Images in the black literary tradition

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IMAGES IN THE BLACK LITERARY TRADITION

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PREFACE

This study traces that correlation between history and literature which provided a unique black literary tradition focusing on self-identity, unity, and protest taking various forms in the representation of black images, including fiction for young readers.

The writer selected forty-three fictional works which range from the earliest black writings in the eighteenth century through twentieth century black-authored fiction in the 1960's. These works were chosen from Augusta Baker's *The Black Experience in Children's Books* and Miles Jackson's *Black Books for Negro Culture*. These two bibliographies provide a wide sampling of black cultural history and fiction. Although the emphasis is on black-authored works, some examples of white-authored fiction, before the twentieth century, have been included to show various characterizations of black characters and the white man's attitude about his self-identity. These white-authored works were selected from Carl Holliday's *A History of Southern Literature*.

The study is divided into four chapters. Chapter One presents black and white authored fiction which gave rise to authentic and stereotypical black images before the twentieth century. Chapter Two analyzes black-authored fiction during the Harlem Renaissance which perpetuated the black literary tradition. Chapter Three focuses on the social and economic conditions that have influenced black portraiture during the thirties and forties. Chapter Four discusses black portraits which were influenced by the Civil Rights movement in the fifties and sixties. There will be a major attempt to show the continuity of the black
literary tradition in black-authored fiction and that this continuity is also obvious in black-authored works for young readers.

This study should serve as a literary guide for future investigations of children's literature in the 1970's.
CHAPTER I

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF BLACKS IN LITERATURE

PRIOR TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

With the dawn of the twentieth century, the tradition of protest, of the changing black self-concept, and of the struggle for freedom remained the major themes in the cultural expressions of black Americans. As Long and Collier stated in *Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (1972):

The writing of the Afro-American is the stain in the literature of this country which seriously challenges the myth of American perfection. Fundamental wrong, fundamental error, fundamental injustice disturb the picture. And yet it is fundamental wrong, fundamental error, fundamental injustice that Afro-American literature must reflect to be true to itself, for it is a literature of oppression, it is a cry from the soul of an oppressed people. It is also a literature of protest, a cry for redress. And in its most recent manifestations it is preeminently a literature of liberation.¹

Twentieth century black authors published works on a greater scale than ever before. These black authors wanted to portray true and positive images of the black race. They desired to contribute their ability and creativity to a black world which desperately needed their productivity and to a white world which restricted the black man's right to express and to define himself. These black authors were probing to define and articulate black identity to counterbalance the established "superior" identity of whites in America. Furthermore, these writers wanted to

rectify the old myths and stereotypes concerning blacks.

Black characterizations in the twentieth century black-authored works for young readers are deeply rooted in the special historical and cultural factors that have affected the lives of black people and in the attitudes of the white majority toward the black minority. The unique and critical circumstances of blacks in America resulted in prescriptions and proscriptions for blacks that have influenced personal, societal, and philosophical formations.¹ Ancient, deep-rooted prejudices provoked and encouraged the formation of America's preeminent social conflict: black versus white.

The black race has remained a segment of America which has been neither completely integrated nor completely segregated in the society, differing from other races which have attained full citizenship status despite their religions and ethnic origins. Prominent factors such as skin color and hair texture, presumed inferiority, and inherited rituals of race relations have abetted the discrimination of blacks and perpetuated ambiguous roles.²

First, physical characteristics of skin color and hair texture easily segregated people into a dual color caste system which was supported through Anglo-American literary and artistic expression: black became a sign of danger and the symbol of baseness and white became a

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symbol of virginity and goodness. Pigmentation and hair became stigmatizing factors which impregnated white-authored fiction in the formation of stereotypes. These stereotypes were incorporated in white-authored and white-oriented literature to disprove any notion that there existed an affinity between "lowly" blacks and the white "master class." Stereotypes were maintained in fiction because of "the fear of facing those facts which would seem to threaten the established routines of men." They were convenient abstractions which negatively categorized traits and characteristics of blacks.

The second factor has been the myth of white supremacy. White dominated institutions continually and systematically projected the belief that blacks are members of an inferior race and that whites are members of a superior race. This belief may be both a cause and result of the previous enslavement of blacks. Samuel Sewall, a Puritan apologist for slavery, saw a disparity in the color and conditions of blacks which "proved" that they could never assimilate into the white society. Slaveholders utilized the distinct color of blacks along with the sanctions of the Old and New Testaments concerning the descendants of Ham in maintaining the concept of black inferiority. This religious

1 Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy, ed., Images of the Negro in American Fiction (Chicago, 1966), p. 35.


interpretation seemingly justified the economically profitable use of slave labor and the spiritual satisfaction of presumed superiority.¹

