. This is made clear when Gunnar's best friend, Scoby, fluffs one of the speeches in *Othello:*

> The crowd started cheering him on as if he were one of those kids stricken with cystic fibrosis taking his first baby steps on a telethon at two o'clock in the morning. "Come on, guy, you can do it." Two white girls, one of whom had just nailed Desdemona minutes earlier, boldly strode onstage, massaged Scoby's rock-hard hypertensive shoulders, and whispered honey-voiced encouragement in his ear: "You can do it, big boy." (Beatty, 1996, p.77)

Beatty's use of the ironic question about the gang name suggests that African Americans might have difficulty confronting low self-esteem resulting from the complexity of such groups due to their labels, which leads to a deeper examination of how identity is constructed about White and Black societal views. Gunnar's participation with the gang exemplifies the conflict between African American identity and the expectations of his peers, especially Scoby and Psycho Loco. Gunnar's relationships with the gang members represent Gunnar's immersion into the realities of inner-city life.

Gunnar's involvement with the local gang brings him into direct conflict with the police, culminating in a disturbing encounter where he is brutally beaten by his father, who is a police officer. This scene highlights the issue of police violence disproportionately affecting African Americans, a significant point in the novel. The absurdity of the situation is emphasized by the fact that it is Gunnar's father, a figure traditionally associated with protection and care, who embodies the brutal force of a system that targets African Americans. Gunnar and his father resemble the kind of intraracial relationships that affect the development of African American identity negatively. Gunnar's father becomes a representation of the police violence that plagues African American communities. Gunnar represents the impact of his father: "My father

was a sketch artist for the LAPD, and he was rarely around. His absence was a constant presence in our lives, shaping us in ways we didn't fully understand until much later" (Beatty, 1996, p.84). This encounter with his father is a stark moment of racial awakening for Gunnar. However, It develops his racial identity and transforms him to the immersion-emersion stage. Gunnar reflects on how his father has influenced his understanding of Blackness. This awareness indicates a growing consciousness of his familial relationships and their impact on his self-concept. Beatty emphasizes the connection between the African American's present experiences and their ancestors' inherited memories and traumas. Through this inclusion of such issues, Beatty promotes the understanding of stereotypes and prejudices that undoubtedly are familiar to many African Americans.

Further, focus on this intraracial relationship, Psycho Loco deepens the connection of Gunnar with his origin neighborhood when Gunnar says: "To ensure that the Friday nights didn't turn into a trendy happening for whities bold enough to spelunk into the depths of the ghetto, Psycho Loco stationed armed guards at the gate to keep out the blue-eyed soulsters" (Beatty, 1996, p. 220). Loco challenges Gunnar to seek his own sense of Blackness. Gunnar feels a mix of admiration and alienation; while he becomes part of the gang culture, he never entirely fits in. That is why Loco's influence forces Gunnar to confront the expectations of toughness, loyalty, and violence. Gunnar's relationship with Loco reinforces his sense of ethnicity and race and empowers the desire to maintain the purity of the Hillside locale; however, arises Gunnar's self-awareness. Beatty summarizes the impact of Gunnar's community on his racial identity when Gunnar admits to Loco's pain: "Yeah, yeah," I said, trying I said, trying not to embarrass either of us by acknowledging Psycho Loco's pain" (Beatty, 1996, p. 97). Beatty depicts Gunnar's reluctance to acknowledge his friend's pain to speak about the societal expectations placed on African American men to repress their emotions. Emotional repression might interpreted as a response to the stress of surviving in a racist society

where emotional expression, particularly pain, is often equated with weakness. Through this scene, Beatty links between his protagonist and the post-Civil Rights era, where many African Americans experienced disillusionment as systemic racism persisted despite the legal gains of the Sixties. Gunnar's hesitance to engage with Loco's pain symbolizes this emotional conflict. According to this scene, Butler leaves an option for multiple realities, conceding that whatever is believed is true. In contrast, the favored reality sustains the longest harmony, balance, compassion, propriety, reciprocity, order, and justice.

The ultimate cultural objective, according to Beatty, is depicted within the fate of Scoby and his experience of fatalism in his expression: "Stay Black, And Die" (Beatty, 1996, p.193), which motivates the African American collective experience of cultural trauma. Beatty reflects the legacy of internalized oppression with this order. Scoby's response, "It means to be yourself, what else could it mean?" (Beatty, 1996, p.171), reflects a resigned acceptance of this fate yet simultaneously challenges the notion that Blackness is inherently tied to oppression and mortality. By framing Scoby's response, Beatty critiques the Western racism that links their authentic identity with suffering. This interaction reveals the internalized burden of African American identity, where "being yourself" is not just a matter of individuality but a negotiation with cultural and societal expectations that are both inescapable and oppressive.

4.6 Gunnar and Yoshiko: Marriage and Self-awareness

Gunnar's thorough treatment of his relationships allows him to bring many aspects of the self to conscious awareness and explore and interrogate any alienation from the African past. Beatty represents Gunnar within a relationship far from American and African values, a Japanese one. He contributes significantly to investigating the interracial relationships from which self-confidence emerges.

At one point, Gunnar overtly states that he "Suffered from what the American Psychiatrist Association Manual of Mental Disorders lists as social arrhythmia and courtship

paralysis, meaning I couldn't dance and I was deathly afraid of women" (Beatty, 1996, p. 121). However, once he meets Yoshiko and is afterward "punked for life," Gunnar is able to achieve a comfortable and sustainable relationship with a woman, albeit a subversion of traditional male/female and Black/ White relationship within the strict confines of African American and Western values. Gunnar revealed in Yoshiko and leaned on her for support, unafraid to show emotion as he mentions in his letter, "It wasn't difficult to tell that Yoshiko was equally enamored with me. No one had looked at me the way she did since Eileen Litmus back" (Beatty, 1996, p. 169). Through Yoshiko, Beatty is implying that African American males do not need to be confined to traditional, rigid notions of masculinity, dominance, or emotional suppression. Instead, he might embrace vulnerability, alternative gender roles, and developed forms of African American male identity that challenge Western views on interracial relationships. However, regardless of social conjecture or prescription, their relationship impacted Gunnar's ups and downs in terms of identity and personality.

At every stage of Gunnar's story, the role of fate is emphasized. It even infuses Gunnar's view of the marriage that his friend, Psycho Loco, arranges for him. Initially angry and upset with Psycho Loco for committing him to wedding a Japanese mail-order bride, Loco tells him: "You don't even have an alarm clock, so don't give me no bullshit that I've altered your destiny" (Beatty, 1996, p. 182). Gunnar's refusal reflects his internalization stage, where he feels secure towards his Black identity and comfortable with his Blackness without being constrained by Western definitions. For Gunnar, marriage with a white woman far from being Japanese endangers his individuality and retrieves him to the earliest struggles of racial identity. Gunnar answers Loco, saying, "You've arranged for me to marry a woman I don't even know without my permission" (Beatty, 1996, p.165). However, Loco challenges the expected power role within such a marriage by having Yoshiko continuously punk Gunnar. Much like the interactions with Betty and Veronica, who befriend Yoshiko, Beatty uses these satirical

relationships to offer Gunnar renewable self-recognition. This intersection of relationships that do not depend upon white hegemonic values fosters Gunnar's Blackness. Gunnar's response raises the conflict between the individual's right to self-determination and the pressures of collective identity within his racial community.

After meeting Yoshiko, Gunnar decides to go through with the wedding because "Sometimes the inevitable just seems right" (Beatty, 1996, p. 184). When Gunnar considers which college to attend on a basketball scholarship, he is impressed with the representative from Boston University. His mother likes the idea of Gunnar going to university in Boston because he will be "following in the footsteps of your great-great-great-great-greatgreat-great-grandfather Euripides. It's as if the Kaufman legacy has come full circle" (Beatty, 1996, p.179). Gunnar falls into the same situation in two of the main stations of his life: his identity.

Thus, Gunnar is confronted with the reality of how others perceive him. However, he should also assert his self-understanding of his identity and his mother's choice of Yoshiko.

Yoshiko's acceptance of Gunnar fosters his sense of survival and validation, as Loco reflects: "You should feel honored. Yoshiko chose you over hundreds of potential husbands" (Beatty, 1996, p.165). This choice affirms Gunnar's self-worth in a way that contrasts with his otherwise cynical outlook on African American male life and relationships. Gunnar acknowledges the difficulty of her decision, saying, "That was difficult. I wouldn't want to spend the rest of my life in Olympia, Washington, cleaning rifles, gutting deer, and drinking Coors Light down at the American Legion Poet either" (Beatty, 1996, p.165) which is a remark that captures his self-awareness and monotonous existence. Gunnar explains how he feels disconnected from white society and specific aspects of African American culture. Gunnar's response reflects his sense of displacement, described when he states: "Sometimes, after retiring for the day, I'd return the next morning, only to find that someone else had taken up where I'd left off. Extended my line with a line of their own, often in a different color" (Beatty,

1996, p. 107). The imagery of returning in Gunnar's perception of his color reflects Gunnar's sense of duality. The different colors suggest diversity within this collective experience, symbolizing the variety of cultural contributions. Thus, Yoshiko's role in Gunnar's life also amplifies the themes of duality and self-consciousness, illustrating how this marriage relationship might mirror a broader sense of identity.

Gunnar's sarcastic tone conveys a sense of humor and disillusionment with the options available to him in a racially stratified society. He wants to avoid falling into a life that is predefined by cultural expectations, whether those expectations are White or Black. Thus, escaping to a marriage with a Japanese woman will be a solution which is approved by Gunnar's sister when said: "Girl, I know that's my brother, but you got to watch these niggers. After they get married, they change (Beatty, 1996, p.166).

Beatty chooses the Black and Japanese, not Afri, an American and Japanese, which appears to be a conversation between Gunnar and his mother. Gunnar still suffers from defining himself as an African American man who is not melted in his mother's culture. The difference between Black and African Americans is clear through Beatty's representation of Gunnar and Yoshiko's relationship especially when Gunnar asks: "Ma, Japan ain't some feudalistic country. "I can't believe it. Thought you'd never approve of me marrying a woman who isn't black." But his mother answers: "Yes, but Yoshiko is black at heart. You can tell. She got soul like. Who's that actor I like always play the Japanese nigger in them shogun movie?" (Beatty, 1996, p.168)

Beatty recognizes that Gunnar's racial identity conflict is not only impacted by Black and White cultural intersection but also by self-doubt of acceptance.
In the conversation between Gunnar and his mother, the description of Yoshiko as black at heart forms the subjectivity of racial identity. Beatty then examines how external and internal perceptions of race lines may diverge.

Gunnar's mother admits: "I like Yoshiko. I believe she'll make an excellent Kaufman. She got spirit, escaping from a repressive society to seek her fortune in a strange world (Beatty, 1996, p.168). Gunnar's mother's admiration for Yoshiko's "spirit" and escape from a "repressive society" aligns with Beatty's cultural displacement and resistance themes. Yoshiko's journey might be seen as an allegory for the psychological experience of oppressed people who must navigate multiple oppressive systems. Yoshiko's transition from one society to another suggests a form of identity negotiation that resonates with how African Americans, particularly in the diaspora, often confront and adapt to hostile environments while preserving a sense of self. In this case, Yoshiko's ability to leave a "repressive society" symbolizes her psychological liberation, essential for healing from internalized oppression. This mirrors the psychological journey many African Americans go through in their resistance and developing self-concepts.

In order to disassociate himself from stereotypes, Gunnar decides to completely abandon all attempts to fit into traditional racial, social, and educational frameworks through this marriage. Gunnar and Yoshiko go into hiding rather than constantly move from stereotype to stereotype and take refuge in the La Cienega Motor Lodge (Beatty, 1996,p. 211). However, this marriage developed Gunnar's sense of self-worth; it created new struggles within his self-perception. Having no fixed address, as they mention, "We even enrolled in a correspondence college that we saw advertised on the back of a matchbook cover, and every week they would send us a mimeographed test sheet along with a certificate of achievement printed on Day-Glo paper" (Beatty, 1996, p. 213), thereby eschewing any ultimate fate associated with either local neighborhood or the academy.

After their marriage, Gunnar's book of poetry, *Watermelanin,* has sold enough copies to provide them with financial stability. However, they refuse to purchase a permanent home. They approve that they "lived in a state of perpetual motion, not in the way a ball rolls down a

hill, but in the way a ship drifts across the water, neither anchored nor lost" (Beatty, 1996, p. 192) as doing so would signify their guiltiness in the social and economic structures that contribute to the disenfranchisement of minorities. Gunnar seeks to distance himself from this system as an act of defiance, another form of rejection. Living in a constant state of impermanence becomes a method of resistance for them both.

Moreover, as Gunnar reflects on Yoshiko's wandering hand, it becomes evident that Beatty might be using this moment to suggest that African American men confront and embrace alternative models of gender for their bodies. Gunnar describes his feelings towards Yoshiko, saying:

> There wasn't a whole lot of niggers nightlife in Boston, much less any fun spots for Japanese nationals. When we first arrived, we cruised the local bars, garish nightspots crammed with white people sloshing beer on one another and singing corny white pop hits from the 1960s. (Beatty, 1996, p.182)

Yoshiko's touch significantly impacts Gunnar's identity development and self-acceptance, especially regarding his racial self-perception. Yoshiko's acceptance and intimate connection with him create a feeling that he might be allowed to experience his Black identity outside of the stereotypes. This feeling challenges Gunnar to rethink traditional notions of gender and masculinity, particularly as they relate to his Black identity.

Through this event, Beatty challenges traditional precepts of African American masculinity perception of the post-civil rights era and resists the psychological forces that manipulate and destroy his self-worth. Gunnar's identity crisis reflects his search for a new sense of self that goes beyond the post-Civil Rights struggle for political freedom, extending into the personal and psychological realm. Rather than relying on conventional representations or assuming that one authentic model must dominate, Gunnar works toward constructing a new sense of African American self. As Yoshiko nears the birth of her child, she and Gunnar make

the unconventional decision to have the baby in Reynier Park instead of a hospital. This decision exemplifies a different way of resistance. They reject the disciplinary structures that regulate and control their presence, even as these systems persist despite the rise of the society of control.

Conclusion

Dana and Gunnar have significantly shaped readers' perceptions of interracial and intraracial relationships in African American literature. Butler provides a critical overview of the challenges of historical trauma and the haunting legacies of slavery. She illustrates how these elements shape personal identity and African American self-discovery. In contrast, Beatty examines the impact of the "other" on self-definition, his mother, Scoby, and Yoshiko, exemplified through the relationship of a Black-Japanese couple and Gunnar's friends. Both authors challenge readers to confront uncomfortable realities about race relations and the ongoing influence of history on self-recognition, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding African American experiences and their unseen identities. While Butler uses historical African American experiences to rebuild self-esteem, Beatty emphasizes how cultural dynamics foster connections within and between racial communities. Together, their works offer a comprehensive exploration of racial identity from different yet complementary perspectives.

Chapter Five

Cultural Trauma and Healing:

Mulatto/Mulatta Protagonists and the

Process of Reconciliation

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Introduction

5.1 Dana's Black Identity Formation

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Introduction

This chapter explores the cultural trauma and processes of healing as represented through the mulatto/mulatta protagonists in literature, focusing on their journey toward self-reconciliation. By analyzing the journey of Dana and Gunnar Kaufman, the chapter reveals how these characters confront historical oppression, racism, and internal conflicts linked to their mixed-race identities. Dana's journey through time and place Gunnar's manhood reflections on race and society expose the complexities of African American identity formation. Both characters illustrate the psychological consequences of struggling with cultural displacement while resisting the reductive stereotypes imposed on their identities. These narratives redefine the tragic mulatto trope, emphasizing resilience, self-determination, and the quest for a liberated self-concept amidst a racially stratified society.

5.1 Dana's Black Identity Formation

The idea of Butler's narrative is to make the time travel experiences of Dana emotionally and logically real to her, her ancestors, and her husband, Kevin. Butler focuses on the inescapability of history and its impact on Black racial identity. Dana's time-travel experiences immerse her in the realities of her ancestors, emphasizing that her past is the marked turning point in her self-recognition. However, Kevin and Dana know that they would not change history and their destiny when they say: "We're in the middle of history. We surely can't change it" (Butler, 1979, p. 100) and "It's over. There's nothing you can do to change any of it now" (Butler, 1979, p. 264), Butler indicates that traveling to the past is a dramatic means to make the past live, to get the reader to live imaginatively in the recreated past, to grasp it as a felt reality rather than merely a learned abstraction. However, Butler has specialized in metaphors that dramatize the tyranny of one species, race, or gender over another.

In Dana's perception, her life in 1976 Los Angeles focuses on her career as a writer and her interracial marriage to Kevin. While organizing her books, Dana utters a profound

description of her life. She said, “I was cleaning my desk, getting ready for work, when I began to feel dizzy. That wasn’t surprising. I hadn’t eaten for a while, and I tend to be mildly hypoglycemic” (Butler, 1979, p. 12). Dana is preoccupied with her work life and sense of normalcy in her contemporary daily routine. She insists that her career is a central focus, indicating that she is grounded in her present life without an immediate connection to the historical struggles of Black identity. This thinking indicates that Dana is still in the pre-encounter stage of her identity. She does not recognize the significance of the race line in her life, considering herself more connected to a universal identity rather than a racial one.

Unlike many scientific fiction novels, Butler involves time travel without scientists fiddling with machines and does not involve any character’s choice. Butler’s way of exploring time travel relates to the African American women’s experience of double consciousness. The African American woman’s internal conflict is not only related to recognizing herself through the eyes of the white oppressor but also through the Black male while she is developing her identity as a woman, as a Black, and as Dana. Dana’s classification “house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom” (Butler, 1979, p. 145) clarifies that she was not only oppressed by white society but also, at times, marginalized within her community due to the patriarchal structures that diminished their agency at that time. Through this classification, Butler focuses on the impact of gender on the African American woman’s self-perception. Dana said, “I thought you were a man, But this time you just look like a woman wearing pants” (Butler,1979, p.22). Butler encapsulates the political tensions and significant social shifts of the post-civil rights era, a time marked by a revived academic focus on the legacy of slavery and its portrayals, particularly highlighting slave narratives as essential historical records. Butler reflects that she is influenced by “some 1960s feelings” (Kenan, 2012, p. 497).

The 1970s were shaped by a range of social, political, and cultural responses to the 1965 Moynihan Report, which argued that racial discrimination and economic disadvantages faced

by African Americans in the 1960s were linked to matriarchal family structures and the resulting disempowerment of African American men, a legacy of slavery. It claimed that the "deterioration of the fabric of Negro society" was rooted in female-headed households, asserting that the matriarchal structure imposed by slavery hindered the progress of Black communities and burdened both Black men and women. The report ultimately called for national efforts to restore African American male authority and strengthen family units.

Dana's relationship with Kevin transcends conventional racial divides, directly critiquing Moynihan's views on family structures. Through her emphasis on African American families, interracial relationships, and blended genealogies, Butler thoughtfully challenges Moynihan's pathologizing perspective on enslaved families. Dana claimed they "don't have to be in 1819 for you to hold me down, you know. You could have just left me alone and refused to understand my feelings" (Butler, 1979, p. 196). Despite its positive impact on reducing race lines, Dana's relationship with Kevin postpones her encounter with the reality of slavery that might mark her racial identity development. This external focus delays Dana's journey of self-understanding and affirmation of her racial identity, as her need to navigate and respond to dominant societal views often overshadows the space for personal reflection and growth.

Nevertheless, Dana remains grounded in her identity; yet, Kevin, as a white man in a relationship with a Black woman, is inherently viewed with suspicion. Consequently, their marriage complicates Dana's racial identity, adding layers of physical and psychological vulnerability. Butler uses this dynamic to illustrate how Kevin is perceived as a potential threat or betrayal, resonating with historical narratives of African American women's exploitation by white men. Dana's marriage with Kevin also suggests that race is not the foremost concern in her personal life; she engages in an interracial relationship without encountering or internalizing the historical tensions between Black and White people.

Dana is pulled back into a time where she is forced to adopt behaviors that ensure her survival in a racist, slave-holding society while still maintaining the mindset of a modern and free African American woman. Her time-travel experiences highlight the psychological reality between being "the self" in her current life and becoming "the other" in a past where her autonomy is stripped away. Through staging a literal return to the period of slavery through this time travel trope, Butler poses numerous differences in the changes between the 1970s African American woman, who is married to a white man, and the 1815 enslaved woman, who is owned by Rufus in Maryland. This shift of time and situation allows Dana to confront the reality of slavery even before recognizing her ancestors. The scene of tutoring resembles moments of painful realization and confrontation with the realities of slavery and racial oppression. Dana's description of the event reveals not only a historical trauma but also a cultural trauma that marked her to reach the encounter stage of her racial identity. Butler vividly depicts this experience, immersing readers in the harsh experience of racism. As Dana notices the brutality, she contrasts it with the sanitized portrayals of violence often presented on the plantation. Her response to this violence highlights the profound gap between fictional representations and the reality she faces firsthand:

> I shut my eyes and tensed my muscles against an urge to vomit. I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. (Butler, 1979, p.37)

Butler depicts Dana's encounter stage by jarring awareness of racism, leading to a reassessment of her identity in light of the historical and personal impact of race. While in search of the individual self, Butler also describes the hidden and autocratic realities of the African American community, where she portrays multiple different forms of oppression

African American women faced. One of those ordinary forms is in the social and political dynamics of being a lone African American free woman in white supremacist environments. Butler depicts her protagonist, Dana, as she defines herself and creates her identity regardless of the constant and reinforced implications of racism. Dana here is confused about her people's reality and seeking protection when she reacted:

> Behind him, his child wept noisily against her mother's leg, but the woman, like her husband, was silent. She clutched the child to her and stood, head down, refusing to watch the beating. Suddenly, I realized what was happening, and I think I screamed. He had to reach me. He had to! And I passed out. (Butler, 1979, p.37)

Butler here does not only describe the emotional conflict of African Americans but also the collective trauma that African American individuals and families confront. This trauma is often internalized and passed down to influence how these communities respond to both historical and contemporary instances of racism. Butler's depiction of collective trauma concerning Dana's self-realization. She is different, Black, and enslaved, drawing from this historical awareness. She portrays the inherited trauma internalized and passed down through generations. This stereotype aligns with the evolving understanding of racial trauma in the 1970s, which emphasized that the scars of slavery were not merely historical but were psychologically embedded in African Americans. Butler's choice to write about time travel was not just a narrative device; it symbolized how the past is not a distant reality but a lived experience that continuously shapes African American identities.