The rituals of race relations were supported by the feudalistic plantation pattern which consisted of a master class and black subordinates. The white master rose because of class distinctions induced by the plantation system. Owners of plantations were "gentlemen" who supposedly acted in the cavalier image of Europe and enjoyed wealth and rank in the southern regions. W. J. Cash stated that the plantation system provided caste distinctions and introduced "that other vastly ego-warming and ego-expanding distinction between the white man and the black."² Black men occupied the position of domestic animals, "without will or right" of their own.³ This type of distinction supported the concept of white superiority and black inferiority, which transfused all levels of contact and forms of address utilized by the white and black races. The ego-expanding device of forms of address between the races was designed to rob and to degrade the black race. The plantation lifestyle was instrumental in establishing forms of address that tended to raise the status of whites and to lower the status of blacks.

White slaveholders addressed their slaves as "aunt," "mammy," "uncle," and "boy." These forms of address were implemented to reduce the positive impact of human interactions between masters and slaves. W. J.

¹ Gross and Hardy, op. cit., pp. 45-46.


³ Ibid., p. 85.
in this society in which the infant son of the planter was commonly suckled by a black mammy, in which gray old black men were his most loved story-tellers in which black stalwarts were among the chieftest heroes and mentors of his boyhood, and in which his usual, often practically his only, companions until he was past the age of puberty were the black boys (and girls) of the plantation. . . Negroes entered into white man as profoundly as white man entered into the Negro—subtly influencing every gesture, every word, every emotion, and idea, every attitude.  

Later, beyond the plantation, these forms of address continued to take on various meanings which degraded blacks. After emancipation, terms shifted from "master" to "mister" and the surname of whites, while blacks were called "boys," "niggers," or "colored." These terms supposedly had no connotations of offense to the black persons addressed. But through these and other demeaning practices, blacks were still held subordinate and kept "in their place" by whites.

The assignment of blacks to a submissive role and whites to a dominant one culminated in undesirable effects that inhibited the maturation of healthy individuals in American society.  

There is great cause for concern when one realizes the danger that images hold in shaping attitudes, and that neither desirable self-concepts nor healthy individuals can evolve so long as whole segments of society are perceived in racial terms of superior and inferior group traits. Fortunately for black Americans, throughout the many generations of mutual dependence

1 Cash, op. cit., p. 51.

and defiance, contacts between blacks were intimate and binding because of the racist nature of the American slave system.¹

Some of the above mentioned factors accrued to benefit blacks. Group identity was forced on blacks not only because they were or had been slaves, but also because of racial visibility and a palpable physical difference, which made it easy for them to be singled out for stigmatism and discrimination. This group identity was further provoked by the inherited rituals of race relations, whenever social tensions prompted insecure whites to "buttress" their own self-image at the expense of a noticeably different group.² A group identity was born within members of the black entity, contributing to the cultural growth of Afro-American society.

In consequence, there evolved a unique black American literature which at times vaguely resembles the pattern and growth of white American literature. The more significant, creative black writing followed an initial period of expository, autobiographical, social, and political writing.³ The early black writers had self-taught literary skill and flexibility in form. Black American literature came into official opening in the 1890's because of the need and intense interest of blacks


to portray black life in authentic terms.\textsuperscript{1}

Communication between master and African slaves from disparate countries and language groups had required a language system that both could understand. Gradually, slaves reproduced and readjusted the language to communicate with each other in special depths and degrees. The slaves became skilled and unified through the language. They developed a structure that expressed their distinctive emotions and thoughts through various levels of art, including at first song and oratory, followed later by written expression. Although only a small number of blacks achieved literary distinction in colonial America, it is surprising what these few were able to do in the face of deprivations and oppositions which whites did not have to endure. The institution of slavery and white racism presented severe limitations to black progress. However, in the late 18th century, two blacks won recognition as writers, in the colonies as well as abroad. They were Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon; both were poets.

In the years prior to the Civil War, literary productivity of blacks was impressive. There was a continuous flow of black writings in spite of legal restrictions created to discourage Negroes from becoming literate.\textsuperscript{2} This black-authored literature consisted of narratives written and sometimes told by slaves, autobiographies, political tracts, and later, novels. Such black writers as Gustava Vassa, Frederick Douglass,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p. 26.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 22.
\end{itemize}
David Walker, and William Wells Brown produced representative works in these genres.