Dana moves from "I stared out into the darkness fighting to calm myself" (Butler, 1979, p. 21), where she first struggles to process the surreal and terrifying reality of her sudden displacement into the past, feeling a deep sense of confusion and fear, to a state of increased awareness and determination as she adapts to the harsh conditions of the antebellum South. This psychological shift marks the beginning of her internal transformation, where her initial

fear gradually evolves into a stronger sense of purpose and resilience as she begins to confront the brutal realities of her racial history and identity head-on. Butler shows Dana's psychological shift from fear to resilience through evolving different and contradicted actions, decisions, and emotional responses. Dana walks through the process of developing her racial identity, reaching the feeling of seeking protection and passing racism. Butler depicts it through "I screamed—I think I screamed. He had to reach me. He had to! And I passed out" (Butler, 1979, p.37), where she confronts, refuses, and neglects the reality of racism. Until she starts to immerse herself in her origin, sufferance, and culture, often rejecting White culture and empathy as Dana challenges past reality: If I had to fight to survive here, I would. I would not be beaten, raped, or killed—not here, not now (Butler, 1979, p. 246). Dana's self-awareness indicates her immersion-emersion stage of racial identity. Butler idealizes the experience of African American women by highlighting their strength, resistance, and self-pride. However, she refuses to idealize their communities. Butler does not idealize the harsh realities they face, nor does she romanticize the struggles of slavery or even its legacy through the interracial couple. Instead, she acknowledges African American women's trauma, moral compromises, and survival strategies that they must employ in the face of racism. Dana's conscious decision to speak and act like the other enslaved people when she said:

> I spoke in the same low tones as the other slaves[...] I had already begun to protect myself by being careful and talking and acting like them. It wasn't imitation but adaptation—an adaptation that could mean the difference between life and death. (Butler, 1979, p. 135)

indicates a profound achievement in the immersion-emersion stage of her racial identity development. Dana recognizes and actively identifies her racial group, obtaining their behaviors and attitudes that affirm her sense of belonging to the plantation. This indicates adaptation as a survival mechanism, which is different from just an attempt at assimilation, which, in contrast,

negatively impacts African American women's self-consciousness. Butler clarifies that this adaptation is not about mimicry of ancestors or passivity but is a means of psychological resistance; however, Dana's adaptation is associated more with offering the crucial change from doubt to self-awareness. Ultimately, Butler uses trauma and ancestral memory in a similar way to "re-memory" and "re-birth" the lived experiences of African American women in the post-Civil Rights era, where she crafts Dana's contemporary experience as a way to break down the gendered and racist ways in which American chattel slavery operated as a patriarchal and racially defined institution. Thus, she simultaneously battles both lenses that followed these women long after they were legally freed.

Dana's slips into the past represent a giant slip into the women's memory of slavery. However, this memory re-births the sense of collective memory and the profound recognition of one's culture, heritage, and history. Through her connection with her ancestor Alice, Dana moves backward in time to reconcile and reacquaint the contemporary with the particular struggles of enslaved women. In tandem, her experiences through the past line as a dive into an ancestral space in which she can deal with the trauma of the memory of slavery. The interaction with another woman from the past is another way for Dana to emotionally and mentally inhabit and find freedom. She will experience this freedom through Sara, Carrie, and Alice. However, she is from a contemporary free woman background; Butler moles Dana with the same slavery experience and is even harsh since Dana refuses to be enslaved, and being enslaved for her is a way to survive the past backward. Alice, Sarah, and Carrie also see being enslaved as a way to survive, not surviving the Weyline plantation but surviving death. These intraracial relationships reflect Dana's movement toward the internalization stage. Dana seems confident with her sense of identity and accepts her experience with women who rebuild her contemporary racial identity. When adopting their routines and work ethics, Dana does not mimic their behavior but actively integrates their survival strategies into her identity. Butler

depicts: “So, like Sarah and Carrie, I rose before the Weylins and went to bed after them. That gave me several days of peace before Margaret Weylin discovered that she had another reason to dislike me” (Butler, 1979, p.93). This depiction signifies Dana’s acceptance of shared racial and historical experiences, acknowledging that these women’s experience is part of her history. Furthermore, Dana describes her contact with them as “several days of peace” (Butler, 1979, p.93), which suggests her sense of agency. This ability to deal with oppression with a sense of inner calm reflects Dana’s internalization stage, where her racial identity becomes a source of grounded resilience, not a barrier or source of inner conflict.

Dana’s reaction to Margaret Weylin’s shows she has reached emotional stability. She no longer internalizes the disdain or sees it as a personal attack but as an expected aspect of her circumstances. Her response is practical and untroubled, illustrating the way this stage allows for a more confident engagement with racism rather than shock, denial, or disorientation that might have characterized earlier stages of racial identity development. When Dana’s evolving sense of racial solidarity with Sarah and Carrie, she mentions:

> Sarah and Carrie were alone when I went in, and I was glad. Sometimes, old people and children lounge there, or house servants or even field hands steal a few leisure moments. I liked to listen to them talk sometimes and fight my way through their accents to find out more about how they survived the lives of slavery. (Butler, 1979, p.94)

She transforms toward deeper self-understanding. Butler’s inclusion of Sarah and Carrie’s stories acknowledges African American humanity. This inclusion indicates a transformation from the individualistic perspective to the collective consciousness. Collective consciousness reflects African American women’s need to connect with the collective memory. The desire to “fight [her] way through their accents” to learn about their survival strategies signifies a profound connection with the communal experience of enslaved people. For Butler, the crucial point is that healing the impacts of race, gender, and other identities does not require

rejecting them. These aspects of identity are not an either/or proposition. Her protagonists are not wholly absorbed in or defined by racial concerns alone; instead, they embody a more developed, layered engagement with identity. Butler's work encapsulates African American women's real-world struggles, using history to explore these intersecting challenges. Butler's perspective here aligns with the internalization-commitment stage. Dana's journey, either in the past or the present, reflects a different evolution of her racial identity. While reaching her complete self-awareness of her personality, Dana not only accepts her racial identity but also demonstrates a continuous commitment to address racial injustice and foster change. Butler claims that the final stage of racial identity goes beyond personal acceptance; it involves active engagement, advocacy, and a sense of responsibility to support her friends to survive slavery. Butler exhibits the internalization-commitment signs through Dana's actions, reactions, mindset, and self-determination to hold the responsibility of her ancestors to survive.

Dana attempts to protect her ancestor, Hagar, to ensure the survival of her lineage. When she admitted that "No doubt most information about her [Hagar] life had died with her. At least it had died before it filtered down to me. There was only the Bible left" (Butler, 1979, p.29), To emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural and familial connections despite historical trauma. Dana's recognition that most of Hagar's story has been lost, except for remnants in the family Bible, reflects the reality of historical erasure faced by many African American families whose histories have been fragmented by slavery. This moment of recognition revives Dana's self-awareness and awareness of the tenuous nature of African American ancestral memory. This awareness helps Dana to maintain her internalization-commitment stage as long as it impacts her contemporary identity as a free African American woman. Then, she fosters her desire to maintain the necessity of survival for future generations when she ensures Rufus's survival despite his role as an enslaver, as she claimed "would have to survive to father Hagar, or I could not exist. That made sense" (Butler, 1979, p.30). Butler emphasizes the role of

ancestral reclamation in shaping African American individual and collective identity. Dana's internal drive to protect Hagar is an act of ancestral reclamation, where she seeks to reclaim and protect her historical and cultural roots. This reclamation is essential to healing the psychological impact of historical and cultural traumas.

Dana's recognition of the need to resist and challenge the systemic oppression of slavery is also marked as one of the essential signs of her racial identity development. Dana's feeling of solidarity with her ancestors and empathy with her past and present situation appears through her desire to enhance her community's awareness of their essential rights to live as human beings. Dana's ultimate objective covers physical, psychological, mental, and emotional survival. She contended: "I told you when all this started that I didn't have their endurance. I still don't. Some of them will go on survive, no matter what. I'm not like that" (Butler, 1979, p. 246). Butler captures the African American woman's struggle, as she does not only confront the physical dangers of slavery but also with its psychological impact. In her commitment to survival and preserving her kindred, Dana transcends a profound turning point in her racial awakening.

5.2 Surviving Slavery: Dana's Racial Awakening

The first time Dana travels to the 19th century, she is abruptly yanked back without any preparation or warning, suddenly thrust into a completely different reality than her present. The first scene she witnesses is a child drowning, signaling the start of a different journey. Butler captures this moment from Dana's perspective when she describes, "Near the middle of that river was a child splashing, screaming," and identifies him as "a small red-haired boy"(Butler, 1979, p. 13). Dana's immediate response focuses on saving the child rather than his race or color. This reaction indicates that she has not yet wholly recognized the pervasive racism of the era she has entered, reflecting her initial lack of awareness about the racial divides that define the 19th-century world she is about to confront. However, her experience with Buz, the worker

in the library, occurs in her present reality, but it does not entirely shape her identity as an African American woman. Lives in a society that has outwardly moved beyond racism but continues to grapple with its legacy internally.

The first thing Dana faced was the trauma of going back in time and place and acting as a foreigner. This trauma does not affect just her self-perception but also marked her racial awakening event. Butler portrays this awakening as the driving power to develop Dana's racial identity.

Butler's situating *Kindred* within political debates post-1968 makes the focus between survival and resistance at the novel's heart palpable. Throughout the 1970s, as the threat of infiltration and repression led to growing distrust and heightened political rifts within the Black Power movement, these tensions only grew. The growing distrust that Dana experiences on the Weylin plantation evokes the disintegration and splits within militant groups like the BPP in their later years. Dana's simultaneous assertion of her right to self-defense and belief in her ability to influence Rufus shows the difficulty of either strategy. Dana, who lives in California in 1976 in a post-Civil Rights era, her comprehension of the African American self is not wholly politicized or tied to the trauma of slavery but also the juxtaposition between Maryland in 1818 and California in 1979, which highlights both the brutal reality of slavery and the exhausted evolution of racial fights in the United States. Butler shows Dana's lack of recognition through her confusion about the police claim of Kevin hurting her: "They began asking me about Kevin [her]. After a while, though, I replayed them and suddenly realized that these men were trying to blame Kevin for "hurting" my arm" (Butler, 1979, p.10). Dana sees the police's insistence on accusing Kevin as unjustified, despite having experienced racial discrimination herself and intensely.

Butler first marks Dana's racial awakening through this historical comparison. Initially living in a relatively integrated society in California, she is forced to confront the legacy of

slavery and segregation when transported back to 1818. This experience not only informs her understanding of the origins of racial oppression but also compels her to see the impact of her ancestor's history on her present racial identity. By contrast, the post-Civil Rights era in 1979 provided legal protections but still involved persistent, institutionalized racism, albeit in more disguised forms. Her journey between these two eras becomes a personal and transformative process that integrates Black identity's past and present struggles into a more comprehensive and committed understanding of racial justice.

Dana's realization of the vulnerability tied to her Blackness also becomes evident in her racial awakening as she navigates the antebellum South. When Dana observes Rufus, she notes, “The room's shadows moved as he moved. I realized how easy it would be for him to betray me—to open the door and run away or shout an alarm” (Butler, 1979, p. 32). This moment reveals Dana's acute awareness of her precarious position, where her safety is contingent on the unpredictable actions of others. Similarly, when Rufus leaves her, Dana reflects, “He pointed the way, then left me alone in the silent chilly night. I stood beside the house for a moment feeling frightened and lonely. I hadn't realized how comforting the boy's presence had been” (Butler, 1979, p. 34). Here, Dana's fear and loneliness confirm the dangerous racial impact that defines her self-existence as a woman and as an African American person in a white supremacist world. Butler, despite the belief of the other presence on the African American self-recognition, highlights the significance of Rufus in her self-awareness.

Dana's self-awareness reaches a crucial point when she reflects, "I looked at the children playing in the dirt and realized that they were my family. We shared blood, history, and survival. I could not turn away from them or what they represented" (Butler, 1979, p. 198). Dana's recognition of the children as "family" and the emphasis on shared “blood, history, and survival” show an acute sense of cultural kinship. Butler emphasizes the collective identity, which often transcends biological family ties and includes a broader communal sense of

belonging and shared heritage. This interconnectedness is necessary for African American psychological well-being. Dana's understanding of her racial identity becomes personal as she recognizes her shared history. This recognition signifies a switch from merely witnessing the brutality of slavery to embracing her historical and ancestral ties to those who sustain it.

Butler further highlights African American women's racial consciousness through Dana's recognition of her battle in the antebellum South when she said, "Kevin, I'm not going to be in any fair fights" (Butler, 1979, p. 47), which defines her experiences thoroughly. Dana is keenly aware that as an African American woman, her battles, whether physical, social, or psychological, are inherently unequal because of her origin. Dana's experience is not just about physical fights but a profound recognition of racism. This thinking reflects an understanding of racialized oppression, where fair fights are impossible in a society that is structured to dehumanize and exploit African American individuals. Dana's words reflect her strategic thinking in navigating an unjust system where her survival depends on recognizing these imbalances and adjusting her behavior accordingly. Ultimately, Dana's racial consciousness bridges the gap between historical dehumanization and contemporary racial identity challenges, emphasizing how the trauma of slavery continues to redefine modern African American identities.

5.3 Dana's Rejection of the Tragic Mulatta Archetype

Slavery, according to Dana, was "more than I could stand" (Butler, 1979, p.116), emphasizing the unbearable impact of the racist institution. However, precisely, this realization fuels the African American desire for change. Rather than being paralyzed by the trauma of enslavement, Dana's response underscores the collective determination of African Americans to transform their circumstances and fight against systemic oppression, seeking empowerment and a redefinition of their identity in the face of adversity. Being forced to relive the trauma of her ancestors, Rufus, Alice, and Hagar, raises Dana's awareness about history in general and

her female heritage in particular; in order to see herself in a broader social context, she must learn how her ancestors were exploited as chattel based on their skin color and gender. Butler depicts Dana's character differently, a Black woman from the 20th century more than a stereotypical light-skinned, racially ambiguous figure torn between two worlds. This depiction expresses the strength of African American women. In her path, Dana recognizes that weakness does not revive her as an African American woman, but it lowers her self-esteem and desire for change. Dana claims, "I discovered I was not as weak as I had thought. By the time I was fully conscious, I wasn't weak at all. Only the pain made me move slowly, carefully, like a woman three times my age" (Butler, 1979, p. 113). Thus, according to Butler, the rebuilding process in the postbellum community is exemplified by Dana's succession to her female ancestors' roles and through an emphasis on the power of the African American desire to promote their self rather than allowing their identities to be solely defined by the trauma of oppression. This desire for self-determination drives them to reclaim their self-reliance and push for change, resisting the effects of racism by asserting their cultural and personal strength. Butler does not portray Dana as merely an African American woman struggling with racism, nor does she aim to reject the label of abnormal. *Kindred* follows Dana as she moves away from conventional standards, which signifies Butler's emphasis on the significance of female empowerment, providing a complete change to the archetype of the tragic woman.

There are tropes often used to frame women as monstrous or abject within society. Butler's construction of these figures is her ability to invert their meaning. Butler's female characters here, however, their horrific situation, do not only adapt and survive but also revive their cultures precisely because of the traits concerned with monstrous. Rather than being neglected for their differences, Butler's characters survive because they embrace these perceived monstrosities.

To challenge the tragic mulatta archetype, Butler positions Dana as an educated woman, making her a figure of empowerment rather than victimhood. Education became a powerful tool of resistance, enabling African Americans to navigate the post-Civil War world with agency and purpose, transcending the racial constraints imposed upon them. Dana's awareness of the societal dangers associated with her education is evident in the warning, "Educated slaves aren't popular around here" (Butler, 1979, p. 80), illustrating the tension between knowledge and oppression. This conflict is further emphasized when Dana recalls Weylin's comment: "Weylin was warning me that it was dangerous to keep a slave like you—educated, maybe kidnapped from a free state as far north as this" (Butler, 1979, p. 80). Despite these threats, Dana recognizes education's potential for resistance, observing that "educated didn't mean smart. He had a point. Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. Yet in a few years, an illiterate runaway named Harriet Tubman would make nineteen trips into this country and lead three hundred fugitives to freedom" (Butler, 1979, p. 117). Through Dana's reflections on both formal education and experiential wisdom, Butler redefines education as a pathway to empowerment, challenging the tragic mulatta stereotype of helplessness and instead celebrating the resilience, intelligence, and strength of African American women.

However, the tragic mulatta struggles to reconcile her mixed heritage, feeling torn between two racial identities but belonging to neither. Dana's identity is rooted in her identification as an African American woman. Her racial awakening during her time travel to the antebellum South only strengthens her sense of the African American self as she becomes increasingly committed to her African American heritage and survival. Civil Rights movement impacts the depiction of the African American woman as Dana unexpectedly does not seek white validation or attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture. Instead, she confronts and

resists racism, maintaining a strong sense of racial solidarity with her ancestors, who are enslaved people.

Self-hatred is often depicted in the tragic mulatta archetype, where the character's inner turmoil manifests as self-hatred, depression, and attempts to live as white, leading to profound despair and even self-destruction. However, Dana rejects this archetype. She is of mixed race but does not hesitate to belong to her community; however, the process of her identity development. Dana does not accept despair or contemplate self-destruction when transported to the antebellum South. Instead, she focuses on survival and preservation. Dana's mission, as she articulates it, is "not only to ensure the survival of one accident-prone small boy but to ensure [her] family's survival, [her] own birth" (Butler, 1979, p. 29). This admission reflects Dana's self-love and the innate desire to live as an African American woman everywhere and at any time. Thus, her sense of purpose strengthens her resolve to protect her kindred, promoting her African American identity and enlightening the African American unseen identities.

Butler acknowledges the sexual dangers Dana faces in the antebellum South. However, she deliberately subverts this harmful stereotype of the tragic mulatta, which often sexualizes mixed-race women and portrays them as objects of desire for white men. Her vulnerability or sexual objectification does not define Dana. Instead, she is portrayed as a woman with agency, intellect, and self-determination to survive in the past and present. This is evident in Dana's response to sexual menaces, as she defends herself and her female ancestor, Alice, and maintains control over their bodies. For instance, when Kevin asked Dana after her second trip, "Did he rape you?" Dana replies, "No. I hit him with a stick—knocked him out. Let me sleep" (Butler, 1979, p. 44), confirming her resistance rather than submission.

Butler also critiques the racial and sexual power dynamics of 1818 Maryland, revealing how white men's relationships with African American women were shaped by both power and shame. As Dana observes, "There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be

shame in loving one" (Butler, 1979, p. 124), highlighting the nonacceptance of interracial relationships. Dana's acknowledgment that sexual violence from Rufus would be "a form of suicide" (Butler, 1979, p. 245) further emphasizes Butler's depiction of the African American woman from the lens of power, control, and survival.

5.4 Dana's Self-concept and Meta-Black Identity

Butler's depiction of a beautiful mulatto woman's self-discovery journey and the struggle for her true identity transcends merely the traditional depiction of African American women's identity. Throughout her journey, Rufus, Kevin, Alice, and the developmental events impact Dana's identity formation and transmit her self-concept to different levels. One of these levels is her meta-Black identity. Dana recognizes her African American self and becomes unhidden and logically tied to her history and contemporary reality, as well as the link between her journey and self-concept, reflecting her identity. Thus, Dana's identity is also shaped by her interactions with her white ancestor, Rufus, and the socio-political realities of her present life. Meta-Black identity emphasizes the complex ways African Americans engage with the accurate representations of Blackness and redefine their identities beyond the constraints of stereotypical definitions. Dana, who moves between worlds and timelines, embodies this complexity, resisting boundaries between past and present, self and other. The experience of Dana in the 19th century provides her with a convoluted understanding of her heritage and a more grounded sense of self, in addition to illustrating the challenges of reconciling historical trauma with contemporary African American identity.

Rufus' fear calls Dana to him, and her fear sends her back home. Their interdependence prevents either of them from harming the other. However, as he ages, Rufus becomes progressively less careful of Dana's well-being. He becomes a product of his environment despite his exposure to the inexplicable forces that bring Dana's humanizing efforts into his life. These forces push Dana and Rufus further into an uncanny, perceptible state; she is out of

his time and her own and represents a future dissolution of order that Rufus cannot and will not understand.

Dana's interactions with her ancestors, particularly Alice, also confirm the importance of the African American community and its collective memory in constructing racial identity. When she is at the plantation and despite the harsh treatment of the enslaver, Dana finds a sense of belonging and solidarity among the enslaved community. This contrasts with her more isolated existence in 1976. This connection to her ancestors and shared history reflects the communal aspect of meta-Black identity, where Blackness is not just an individual experience but a collective one that spans generations.