Gustava Vassa wrote one of the earliest and most significant slave narratives entitled, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olondah Equiano, or Gustava Vassa, The African* (1789). Because of the elaborateness of this narrative, there is a more distinct image of Vassa than of any other black of the eighteenth century.\(^1\) The work, pointedly lucid throughout, recounts his childhood in Africa; of African hunters capturing him when he was eleven years old; of his experience as a slave on a plantation in America, then, in the bondage of a British naval officer who provided education for him; of his purchasing his freedom from his master by saving wages; and of his residing in England to write anti-slavery tracts.\(^2\)

Throughout the narrative and apparently during his lifetime, Vassa maintained his African heritage with its customs which no alien environment could destroy. Vassa was passionately concerned with his mother country's welfare after it had fallen prey to white invasions, the end product being slavery. Repeatedly in the narrative, Vassa incorporated anti-slavery sentiments. In one particular passage, he had witnessed the sale of seven brothers to seven different masters, breaking up the family unit. He stated:

0, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you - Learned you this from your God,... Is it not

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\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 41-44.
enough that we are torn from our country and friends, to
toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender
feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice?¹

Vassa represented the maturing independence of spirit which blacks were
manifesting during the eighteenth century. Thus, Vassa's work can be
termed as an abolitionist pamphlet protesting both Christian hypocrisy
and the cruel injustices of slavery. This work projected the image of a
strong courageous, and virile black man.

Simultaneously with the slave narrative, anti-slavery expository
writing flourished. David Walker, who is most widely known for his
essay, "Walker's Appeal in Four Articles Together with a Preamble to the
Colored Citizens of the World But in Particular and very Expressly to
those of the United States of America," emerged as a fierce fighter for
the liberation of his people. Walker witnessed slavery from birth in
North Carolina to the time he left that state and arrived in Boston. In
1829, his work was an appeal to every man who believed in God to open
his "heart to understand and believe the truth" about the causes "which
produce" the black race's "wretchedness and miseries."² He used rhetor-
ical devices in his "Appeal" to create a greater impact on the reader.
Walker frequently compared the black race to biblical races of people
who had been held in bondage. In each case, the oppressed people were

¹ Gustava Vassa, The Life of Gustava Vassa, The African, included in

² David Walker, Appeal: To the Colored Citizens of The World, but
in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of
America (New York, 1965), 1-78.
rescued from their oppressors by the intervention of God's wrath. Walker's work was written to intimidate white oppression. Like Vassa's narrative, Walker's 'Appeal' laid the foundation for Frederick Douglass and other great black abolitionists who had sharpened senses and oratory skills to articulate the injustices of slavery.

In 1855, Frederick Douglass wrote his autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Before the publication of this work, Douglass had emerged as one of the most persistent of the black abolitionist movement and a crusader for the eradication of slavery. In accordance with the thesis of the movement, Douglass incorporated in his autobiography the diverse terrors of slavery on a Maryland plantation where he spent his early childhood. The black characters treated in his work were characterized as virtuous and close-knit. For instance, Douglass told of the respect blacks gave to black elders and how it all came about. He made the observation:

I set this down as partly constitutional with my race, and partly conventional. There is no better material in the world for making a gentleman, than is furnished in the African. He shows to others, and exacts for himself, all the tokens of respect which he is compelled to manifest toward his master.¹

The tone of black manhood and humanity is consistent throughout Douglass's work. The idea of black inferiority never enters into the work. Douglass affirms the tradition of human dignity and self respect imbedded in the black race.

The black-authored novel came into its early form when William

Wells Brown wrote *Clotel or the President's Daughter* in 1853. The main character of the novel is Clotel who is a mulatto girl. She and her family are sold after the death of their master. The advertisement of their sale is descriptive and vividly detailed. Within the article, Clotel and another mulatto girl are described as "girls of rare personal qualities: two of them very superior." Clotel is bought and made a concubine by her white master. An illegitimate daughter is born and taken from her, when the mistress of the house discovers the nature of the relationship between her husband and Clotel. As a consequence, she is sold "down the river." However, she futilely tries to escape her oppressors, which eventually ends with her committing suicide. Through death, Clotel is freed from her earthly oppressors.

She clasped her hands convulsively, and raised them, as she at the same time raised her eyes toward heaven, and begged for that mercy and compassion there, which had been denied her on earth. . . she vaulted over the railings of the bridge. . .

Brown clearly asserted that the hardships and "good treatment" of slaves did not dampen Clotel or any other slave's spirit about the "idea that he was born to be free" and that this idea "will survive it all."

This novel portrays the strength of black motherhood and womanhood as dominant characteristics in the black race. Even in the face of

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1 William Wells Brown, *Clotel or the President's Daughter* (New York, 1853), p. 59.

2 Ibid., p. 178.

3 Ibid., p. 120.
harsh cruelties and possible death, the mother tries repeatedly to save her young. Brown holds the strength of black women as an unquestioned trait. Just as Douglass portrays black manhood, Brown attributes the abiding human sensitivity of black women to the tradition of oppressed people.