Butler masterfully separates the past and the Black female body to rewrite the future. She uses time travel as a tool to explore identity formation. Her manipulation of time invites a conversation about slavery that not only reveals the inherent contradictions in African American identity but also forces readers to consider the relationship between past and future identities. The experiences Dana endures in the antebellum South significantly reshape her self-concept, linking her personal history with the broader social and political history of the United States. This is poignantly symbolized by the date of Dana's final return to Los Angeles on July 4, 1976, the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. By aligning Dana's journey with the nation's birthday, Butler deftly connects individual consciousness with social history, where she reflects on the intersection of personal and political identities. Even though Dana is an enslaved woman in the past, she finds cooperation, collaboration, and nurturing in her ancestral home, unlike her lack of community in her twentieth-century life, which may symbolize the state of African American communities in the post-integration years. During slavery and later during segregation, homogeneous African American communities provided the necessary site for the conservation and perpetuation of generational and continuity.

Furthermore, although *Kindred* was published long before the emergence of critical pedagogies of whiteness in the 1990s, the novel's depiction of a non-pathologized interracial relationship between an African American woman and a white man anticipates many insights derived from this discourse. Dana's journey thus becomes a broader exploration of meta-Black identity, where past, present, personal, and political intersect to construct a future informed by the complexities of race, identity, and history. According to Butler, the stereotype of African American women's uncontrollable sexuality and passionate nature is historically used to justify their exploitation and objectification. However, Butler subverts this narrative by portraying Dana as a fully realized individual who actively resists these imposed stereotypes. This reflects a core element of meta-Black identity, where African Americans engage with and challenge the racialized identities imposed on them. Rather than internalizing these stereotypes, Dana negotiates her identity through her lived experiences, resisting objectification and redefining her self-concept. In this way, Butler explores Black identity's dynamic and multifaceted nature, moving beyond simplistic, racialized caricatures to illustrate how African Americans construct and reclaim their identities.

Dana's first flashback to stare back at the Weylin plantation is a reflection of her free woman 20th-century consciousness, where she has not internalized the oppressive legacy of slavery. However, her subsequent decision to observe away, recognizing that she is "supposed to be a slave" (Butler, 1979, p.67) and must lower her eyes, illustrates her forced adaptation to the racial and social expectations of the antebellum South. Dana's quick adjustment reflects the power of her modern identity and the rejection of the stereotypes imposed upon her in the past, which resembles the presence of her meta-Black identity. As an African American woman, Dana might continuously navigate between imposed roles and their self-determined identity. Butler then uses the character of power in Dana to destroy the stereotype of the female enslaved woman, revealing that women are a canvas upon which beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality

are marked. Thus, through the character of Dana, Butler exposes the extent to w which women have become collaborators in the changing social structure as Dana wields a considerable amount of power, both within the past situation and in modern society.

5.5 Gunnar's Black Identity Formation

Beatty's novel, *The White Boy Shuffle*, is a work of satirical fiction; nevertheless, it delves deeply into the traumas and challenging experiences that African American men face on their journey, often leading to both the destruction and reconstruction of their personalities, identities, and sense of self. The mixed-race protagonist, Gunnar, begins his tumultuous journey when his mother decides to move them from a predominantly white, middle-class environment to their original African American community. This move marks Gunnar's first experience of displacement, opening the door to challenging transitions. His mother's decision becomes the catalyst for his ongoing struggle for self-discovery, setting him on a path marked by contentious encounters and moments of identity crisis.

As a young boy in a delicate stage of life, when he is supposed to form his identity and self-image, Gunnar faces instability and a lack of tenderness. The relocation deepens his sense of rejection, particularly as he remembers when his mother and her brother were sent alone with only a note attached to their wrists, addressed "To Whom It May Concern" (Beatty, 1996, p.7). This memory shows Gunnar's feelings of abandonment and the lack of personal connection in his early experiences, complicating his struggle for a stable sense of self.

Beatty reflects Gunnar's early detachment from a positive African American identity, resonating with his pre-encounter stage where he might lack self-awareness of or reject aspects of their African American identity, often discovering his racial background through observing the societal distance. Gunnar expresses a bleak perspective on the historical quest for equality and the persistent inutility many African Americans feel in their attempt to assimilate or achieve acceptance. Beatty lists various strategies African Americans have employed, begging,

revolting, entertaining, and intermarrying, only to conclude that none have earned them true equality. Through this reference to these approaches, Beatty suggests that African American identity is defined by attempts to navigate or resist a hostile society, often with limited success, which is presented through Gunnar's saying:

> In the quest for equality, black folks have tried everything. We have begged, revolted, entertained, intermarried, and are still treated like shit. Nothing works, so why suffer the slow deaths of toxic addiction and the American work ethic when the immediate gratification of suicide awaits? (Beatty, 1996, p.9)

Beatty's deep description of the African American man using "dead niggers"(Beatty, 1996, p.15) and his depiction of African figures with "arid lips" and "rumbling vacuous stomachs" (Beatty, 1996, p.15) reflect the internalization of racist stereotypes about African American people. These images evoke caricatures of poverty, hunger, and a perceived dependency, qualities that have been historically related to negative stereotypes of African Americans. Beatty examines how this kind of oppression impacts the mental health and self-conception of African American men and suggests that Gunnar's use of these derogatory images clarifies how he has absorbed these stereotypes, viewing his Blackness through a misrepresented lens formed by the dominant culture.

Beatty suggests that the African American man who shaped the protagonist Gunnar's connection to his heritage and his ancestors' stories is indirect, mediated through his mother rather than being a personal part of his identity. The ancestor who are "dead niggers who smacked their arid lips and held their rumbling vacuous stomachs while they stared at the fried chicken, waiting for Mom to tell their tales" (Beatty, 1996, p.15), implies that Gunnar does not internalize these stories or view them as a source of personal pride or identity; instead, they exist at a distance, almost as a curiosity or burden. This detached, somewhat cynical attitude

aligns with the pre-encounter stage, where the African American man feels separate from his culture and lacks an integrated sense of connection to his Blackness.

In addition, Gunnar's lack of connection to his family's painful history is evident. He compares his mother's stories to "television miniseries," trivializing the trauma and suffering that are integral to his heritage. When Gunnar says: "they meant nothing to me," he shows his emotional distance, as he feels no personal resonance with these stories of generational struggle. This causes his stability in the first stage of his racial identity. Gunnar's detachment from his family's painful past, especially his mother, also reflects his discomfort with his African history. Beatty depicts this disconnection through treating his self as something separate from his reality rather than as a source of pride or resilience. Gunnar reflects on this disconnection when he says: "My mother's stories of my father's family were like slavery-era television miniseries. There were lynchings, 'massa rapings,' land thefts, and other stock perils, but they meant nothing to me" (Beatty, 1996, p. 8). Thus, Beatty tackles the trauma that African American men endured during the twentieth century through their families. That is mainly the result of the socially created stereotypes about the supremacy of the white people and the inferiority of the African race. Besides, the devastating effect of these traumas on African American individuals, especially on the most delicate and vulnerable portion of their society, especially children, fractured their sense of self. It resulted in psychological disintegration, which leaves many young African Americans in conflict with a fragmented identity that reflects both societal rejection and inherited pain.

Gunnar's move is significant to his self-development because it marks a literal and figurative departure from his sheltered, predominantly white environment, which forces him to engage with his origin culture as he says: "My mother decided it was time for us to leave Santa Monica's sun-bleached ambiance and return to the blood-red clay of our origins" (Beatty, 1996, p. 17). When Gunnar's mother moves the family, Gunnar is placed into an environment where

he is more associated with self-awareness and the experiences of his people. This displacement challenges Gunnar's previous sense of identity and forces him to confront the realities of being African American, not just American. This immersion in the African American community disrupts his previous isolation from his Blackness and initiates a period of self-questioning and self-re-evaluation. Gunnar's definition of himself indicates his movement to another stage of his identity. He says:

> My name is Kaufman Gunnar Kaufman. I'm black Orestes in the cursed House of Atreus. Preordained by a set of weak-kneed DNA to shuffle in the footsteps of a long cowardly queue of coons, Uncle Toms's, and faithful bogged-body retainers. (Beatty, 1996, p.12)

Here, Gunnar's self-description encapsulates the internal conflict he experiences in developing his racial identity. Beatty describes Gunnar focusing on his disorienting or eye-opening event that compels Gunnar to reevaluate his understanding of race and his place within it. Gunnar's comparison of himself to "Orestes in the cursed House of Atreus" indicates that he feels entangled by a tragic fate bound to a lineage of suffering and betrayal. Here, Beatty uses terms like "coons," "Uncle Toms," and "faithful bogged-body retainers," derogatory phrases that reflect his self-awareness and the historical pressure on African Americans to conform to submissive roles. Gunnar's language, filled with self-deprecating references to negative stereotypes, where he shows his struggle to this stage.

Beatty explores how generational trauma and cultural stereotypes might distort the African American self-image. Gunnar's words reveal that he is starting to confront his discomfort with this identity. However, his tone is laced with disdain, indicating that he has not entirely embraced a positive perspective of his heritage.

In Hillside, Gunnar encounters racism and violence. He experiences that contrast sharply with his relatively privileged, insulated life in Santa Monica. This exposure forces him

to reconsider his place within African American identity and confront the reality of racial injustice. Gunnar's observation confronts him with the reality of Blackness as something collective, shared, and unavoidable. His reaction, however, is one of resistance and discomfort. When he states, "I saw things I never wanted to see in myself" (Beatty, 1996, p. 21), it suggests that he recognizes experiences among his African American peers that he previously denied or distanced himself from. Through this reaction, Beatty illustrates an internalized conflict where Gunnar has absorbed negative stereotypes about Blackness and is initially reluctant to see these qualities as part of his African American identity.

Gunnar's strong desire to strengthen the comprehension of his culture and reject the values and standards imposed by the dominant society indicates his movement to another stage of his racial identity. In this stage, Gunnar feels intensely connected to his African American identity. He embraces it with self-pride and explores it with curiosity. For Gunnar, this means moving away from internalized stereotypes and distancing himself from mainstream views, immersing himself in African American culture and identity:

> I wanted to comment on how building more basketball courts just created a demand for more sneakers, but instead gimped around the store, hopped up and down on one foot, and put one hundred and seventy-five dollars on the counter. (Beatty, 1996, pp. 89–90)

Gunnar is so tantalized by the prospect of acceptance into the African American male social hegemony that his astute, semi-Marxist assessment of the sneaker industrial complex either fades into oblivion in favor of looking the part or is instantaneously and painstakingly suppressed due to his perceived need to conform. This reaction shows the conflict of his immersion in the stage, where, in his quest for belonging, his critical stance on cultural exploitation is momentarily overridden by the desire for self-acceptance. Gunnar becomes increasingly critical of the white societal norms by which he was previously influenced. Thus, his immersion stage is marked by this rejection, which often includes a rejection of his former

self as he tries to shed the influences of the predominantly white spaces he once occupied. Gunnar states: “I wanted to pull myself free from the shackles of every expectation, every label society had branded on me” (Beatty, 1996, p.23). This reaction captures his desire to strip away the externally imposed expectations and embrace a more authentic connection to African American identity.