During Reconstruction, blacks were afforded greater opportunities for education with the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau. As more blacks became literate, the creative quality of alert black minds became more evident. Blacks were able to appraise their situations from a different level of political and social understanding. Such men as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles W. Chestnutt emerged during these years as great literary figures with their major production in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

In 1899, Charles Waddell Chestnutt wrote *The Conjure Woman*, which is a collection of short stories about black folk culture. The work centers on a northern white man who has to move South because of his wife's illness. When the couple arrives in North Carolina, they become interested in grape culture. While surveying a potential plantation for their homesite, they meet Julius McAdoo, an ex-slave. This meeting begins Julius's orations, designed to gain everything from the white man as best he can.

Julius is portrayed as a shrewd and cunning black man who seeks conscientiously the improvement of his race. For instance, the white

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northerner is considering using an old barn which Julius has already
visioned as a church for his people. In order to discourage the white
northerner, Julius begins to tell tales of the ghostly inhabitants of
the barn. Apparently, the white northerner does not believe him, but
his wife does. She persuades the man to leave the building alone. Thus,
Julius has helped his black community gain a church building.

Through Julius, Chestnutt has portrayed the costume that blacks
paraded in to obtain what they knew was right. In essence, Chestnutt
has taken the "Uncle Tom" and comic Negro stereotypes and transformed
them into a positive image of blacks. He has employed farcical sit-
uations to highlight the intelligence and scrutiny of blacks to appeal
to the conscience of whites who tend to analyze blacks by face value.

In 1902, Dunbar published The Sport of the Gods. This novel is a
forerunner to those of the Harlem Renaissance. His novel was the first
to depict the urban Negro who was to be the main topic of black writers
in the twentieth century Harlem Renaissance. In the portrayal of his
two main characters, Dunbar tried to portray the basic quest for true
identity.

Dunbar portrays Kitty and Joe, sister and brother, as blacks from
the South trying to escape their past by moving to the North. Tragical-
ly, both of these characters learn that they can not escape their heri-
tage by drifting to and from cities. Kitty is seduced and misused by
the young man of her choosing, but bounces back into reality by becoming
a black actress with a black group in the theater. Joe falls in love
with an actress who does not care for him. When the woman tires of Joe,
he is defeated. He kills her, and is sentenced to prison.

In the novel, Dunbar addressed the black people in an attempt to arouse and stir the quest for black identity. Dunbar was urging blacks to return to their roots in the South because of "the pernicious influence of the city." For, Dunbar felt that blacks immigrating to the northern cities were trying to elude their pasts and identities in exchange for "false ideals and unreal ambitions."¹ It appeared that Dunbar was reminding blacks to take their pasts with them wherever they may go. For, it is through acknowledgment of one's background that he can build a better future.

During this period, the early black writers sought to portray honestly and vividly the black experience in America through the above mentioned genres by protest in prose against subjugation and discrimination.

In order to understand black images in white American fiction, one must examine more closely the factors mentioned above and their relationship to historical chronology. The white-authored writings of the early eighteenth century offer little problem. They consist mainly of diaries, chronicles, and political tracts concerned basically with the British colonists' struggle for physical, spiritual, and political survival.² These writings are not fiction. Black characters are present

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² Gross and Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-53.
in these writings as peripheral figures functioning as laborers for the colonizers. It was not until the early nineteenth century that black characters began to appear within the mainstream of white-authored American writing.

By the middle of the century, pro-slavery and antislavery sentiments dominated American life and literature. These sentiments influenced black characterizations. The institution of slavery conditioned the attitudes of whites and blacks toward one another.¹ Slavery, moreover, anchored the Negro deep into the soil of American life. By the 1820's, the white-authored American novel had been established; it incorporated the American Indian and the American Negro into its framework.

James Fennimore Cooper chose to depict the first "full-length portrait" of the Negro as a contented slave in his novel, The Spy (1821).² Caesar Thompson was portrayed as a faithful and loyal servant who served the author's purpose through the contrast of his image with those of the whites. Caesar is described as comic in appearance, although "he has his heart in the right place." An examination of Caesar's name, physical appearance and personality shows that all three reflect the cultural attitudes to which his master and other whites and Caesar himself had become well-conditioned. This kind of naming is sarcastic; the apparent reason being to make fun of and to dehumanize the man by reducing him to

¹ Naomi Goldstein, The Roots of Prejudices Against the Negro in the United States (Boston, 1948), p. 133.

the status of a creature in the naming process similar to a horse or dog.

Caesar is comparable to an animal and the animal image is reinforced by descriptions of his physical appearance. Cooper writes:

... But it was in his legs that nature had indulged her most capricious humor. There was an abundance of material injudiciously used. The calves were neither before nor behind, but rather on the side of the limb. In the foot . . . Caesar had no cause of complaint, unless indeed, it might be that the leg was placed so near the center as to make it sometimes a matter of dispute whether he walking backwards.¹

In this novel, the image of the comic Negro is developed skillfully, along with the image of the black as animal rather than man. Further, Cooper projects the image of the black in docile acceptance of the rightness of his inferior status: "salute a young lady - Miss Fanny wouldn't let an old colored man kiss a red cheek."² Caesar is aware of the conventions of society that prohibit black men from intimate contact with white women. He knows that he is a "colored man" who must not aspire to such an honor;" and so, he remains in his subordinate role.