Beatty describes Kaufman’s complicated relationship with his racial identity and role as a leader within his community. He writes:

> Being a poet and thus expert in soulful coercion, I am eminently qualified. My book, *Watermelanin,* has sold 126 million copies. I have the ear of the academics, the street denizens, and the political cabalists. Leader of the Black Community? There is no better job fit. (Beatty, 1996, p.9)

Gunnar’s ironic declaration that there is “no better job fit” for the African American community leader reflects a profound cynicism about the role itself. Gunnar embodies this tension while he critiques the systems that demand African American leadership and recognizes the importance of cultural expression. Beatty often explores the psychological impact of oppression, which might lead to feelings of disillusionment toward self-change.

Asking this question using humor reflects Gunnar’s ambivalence about social perspectives, his self-perception, and the process of racial identity. Gunnar’s reluctant role as a “savior” or leader of the African American community showcases his internalization of African American identity. Despite both communities’ adoration, he views his role critically. For instance, he writes: “Our teacher says we are supposed to be colorblind. That’s hard to do if you can see color, isn’t it?” (Beatty, 1996, p.40). This critique adjusts with Gunnar’s rejection of Eurocentric perspectives that invalidate racial identity as a significant aspect of the self. Gunnar uses his sense of humor to expose pretending not to see race differences. However, this notice changes his mindset, personality, and mental health, which is transmitted through the

letters in the novel. Beatty offers a clear comparison between White and Black, starting with white, reflecting Gunnar's backward to the pre-encounter stage in different moments of his life. Beatty's humor in this context allows him to both disarm and educate. By shedding light on the absurdity of "seeing" color but claiming not to notice it, Gunnar highlights the necessity of self-recognizing and self-addressing, in addition to comprehending the racial differences rather than ignoring them. This balance illustrates his capability to lead and inspire without being consumed by social expectations, which is a key characteristic of the internalization stage of his identity.

Although the desire to find one's identity about a relatable "leadership" abroad is sincerely presented in Beatty's, it varies significantly between negative and positive self-perceptions; for African American men and women, identifying as American is the only requirement for entry into this role. However, this identification often comes with the burden of representing the entire race, which Beatty explores with irony. While Gunnar's role as a leader might offer a sense of community, he might also create internal conflict, oscillating between negative self-perception, related to social pressures, and positive self-perception, related to cultural pride and resilience. Beatty's African-centered ideas express the feeling that only those who share this unique lifestyle may understand, advise, and empathize with its experiences. His descriptions, however, often depict a search for fellow African Americans who might share a similar perspective or lived experience. Many of his critical views had conducted their daily lives in environments where they were the only African American person in the room.

Gunnar does not seek a leadership position but is thrust into it because of his poetry and ability to articulate collective struggles. His statement: "Leader of the Black Community? There is no better job fit," reflects Gunnar's skepticism about the authenticity of such roles. Despite

his reluctance, Gunnar accepts the mantle of leadership, embodying his internalization-commitment stage's focus on taking action for the whole community:

> After a long schoolday of moralistic bombardment with the aphorisms of Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Cesar Chavez, Pocahontas, and a herd of pacifist pachyderms, my friends and I were ready to think about color on our terms. Was a challenging part of his journey.(Beatty, 1996, p.42)

Beatty desires self-independence, the ability to act independently and make choices and decisions. He also calls for self-determination in his comparison between Black and White.

5.6 Surviving Slavery: Gunnar and Assimilation

Gunnar Kaufman's journey is an analyzable exploration of African American identity and assimilation. Surviving slavery is just the beginning of Gunnar's challenges as an African American man. Thus, if African Americans logically face the trauma of assimilation in the white-dominant society, Gunnar faces the trauma of assimilation in both surroundings, Black and White. As his athletic skills are recognized and further developed, Gunnar eventually attends college on an athletic scholarship, though his poetic skills also influence his recognition. Beatty clarifies the complexity of Gunnar's self-recognition in his authentic society through the intersection of both events. However, he finds a space where he can experience his blackness freely. Gunnar states: "Good luck with the basketball and the poetry. I looked into Pumpkin's brittle face and tried to hide my indifference" (Beatty,1996,p. 129) where his desire to maintain African self-image, perhaps to avoid judgment, which is a common experience for many African Americans. This internal conflict leads him to feelings of isolation and alienation.

Gunnar's status as a famous basketball player and author of his debut novel, *Watermelanin*, also reflects another type of assimilation. Between being a basketball player, celebrated among his people, and a poet, a less recognized pursuit, he faces psychological assimilation as he navigates the expectations and stereotypes associated with his racial identity.

External pressures further complicate this internal struggle. When Gunnar, somewhat reluctantly and indifferently, speaks at a rally against South Africa's Apartheid, he finds himself criticizing the audience for their perceived lack of dedication to 'the cause.' Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he accuses the audience of not being willing to die for anything, implying they are unfit to live. This radical rhetoric, while initially intended to inspire, inadvertently triggers a wave of suicides across the nation, including that of Gunnar's closest friend, Nicholas Scoby.

Gunnar Kaufman is removed from the comforts of white Santa Monica and relocated into a foreign setting, the ghetto of Hillside. Gunnar considers himself to be the “whitest Negro” and as he begins his journey in his new surrounding, he realizes how accurate this title is. He may have held some expectations of what life in a “ghetto” would be like, but he never believed that he would have to live it. Beatty creates a character that might transcend racial barriers. Gunnar is accepted into the Santa Monica white community because that is where he was raised and, as a result, is, as some put it, “white-washed,” he is not seen as an African American but as a member of the community. Although he experiences great difficulty assimilating to the new culture, Gunnar moves to Hillside without causing much alarm.

All in all, As an African American man raised in a predominantly white environment, Gunnar is constantly facing the expectations and stereotypes associated with his race. Whether he is on the basketball court, the stage, or the streets of Hillside, he is pushed to encounter the limitations and contradictions of his racial identity. Beatty engages in the psychological impact of this regular negotiation as he fights to reconcile his inner self with the external pressures to fit into both social norms. Gunnar’s experiences in Santa Monica and the overt racism he encounters in Hillside, his journey highlight the unremitting impact of slavery and the ongoing struggle of assimilation.

5.7 Gunnar's Leadership and the Signs of Tragic Mulatto

Paul Beatty reimagines the tragic mulatto archetype through Gunnar Kaufman, using satire and existential despair to critique cultural displacement, racial oppression, and the psychological impact of belonging in a divided society. Beatty challenges traditional narratives of racial identity and interrogates the failures of modern leadership and the limitations of collective liberation. The tragic mulatto is explored through Gunnar Kaufman. Through his journey, Beatty reveals the impact of facing different cultural identities and attempting to assimilate into both. Raised in a predominantly white neighborhood and later moving to a predominantly origin one, he experiences the tension of being perceived as an outsider in both worlds. This duality highlights the internal and external conflicts faced by those who do not fit neatly into a single racial category.

Gunnar represents a mixed-race individual who struggles with his identity and belonging in a racially divided society. Beatty uses Gunnar's mentality to explain African American cultural displacement, racial authenticity, and self-identification. He indicates Malcolm X's experience reflects the strong relationship between his people's old and new generations. Before his death, Malcolm X appealed to African Americans to develop self-knowledge, self-determination, self-respect, and self-defense for African American people by African American people. Gunnar's influence appeared in Beatty's description of Gunnar's emotions of frustration, anger, and a desire for self-determination. This latter reflects Gunnar's struggle for self-definition in both societies as it highlights the idea of Malcolm X's philosophy in shaping African American identity. In Gunnar's thinking, this desire is a compelling exposition of African American self-empowerment rooted in cultural pride and self-reliance. As Gunnar indicates, the civil rights movement has become robbed of its potency by its initial successes, a similar stance to that which Cornel West claims. The movement has evolved into one in which the people who lead want nothing more than to preserve their status as leaders. So

the revolutionary zeal that propelled Martin Luther King and Malcolm X has been defused: "That is why today's black leadership is not worth shit, these telegenic niggers not willing to die[...]What we need is some new leaders"(Beatty, 1996, p. 197).

Gunnar struggles to find his role in shifting environments of race and place in America. He somewhat reluctantly ends up as an African American leader figure who incites his followers to commit suicide in the name of African-Americans' fight for equality. Towards the end of the novel, Gunnar starts advocating that the only way for someone to find freedom is through suicide. In an interview for a French version of "Good Morning America," Gunnar is asked about his "endorsement of freedom through suicide." He responds: "My suicide, no one else's." "Yes," says the interviewer, "but people follow your example. There are reports of African Americans killing themselves indiscriminately across the United States. Don't you have anything to say?"Send me your death poems," Gunnar replies (Beatty, 1996, p. 201). While Beatty does not advocate suicide, he uses it as a lens to explore the existential despair faced by African Americans. In other words, being African American during this era was very difficult due to all the discrimination and stereotypes surrounding African Americans; due to all the negativity, to get freedom, the answer is suicide.

All in all, suicide serves as a powerful commentary on the existential despair and social pressures faced by African Americans. Kaufman becomes an unexpected advocate for what he terms "freedom through suicide"(Beatty,1996, p.210). Beatty uses humor to evaluate the social perspectives. Thus, Beatty does not only present the tragic mulatto trope but also offers a new definition of the quest for the African American identity and belonging. Gunnar's motivation for mass suicide is a personal consideration that reflects assimilation and self-worth. However, his words resonate with a broader audience of his people. He leads a movement that promotes the presence of African Americans' tragic reality where many individuals send him "death poems" and consider suicide as a form of liberation from oppression.

Gunnar riffs on Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic words, declaring, "I'm not willing to die for South Africa, and you ain't either. Guess I'm just not fit to live. In other words, I'm just ready to die" (Beatty, 1996, p. 200). His statement resonates with Baudrillard's theory of suicide as a symbolic act of redress within the hyperreal. It reflects an attempt to disrupt the simulative economy by using death to trigger the system's collapse. This logic materializes in Scoby's leap from the university law school roof shortly after the rally.

Initially framed as a heroic act of resistance against the commodification of cultural identity, Scoby's suicide note reveals a longing for personal glory. This is symbolized by his reference to the Brocken Specter, a rare optical phenomenon in which one's shadow appears surrounded by a halo from a high vantage point. However, this symbolic sacrifice ultimately achieves nothing. The note becomes fodder for sensationalist media coverage, perpetuating the very commodification it sought to challenge.

Suicide, then, is not solely about the act itself. It reflects a profound hopelessness and the search for an African self. Beatty uses this extreme notion to critique social structures and highlight the psychological toll of racial oppression.