With the invention of the cotton gin, slavery was considered a basic necessity in the South. The tension between the North and the South on the slavery question was building. The southerners conceived the idea that they had to maintain and to spread the institution because of their needs on the plantation. They had to defend their right to hold slaves in perpetual bondage. As a result, the white southerners had to appeal

¹ James Fenimore Cooper, The Spy (New York, 1821), p. 36.

² Ibid., p. 45.
to the romantic sentiments of the South's inhabitants. Since the plantation's image was the North's focal point of attack, according to Sterling Brown, the southerners began to search for a unique tradition to "prettify" the plantation system. "A complete rationale of slavery evolved."¹ The plantation legend was born as a cause and effect of this rationale. The works created were transparent efforts to prove that slavery was the ideal system for the Negro and the only system of economy for the South. So the southern writers glorified plantation life and the condition of the slaves.

In 1824, George Tucker initiated the mood of the plantation tradition with his novel, *The Valley of Shenandoah*.² In actuality, the novel is a forerunner of the tradition, but it contains basic recurrent elements of that tradition. Tucker conveyed the image of the Negro as contented, an image which recurred in the works of John P. Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms. In *The Valley of Shenandoah*, Tucker superimposed reality on the fictitious aspects of the conditions of the slaves. He asserted that the Negro was insignificant as "a member of civilized society."³ Tucker drew the slave as contented with his station in the plantation system. He offered the argument that the Negro was well kept and well behaved due to the restrictions placed on him by his owner.

¹ Sterling Brown, "Negro Characters as Seen by White Authors," in *Journal of Negro Education* (April, 1933), 179-201.

² Gross and Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Tucker, to some degree, glorified slavery as an institution that produced loyalty from the slaves. For instance, his brief discussions of Granny Mott and Uncle Bristow portrays these characters as faithful to their masters. The black slaves are depicted as so loyal that even the field hands "completely identify themselves with the family as if the crops were their own."\textsuperscript{2} Tucker's thoughts on slavery were somewhat ambiguous, but it is quite apparent that he characterized the contented slave.

John F. Kennedy, in 1832, opened the power-charged plantation tradition with the publication of \textit{Swallow Barn}. The novel recounts the impressions of Mark Littleton, a white northerner, as he visits his cousin's southern plantation.

While in route to the plantation, Littleton is apprehensive about the conditions in the South. However, once there, he observes the beauty of the countryside and the atmosphere of contentment surrounding the plantation. He views the institution of slavery as a necessity for the Negro slaves who enjoy a good life. Littleton states:

\ldots he \{the Negro\} is, in his moral constitution, a dependant upon the white race; dependent for guidance--and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 208.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 227.
\end{itemize}
direction even to the procurement of his most indispen-
sable necessaries. . . I never met a Negro man—unless
he is quite old— that he is not whistling; and the
women sing from morning till night.1

In this novel, Kennedy not only tended to rationalize the idea that
slavery was necessary but depicted black characters as inferior to the
master class and fortunate to be in bondage in a civilized society.
This type of racism is perhaps most concisely expressed in the descrip-
tions of slaves serving at a dinner party.

A bevy of domestics, in every stage of training,
attended upon the table, presenting a lively type of the
progress of civilization, or the march of intellect; the
veteran waiting-man being well-contrasted with the rude
half-monkey, half-boy, who seemed to have been for the
first time admitted to the parlour; whilst, between
these two, were exhibited the successive degrees that
mark the advance from the young savage to the sedate and
sophisticated image of the old-fashioned Negro nobility.
It was equal to a galley of caricatures, a sort of scenic
satire upon man in his various stages.2

The institution of slavery in a civilized society, according to this
passage, was a necessity for the black slave's growth, mentally, and
physically. Furthermore, Kennedy's treatment of the Negro servants did
not individualize them. He compressed the whole massive body of black
slaves into "a galley of caricatures" whose sole purpose is attending
the master class.

A follower of Kennedy was William Gilmore Simms, who wrote Yemassee:
A Romance of the Carolinas in 1835. The plot revolved around an Indian

1 John P. Kennedy, Swallow Barn (New York, 1832), p. 16.

2 Ibid., p. 78.
uprising against the colonists in the Carolinas.

In the novel, Hector is a black slave who stands out as a skillful scout and Indian fighter. Hector’s role is that of mediator between the colonists and other slaves. To the Indians, he is a potential enemy. When Hector’s master is presumed captured by the Indians, Hector pleads to go and search for him in an attempt to show his heroism in battle. Hector urges his mistress to let him make the search. After he convinces his mistress that he will be careful in seeking out his master, he impresses upon her that he will not run away. Hector insists that before he would be a runaway he would rather be dead.

After his rescue, Lord Palatinate, out of gratitude, offers Hector his freedom. It is not surprising that Hector rejects this offer and does so vehemently. He prefers to remain a loyal and faithful servant in the bonds of slavery. He states:

I d-n to h-ll maussa ef I guine be free!  
I can't lose you company. . . 'tis unpossible,  
Maussa, and dere's no use for talk 'bout it. De ting ain't right. . . No Maussa-- you and Dugdole  
berry good company for Hector. I tank God he so good--I no want any better.  

Simms portrayed Hector as a black who accepted the thesis that blacks are inherently unprepared for freedom. Brainwashed Hector was unable to conceive of happiness in freedom. All he ever knew or wished was servile dependency on the master class. Thus, Simms incorporated the stereotype of the comic Negro and the contented slave into his work.

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The attitudes expressed by Simms, Kennedy, and Tucker were characteristic of the pro-slavery argument in the South. Slavery was necessary to protect the ignorant black masses who knew nothing about independence. The stereotypes of the contented slave and the comic Negro were used as social and political arguments to maintain slavery in the South.

White Americans, both North and South, needed to some degree the stereotypical images of black slaves most persuasive for the points of view expressed in the pre-Civil War conflict. For those who defended slavery, the stereotypes of contented slaves and comic Negroes were propagandistic weapons. For those who argued against slavery, stereotypical characterizations of black slaves were used, but in a different manner. Since the North was basically antislavery, men and women of letters employed their pens to put an end to misconceptions of slavery and its effect on blacks. These writers chose to depict blacks as appearing to be contented and comic, in order that they could veil their true emotions. The black characters had an ulterior motive for appearing content and comic, in the northern novels. The southern novel had presented the embryo of black images but many northern writers developed black portraiture in opposing images that shed a vastly different perspective on slavery.

Perhaps the person who was most influential in expressing the northern approach to slavery was Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1853. In this novel, Stowe addressed the dilemma of more than two generations of writings about the Negro. This dilemma was an entanglement of "democratic belief and certain anti-democratic practices"
Uncle Tom's Cabin begins with the threatened loss of the Shelby estate and the possible sale of its slaves. The slaves on the estate go through various crises brought on by their enslavement. A recurrent theme of the novel is the separation of the black family unit by sale. George and Eliza, a married mulatto couple, are separated by the vices of an overbearing master and the pending sale of their son, Harry. Uncle Tom and his wife, Aunt Chloe, are separated by the sale of Tom "down the river." Cassy, a quadroon slave woman, is separated from her children by sale, also. Although the slaves fear this separation, they must submit to the "superior" master class. There are emotional effects that accompany the separation of families which give vent to hostility and hatred. Stowe presented the familial relationship existing between slaves as an attempt to depict the realistic attitudes of the slaves toward one another and the inhumanity of separating families.

To further support antislavery sentiment, Stowe used various stereotypes. She employed the stereotype of the contented slave in Uncle Tom; the stereotype of the tragic mulatto in Cassy; the stereotype of the comic Negro in Topsy. Uncle Tom was characterized as a very religious man who waits patiently for the benevolence and justice of the Lord. After he is sold to Simon Legree, Tom undergoes many tragic experiences. He is beaten for helping another slave, Cassy, pick cotton and not beating her when commanded by his owner. When Legree asks Tom, "an't yer mine now, body and soul," Tom responds:

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1 Gross and Hardy, op. cit., p. 118.
No! No! No! My soul an't yours, Mas'r You havent' bought it - ye can't buy it. It's been brought and paid for by One that is able to keep it. No matter, no matter, you can't harm me.

Stowe's novel exemplified traits and characteristics vastly different from the contented slave portrayed by Kennedy and Simms. For, Uncle Tom rebelled against his earthly oppressors by putting his trust in God. Tom is above mental and physical harm from Legree. It seems that both Tom and Legree know that death will provide Tom's release from human bondage.

In the section "Quadroon's Story," the character Cassy is depicted as a very unhappy slave because of her tragic past. She has murdered her white lover who sold her children. In her present status on Legree's plantation, Cassy is in the role of a mistress or concubine to Legree. Throughout her life, she has held this position which is the pattern for the stereotype of the tragic mulatto woman.

An antithesis to Cassy is Topsy, especially in color and temperament. Topsy is referred to as a "funny specimen" by her master who purchased the girl for the purpose of teaching her the manners of a servant. Topsy is transformed from a comic Negro image to a sensitive and feeling individual. She is "goblin-like" in the beginning and moves into the status of a refined Christian girl, under the supervision and guidance of Miss Ophelia, her owner's cousin from the North.