Beatty's portrayal of Gunnar challenges the traditional tragic mulatto archetype by infusing it with satire. The tragic mulatto trope is explored through Gunnar Kaufman, a mixed-race protagonist who struggles with identity and belonging in a racially segregated society. Through Gunnar's personality, Beatty examines cultural displacement, racial authenticity, and self-identification, offering a nuanced critique of these themes.

5.8 Gunnar Between Black Man and the New Negro

Beatty focuses on the tension between historical and modern African American identities through the character of Gunnar Kaufman, exploring the evolution from the "Black Man" to the "New Negro." Through satire, historical resonance, and existential introspection, Beatty critiques the complexities of racial identity, societal expectations, and self-perception,

illustrating how Gunnar navigates the cultural dichotomies and systemic challenges that define the African American experience. Beatty proclaims in the novel, “The Negro is now officially human”(Beatty, 1996, p. 196) to satirize the superficial progress of racial equality. On the surface, society proclaims racism eradicated, yet it continues to propagate entrenched stereotypes of African Americans as violent, lustful, and criminal. This duality underscores the persistent challenge of reconciling external perceptions with self-definition. Gunnar and his friends attempt to redefine “color on their terms,” rejecting prescribed narratives and refusing to “stay inside the lines.” However, this effort reflects a more profound struggle, the desire to assimilate while fighting with a legacy of dehumanization differently.

At Manischewitz Junior High, Gunnar confronts these stereotypes directly during a Shakespearean soliloquy contest. Taking the stage as Iago from *Othello*, he replaces the monologue with a biting commentary on how the judges likely view him, a young Black boy embodying their preconceived notions. This moment encapsulates Gunnar’s internal frustration with the reductive views imposed upon him. Gunnar’s performance is both an act of defiance and a poignant critique of how African American men are framed within society, echoing the historical scars of racism and alienation.

The novel interrogates the concept of color blindness, most notably when Gunnar observes, “Our teacher says we’re supposed to be colorblind. That’s hard to do if you can see color, right?” This statement exposes the paradox of pretending race does not matter in a world that constantly highlights it. Gunnar’s experiences reveal the absurdity of colorblind ideologies, emphasizing the enduring visibility of racial differences and the impossibility of ignoring their impact. Beatty uses Gunnar’s humor and introspection to underscore the tension between the pressure to conform to societal expectations and the necessity of embracing one’s racial identity.

Gunnar’s evolution also embodies the “Black Man” characteristics, symbolizing resilience in the face of systemic oppression. His poignant question, “What kind of Black man

would let his wife give birth in the park?" invokes the historical dehumanization of African American families. This moment, set against the sacredness of childbirth, becomes a powerful critique of the systemic neglect that denies Black families dignity and safety. The park, a public yet marginal space, symbolizes how African American communities are often relegated to areas that lack belonging or security. Gunnar's question also reflects expectations of Black manhood, emphasizing the societal pressure for Black men to embody strength, leadership, and resilience even in adverse circumstances.

Gunnar also represents the modern struggle for balance, an experience resonant with the archetype of the "New Negro." This concept, rooted in the Harlem Renaissance, emphasizes self-determination, cultural pride, and intellectual achievement. However, as Gunnar reflects in his satirical observation, "Like the good Reverend King I too 'have a dream,' but when I wake up I forget it and remember I am running late for work," the idealized dreams of equality often collide with the practical realities of daily life. This tension encapsulates the challenge of sustaining the lofty aspirations of the "New Negro" in a society that continues to marginalize African Americans.

Gunnar's relationship with his father also captures another sign of Gunnar's Black Man personality. Violent paternal force emerges at the critical moment when Gunnar risks forming a connection that symbolizes racial and cultural transgression. His father's physical punishment serves to sever him from Eileen's captivating blue-eyed gaze, described as a "beacon lancing into midnight" (Beatty, 1996,p. 34), and to reassert his identity as a Kaufman male, tethered to his cultural heritage. Gunnar's flirtation with Eileen, alongside his immersion in the multicultural environment of Santa Monica, threatens to compromise his role as a cultural intermediary and risks transforming him into distorting the legacy he is tasked to uphold.

This act of violence, infused with latent sexual undertones, brings an abrupt end to Gunnar's literary experimentation and prompts the family's relocation to Hillside, a

neighborhood representing a more "traditional Black experience" (Beatty, 1996, p. 46). This underscores how physicality becomes a symbolic mechanism to control sexual, cultural, and aesthetic expressions. A stark contrast marks Gunnar's arrival in this new environment: instead of being pierced by the light of Santa Monica's multicultural allure, he finds himself metaphorically confined in a "black box," reduced to a state where his body and voice render him "broke as hell. Corporeally mute" (Beatty, 1996, p. 52). This moment encapsulates how Black masculinity, particularly in the role of the "Black Man," is disciplined and constrained to preserve cultural continuity and resist perceived threats of assimilation.

Beatty's use of humor critiques both the commodification of Black identity and the often facile narratives of liberation. Gunnar's transformation into a leader of a movement advocating "freedom through suicide"(Beatty, 1996, p. 245) starkly satirizes the inability of contemporary systems to provide meaningful change. His declaration, "I'm just ready to die"(Beatty, 1996, p. 245), reflects a profound disillusionment with both historical models of resistance and the current state of racial politics. Beatty connects this disillusionment to Gunnar's existential struggle.

Through Gunnar Kaufman, Beatty pictures the difficulties of being both "Black Man" and "New Negro," critiquing the reductive stereotypes, historical scars, and social perceptions that build racial identity. Therefore, Gunnar's path illustrates that the ongoing struggle for self-determination in a world that claims to be post-racial exists on a spectrum. This spectrum alternates between efforts to deny racism and simultaneous attempts to (re)value it through erasure and cultural appropriation of racialized bodies. From another perspective, this highlights how damaging such contradictions are to the psyche of Black life in America. It demonstrates the resilience to assert African American selfhood while inheriting a collective past. Beatty blends satire, historical narrative, and existential philosophy to reimagine what it

means to seek identity as an African American and advocate for a more liberated vision of African American selfhood.

Conclusion

Dana and Gunnar offered a contrasting yet complementary reimagining of the differences between Butler's and Beatty's presentation of the painful oppressed people's identity journey. Dana rejected the trope by embracing her African American heritage and using her ancestral connections and education as self-empowerment tools. Her journey is one of resilience, survival, and defiance as she grounded her racial identity in solidarity with her enslaved ancestors. In contrast, Gunnar critiqued the archetype through satire and existential despair. Struggling with displacement and dual alienation, he mocked social structures and the commodification of African American identity.

Moreover, Dana rejected the mulatta trope by embracing her interracial marriage and her relationship with her women's ancestors. In contrast, Gunnar symbolized the mulatto archetype through his suicidal ideas, which are covered with pain, satire, and existential despair. Struggling with displacement and dual alienation, both Dana and Beatty presented the social structures of African American identity, ultimately advocating for a healthy way for assimilation and maintaining healthy well-being.

All in all, while Dana reclaimed agency through cultural connection, Gunnar highlighted the futility and psychological toll of navigating a fractured racial identity. Together, they redefined the tragic mulatto, with Dana emphasizing empowerment and Gunnar exposing the existential struggles of belonging in a racially divided society.

General Conclusion

It would be easy to argue that we live in a world in crisis, with social, moral, economic, and humanitarian crises, among countless others. As chaos and confusion seem to reign supreme in the inner lives of African American people and the outer world of so many, voices that would help make sense of it all are sorely needed. The history of African-American people is marked by slavery (1619-1865), which is characterized by continuous dehumanization, humiliation, racial segregation, and exploitation. African Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America. However, because of racism, their history is considered one of the richest.

Racism devalues, demeans, and oppresses African Americans by treating them as lesser than their White racial counterparts, often lesser than any racial counterpart, and denying them equal access and opportunity for health, safety, happiness, and prosperity. African Americans' historical background made of oppression, isolation, loneliness, movements, and countless factors that affect the literary production of African American writers.

Therefore, African American literature is the mirror that reflects their suffering during the twentieth century, after, and before. There are a few noticeable periods of African-American literary tradition: the early period (18th c.–early 1920s), the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940), the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Arts (or Black Aesthetic) Movement of the 1960s and 1970s; a postmodern moment in African-American literature (roughly speaking, it started in the 1970s and continues to the present day). Each period contributes to the growth and diversification of African American literary expression, reflecting the changing historical, cultural, psychological, and social landscapes that shape the African American journey.

The current research, entitled *The Dialectics of the Self and the Other in Twentieth-Century African American Literature: The Case of Octavia Butler's Kindred and Paul Beatty's The White Boy Shuffle*, investigated the representation of the self and the other in African American literature. This thesis then analyzed the themes, events, and protagonists'

psychological journeys in the aforementioned works. In addition it explored how these authors redefine the African American self, moving beyond binary frameworks to present it as an evolving racial identity. Drawing on Black Psychology and William E. Cross's Nigrescence Model, the research examined the protagonists' processes of identity formation as acts of growth and resistance. Additionally, it considered how these authors reimagine the African American self in the post-racial era, mainly through the lens of mulatto characters and meta-Black identity.

Though separated by the Civil Rights Act, Octavia Butler's pre-segregation realities echo Paul Beatty's post-Act critiques, both wielding literature to dissect enduring racial conflicts. Both authors' awareness of the African American social reality, as well as the collective consciousness, has pushed complaints aside and urged the African-origin authors' creativity to think in terms of literary and psychological production, the reason why the modern African American novel has moved from the theme of segregation, racism, weakness, argument to the sixties that began to concern itself with the theme of the great dream of independence, socially and literally—themes after the sixties extends beyond the confines of literature into the broader socio-political psychological, context. Here, it becomes the literature that voices the belief in the viability and effectiveness of Black voices.

These authors have gone through a very long process of cultural assimilation, race issues, and discrimination experience. However, their literature deserves to be given a deal of importance not only as a literary document but as a psychological case. *Kindred* and *The White Boy Shuffle* embark on a journey of African American self-growth and challenge Western bias. Although extracting the novel's essence depends on both the writer and the reader, delving into the psychological aspects of the subject directly has made it a direct argument for the is-ness of African American literature. Butler and Beatty depict racial identity as a central force shaping their protagonists' self-perception, demonstrating how it influences their sense of belonging,

agency, and resistance. Dana internalizes her dual temporal realities, using her experiences as a Black woman in the antebellum South and a modern-era individual to reconcile her identity. In contrast, Gunnar approaches his racial identity with satirical scenes through displacement.

Dana's invisibility stems from the dehumanization of slavery, erasing her agency and individuality. Her time travel and shared suffering with enslaved people highlight the systemic violence that silences her voice. Gunnar's invisibility is rooted in cultural isolation and racial stereotyping. Labeled the "cool Black kid," he struggles with alienation while living in predominantly white spaces. While Dana's journey involves connecting with her enslaved ancestors to reclaim her identity, Gunnar finds visibility by rejecting societal stereotypes and embracing his Black identity within his community. Both works reveal invisibility as a consequence of oppression and a pathway to self-discovery, enriching the broader discourse on identity in African American literature.