Uncle Tom, Cassy, and Topsy were all victims of slavery who had to adapt to the situations in which they found themselves. Tom became a

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martyr and a Christ symbol by refusal to submit his soul to Legree. Cassy, somewhat humbled by her existence, was able to salvage some degree of happiness. Topsy became a sensitive girl after discovering what love and truth can do. Stowe portrayed her black characters realistically, in terms of emotional conflicts, self-acceptance, and Christianity.

After Stowe's novel was published and read, the hostility between the North and the South grew more intense. The two sections fought a civil war for what they believed was just. The South was destined to lose the war for many reasons which basically stemmed from the southerners' insistence on keeping human beings in perpetual bondage. Poverty, ruin, and frustrations were in store for the southerners.

Although the institution of slavery was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation, the Reconstruction era witnessed a channeling of the principles of slavery into institutions of equal peculiarities. Sharecropping was the feasible answer for whites, who had land and no cash resources, and for freedmen who had no land and only agricultural skills. Because the South was mainly concerned with the rebuilding of itself and the North turned its attention to industry, there was very little fiction produced during the Reconstruction era.

Cash accurately assesses this period in which there was no noteworthy production of fiction:

Its novels, its sketches and stories are essentially so many pamphlets, its poems so many handbills, concerned mainly... with the Old South, and addressed primarily to glorifying—that Old South—to the elaboration of the legend, and the conviction of both the people at home and world outside of the truth of that legend in fullness.¹

¹Cash, op. cit., p. 146.
When the congressional government of Reconstruction ended, southerners fought for the sole rule of their section. With certain legislative measures, the South was able to politically govern the section. Negroes were allowed some liberties under congressional rules. However, the southerners with their newly found power intended to return the Negro to his former status of economic and social inferiority. The "separate but equal doctrine" sanctioned by the Supreme Court was of key importance to this movement because it served to nurture race pride.¹

To convince both the southerners and their northern critics, the South encouraged a renaissance of the beautiful old South of "magnolia blossoms, mint juleps, and obsequious Uncle Toms and mammies."² Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and George Cable emerged as perpetrators of this legend.

Thomas Page employed the stereotypes of the wretched freedmen and the brute Negro in his works, *In Ole Virginia* (1887) and *Red Rock* (1898), respectively. In the short story, "Marse Chan" included in *In Ole Virginia*, Page portrayed Sam, an ex-slave, as a man disillusioned with his freedom. Sam remembers the good times and excitement on the plantation without reference to any of the suffering there. Concerning slavery, Sam says to a white stranger:

Dem wuz good ole times, marster - de bes' Sam ever see! . . . Niggers didn' had nothin'

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By recounting his happy days, Sam is rejecting his newly found freedom. Here, the image of the wretched freedman is used as an instrument to glorify the Old South and present the disadvantages of freedom for blacks.

In Page's novel, *Red Rock*, the stereotype of the brute Negro is portrayed in "Moses, the Trick Doctor." Moses is described as a "somewhat strongly built dark mulatto," whose figure is grotesque. Page shows Moses abusing his rights as a freedman when he attempts to physically assault a white woman. Moreover, Page has Moses rejecting blackness in exchange for the symbol of the southerners' pride, their pure white women. Moses states:

I'm just as good as any white man, and
I'm going to show 'em so. I'm going to marry
a white 'ooman and meek white folks
wait on me.

Moses tries to carry out this plan, when he attempts to assault Ruth. While Ruth is trying to establish a school for Negroes, she is accosted by Moses who has conjured up his powers as "trick doctor" to persuade the white woman to marry him. However, his attempt was futile and, according to the author's purpose, further proof that Negroes were unable to become members of American civilization.

Joel Chandler Harris wrote *Free Joe* (1887), which depicts the Negro

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3 Ibid., p. 291.
as a wretched freedmen. His character, Joe, becomes an outcast from the black community and from the white community which refuses to acknowledge his freedom and his rights in the society. Blacks are afraid to associate with him because they would be physically abused by their masters. Another reason for blacks repelling Joe's friendship is their resentment toward a man who has freedom, while they are still in bondage. With his isolation from the black community another obstacle is in his path, Joe is challenged by every white he meets and becomes a slave to every white man. The only people that Joe associates with are poor whites. Harris summarizes Joe's position:

Having no owner, every man was his master. He knew that he was the object of suspicion, and all his slender resources were devoted to winning, not kindness and appreciation, but toleration; all his efforts were in the direction of mitigating the circumstances that tended to make his condition so much worse than that of the Negroes around him - Negroes who had friends because they had masters.¹

Joe has another reason for grieving about his freedom. His wife is still a slave whose master refuses to let the couple meet. Joe has to resort to sneaking around the estate in order to catch a glimpse of his wife. Eventually, the woman is sold to someone whom Joe does not know. The reality strikes him that he has lost the most important thing in his life because of his freedom.