Butler presents Dana as a subject whose identity is shaped by her paradoxical predicament. Her survival hinges on saving Rufus, her ancestor, tying her existence to his. This dependency forces Dana to navigate her identity as a Black woman within the oppressive structures of slavery. The trauma and displacement she experiences—both physical, like losing her arm, and psychological, as seen in her alienation and time-traveling—challenge her self-perception. However, through memory and resilience, Dana reconciles her dual identity, acknowledging her agency while grappling with the enduring scars of her historical and personal struggles. However, Beatty explores Gunnar's subjectivity through his desires and collective expectations. His struggles with racial prejudice reveal the limits of cultural whiteness in shielding him from racism. His identity crisis intensifies after moving to Hillside, where he confronts new cultural norms and expectations. Gunnar's desires in basketball and being a poet have become a way to reconcile his individuality. His transformation is symbolized

by cultural markers like sneakers and basketball, which balance his internal struggles with the need for belonging.

In interracial and intraracial relationships, Butler uses Dana and Kevin's interracial marriage to explore themes of identity, self-growth, and historical memory. Their relationship, set against the backdrop of 1970s California and the antebellum South, highlights the socio-political tensions of racism and sexism. Butler used flashbacks as one of the devices that reflected Dana's choice in the present. At the same time, the traumatic relationship between Dana and Rufus explored the impact of historical trauma on identity. Butler used repeated time travel to save Rufus, which is a symbol of slavery's brutality. The scene, in which her survival and identity hinge on preserving Rufus's life, challenges traditional victim-oppressor binaries and reveals the psychological and emotional entanglements of slavery. In addition, Butler used the relationship between Dana and Alice as a metaphor to highlight the legacy of slavery and the duality of survival strategies. Butler juxtaposes these two characters, modern, independent Dana and enslaved, oppressed Alice, to reveal the trauma of slavery.

The post-Civil Rights era emerges as a time of disillusionment, where the gap between legislative victories and racism fosters identity confusion. Beatty uses poignant interactions, like Gunnar's experiences with Yoshiko, Scoby, and his mother, cultural mistrust, and community dynamics, to depict the journey of self-recognition. Gunnar's move to Hillside, his involvement with gang culture, and his relationship with Psycho Loco reveal the link between internalized Blackness and external judgments.

The presence of (tragic) mulatto characteristics in different relationships and integration of both Dana's and Gunnar's lives might be either a sense of reconciliation or might be seen as a poignant reminder of the psychological impact of racism. Dana's journey emphasizes resilience as she reconnects with her African American kindred. Detached from her history, she evolves from viewing race as secondary to embracing her ancestry as a source of strength and

empowerment, ultimately rejecting the tragic mulatto stereotype. Her commitment to her history developed her meta-lacinia identity, reflecting a transformative journey of self-awareness.

Gunnar's journey critiques the tragic mulatto trope. However, he presents a new image of a Black man to disrupt the disturbing comfort that people might have when they read about Black people's tragedies, suicidal orientations, or Black lives stories in general. Beatty finds a way to dislodge the idea adopted by both mainstreams, suicide, which also presents the real tragic mulatto.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Biography of Octavia E. Butler

1947: Octavia Butler was born on June 22nd

1967: fifth place, Writer's Digest Short Story Contest

1968: received an associate's degree from Pasadena City College

1971: "Crossover" (short story) published in Clarion, the anthology of the Clarion Workshop

1976: *Patternmaster,* the fourth book in the Patternist series, was published.

1977: *Mind of My Mind,* the second book in the Patternist series, was published.

1978: *Survivor,* the third book of the Patternist series, was published, but was never reprinted.

1979: *Kindred* was published.

1979: "Near of Kin" (short story)

1980: *Wild Seed,* the first book in the Patternist series, was published.

1980: receives Creative Art Award, L.A YWCA

1983: "Speech Sounds" (short story) published in Asimov's Science Fiction.

1984: *Clay's Ark,* the fifth book in the Patternist series, was published.

1984: "Bloodchild" (short story) published in Asimov's Science Fiction.

1984: received Nebula Award for Best Novelette-"Bloodchild."

1984: received the Hugo Award for Best Short Story-"Speech Sounds."

1985: received the Hugo Award for Best Novelette-Bloodchild.

1985: received Locus Award for Best Novelette-Bloodchild.

1985: received Science Fiction Chronicle Award for Best Novelette-Bloodchild.

1987: *Dawn*, the first book in the Lilith's Brood trilogy, was published.

1987: "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (short story) published in Omni Magazine.

1987: received the Nebula Award for Best Novelette-"The Evening and the Morning and the

Night."

1988: *Adult Rights*, the second book in the Lilith's Brood trilogy, was published.

1989: *Imago*, the last book in the *Lilith's Brood trilogy*, was published.

1993: *Parable of the Sower*, the first book that appeared in The Parable Series, was published.

1994: received Nebula Award for Best Novel-Parable of the Sower.

1995: received MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant; the first science fiction writer to receive the grant.

1998: *Parable of the Talents*, the second book in The Parable Series, was published.

1999: received the Nebula Award for Best Novel-Parable of the Talents.

2000: *Lilith's Brood* (omnibus of two works by Butler, formerly the Xenogenesis series) was published.

2000: received lifetime achievement award in writing from the PEN American Center.

2005: *Fledging* was published.

2006: Octavia Butler died on February 24th of a stroke, which caused head injuries.

2007: *Seed to Harvest* (omnibus of the Patternist series) is published. Survivor is not included.

2010: Butler was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame.

Appendix B

Biography of Paul Beatty

1962: Paul Beatty was born on June 9 in Los Angeles, California.

1980: Graduated from El Camino Real High School in Los Angeles.

1980s: Attended Boston University, earning a Master of Arts in psychology.

1990: Became the first Grand Poetry Slam Champion of the Nuyorican Poets Café, securing a book deal.

1991: Published his first poetry collection, *Big Bank Take Little Bank.*

1993: Received a grant from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, enabling him to write his debut novel.

1994: Published his second poetry collection, *Joker, Joker, Deuce*.

1996: Released his first novel, *The White Boy Shuffle*, which gains critical acclaim as a pioneering "*hip-hop*" novel.

2000: Published his second novel, *Tuff.*

2006: Edited and contributed to Hokum: An Anthology of African American Humor.

2008: Released his third novel, *Slumberland.*

2015: Published *The Sellout,* his fourth novel.

2016: Won the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction for *The Sellout*, becoming the first American to win the Man Booker Prize since its expansion to English-language novels in 2014.

Present: Lives in Manhattan with his wife, filmmaker Althea Wasow, and serves as an associate professor of writing at Columbia University in New York.

Résumé

Il est difficile pour les Afro-Américains de maintenir leur sentiment d'existence ou de développer leur identité raciale dans une société marquée par le racisme systémique. *Kindred* d'Octavia Butler et *The White Boy Shuffle* de Paul Beatty dressent un portrait renouvelé de l'identité afro-américaine, présentant une série d'expériences vécues par leurs protagonistes, Dana et Gunnar, deux personnages afro-américains non traditionnels dont les parcours illustrent la difficulté de la formation de l'identité raciale et de l'auto-représentation. Ces expériences se cristallisent en des explorations de la culture, de l'histoire, de la mémoire, du temps, du lieu et de la psyché. Cette étude se concentre sur les cicatrices psychologiques du racisme et son impact sur la formation de l'identité raciale et l'auto-définition des Afro-Américains. En appliquant une branche innovante de la psychologie noire, le modèle de la Nigrescence de William E. Cross, cette recherche examine la représentation de l'identité raciale et de la perception de soi dans les deux romans. Elle explore comment les protagonistes dépeignent la figure tragique du mulâtre et comment ce trope pourrait être réapproprié comme un symbole de résistance. L'étude examine également comment Butler et Beatty réaffirment les notions d'identité méta-noire et du Nouveau Noir. À travers cette exploration, cette recherche met en lumière les complexités de la formation de l'identité, à la fois comme un lieu de lutte et un outil d'autonomisation face au racisme systémique. Cette étude compare les deux romans en utilisant les concepts mentionnés ci-dessus pour montrer les similitudes et les différences entre les représentations des auteurs de la lutte afro-américaine pour maintenir l'estime de soi noire. La comparaison révèle une différence significative entre les parcours de formation identitaire des protagonistes et souligne l'importance des contextes authentiques dans ce processus.

Mots-clés: Psychologie noire, Modèle de Nigrescence, autre, identité raciale, racisme.

الملخص

من الصعب على الأفرو-أمريكيين الحفاظ على شعورهم بالوجود أو تطوير هويتهم العرقية في مجتمع يعاني من العنصرية النظامية. روايتا *Kindred* لـOctavia Butler و*The White Boy Shuffle* لـPaul Beatty ترسمان صورة جديدة للهوية الأفرو-أمريكية، حيث تعرضان سلسلة من التجارب التي يمر بها بطلاهما، دانا وغونار، وهما شخصيتان أفرو-أمريكيتان غير تقليديتان تسلطان الضوء على صعوبة تشكيل الهوية العرقية وتمثيل الذات. تتجسد هذه التجارب في استكشافات للثقافة، التاريخ، الذاكرة، الزمان، المكان، والنفس. تركز هذه الدراسة على الندوب النفسية للعنصرية وتأثيرها على تشكيل الهوية العرقية وتحديد الذات لدى الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي. من خلال تطبيق فرع مبتكر من علم النفس الأسود، وهو Nigrescence Model لـ William. E. Cross، تبحث هذه الدراسة في تمثيل الهوية العرقية وإدراك الذات في الروايتين. كما تستكشف كيف يرسم البطلان صورة شخصية Tragic Mulatto وكيف يمكن إعادة توظيف هذا النمط كرمز للمقاومة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تبحث الدراسة كيف أعادButlerوBeatty تأكيد مفاهيم الهوية الميتا-سوداء و"النيغرو الجديد". من خلال هذا الاستكشاف، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على تعقيدات تشكيل الهوية كموقع للصراع وأداة للتمكين في مواجهة العنصرية النظامية. تقارن هذه الدراسة بين الروايتين باستخدام المفاهيم المذكورة أعلاه لإظهار أوجه التشابه والاختلاف في تمثيل الكاتبين للنضال الأفرو-أمريكي للحفاظ على تقدير الذات الأسود. يكشف هذا المقارنة عن اختلاف كبير بين مسارات تشكيل الهوية لدى البطلين ويؤكد أهمية الخلفيات الأصيلة في هذه العملية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشكيل الهوية الأنثوية، الدافع النسوي، نهج علم النفس الاسود، نموذج السواد، الهوية العرقية ،الآخر،الذات.