In The Grandissimes (1880), George Cable used the stereotype of the exotic primitive in his portrayal of Bras-Coupe, a former African prince. The action revolves around Bras-Coupe, depicting tragic consequences which happen to him as a result of his rejecting the conventions of

¹ Joel Chandler Harris, Free Joe (New York, 1887), p. 8.
Western civilization.

Page, Harris, and Cable employed the brute Negro, the wretched freedman, and the exotic primitive to implement their purpose of glorifying the South. The brute Negro is essentially vindictive in source: he arises in white-authored literature in a period when Negroes gained control of political weapons and came close to achieving economic and political equality in places where they were a majority.¹ The wretched freedman was a stereotype which emphasized the fate of the Negro who was set free by law but not by society. The exotic primitive stereotype can be manifested as an "atavist who reverts to jungle primitivism."² These stereotypes, as portrayed by Page, Harris, and Cable, had damaging effects on blacks. They fostered the Western myths about blacks as being inferior and unable to assimilate into American culture. They were constantly used to further the myths of ignorance and barbarity of the black race. These images often provoked embarrassment, hostility, and self-pity among blacks.

While the South was engrossed in glorifying the Old South, the northern white writers were producing fiction, also. These writers did not have to indulge in ego boasting in their works. However, some of the minor white northern writers fell under the influence of the South's characterizations of the Negro. Frank Stockton, Harriet Spoffard, and Constance Fennimore Woolson accepted the southern versions of the

¹ Goldstein, op. cit., p. 62.
² Starke, op. cit., p. 137.
Negro.¹ These three writers adopted the theme of the wretched freedmen who recalled their contented existence before the war and remained faithful to their past masters. The favorite formula of these authors was the Negro who alleviated his ex-master's poverty.

From slavery to Reconstruction, images of blacks in white-authored American fiction followed a formula that exemplified the attitudes of white Americans toward black Americans. The stereotypes of blacks were based on physical characteristics, inferiority, and the subordinate role that blacks and freedmen were forced to play. During Reconstruction and later years, before the twentieth century, the stereotypical implications of white superiority and black inferiority abounded in white-authored works.

But black writers had begun an artistic examination of black life and the quest for liberation from the myths of white supremacy. These black writers provided literary works which twentieth century black writers expanded and improved to promote a vital ethnic literature. Drawing from the roots of blacks in African and American culture, black writers were able to utilize the pre-twentieth century life and literature to further the artistic and creative expressions of black life. In the 1900's, the black writers of the 1920's pulled together these various segments of the black experience in order to portray black characters in authentic and realistic terms.

¹ See Frank Stockton's *What Might Have Been Expected* (1874); Harriet Spoffard's *Old Washington* (1906); Constance Woolson's *Rodman, the Keeper* (1886).
CHAPTER II

REVIVAL OF THE BLACK LITERARY TRADITION

IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The black literary outburst of the 1920's is most frequently referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. In this chapter, examples of the Harlem Renaissance novels have been selected and examined to show the continuity between these writers and their progenitors. Black literature in the first decades of the twentieth century, like the black expressions of the primal eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was "the stain in the literature of this country which seriously challenges the myth of American perfection... a literature of oppression... a cry from the soul of an oppressed people... a literature of protest, a cry for redress."¹

During the Harlem Renaissance, black Americans were serving notice that the "Negro of postwar America was going to be more militant than his prewar brothers."² The stereotypes created by white authors such as Page, Simms, and Harris had to be struck down by many black writers. Black artists were ready to expose the white racist distortions and to reconstruct the authentic view of black experiences.

Expansions on the black struggle for freedom, dignity, and identity

¹ Long and Collier, op. cit., p. 5.
were presented in fiction by black writers of the Harlem Renaissance and by their significant forerunners. The myth that black people were worthless, lazy, and stupid was increasingly challenged and negated by these writers. This period was a re-awakening of the black masses to their potential as American citizens and as a proud black race.

"Whatever it is that impels an individual to act or not to act, a significant role is played in his determination by what the person thinks of himself."

The intense fervor for self identity was expressed by the blacks in the 1920's, partially due to the bravery and valor of black soldiers who participated in World War I, partially due to the influx of blacks to the urban centers from the South, and partially due to the traditional quest of black people for liberation. After World War I, black soldiers and blacks at home began to visualize a new existence for themselves. Blacks became more aware of their power as a unit and began a transitional period from second-class citizenship and mute voice to a vocal and vital energy within American culture.

The "something" that is very personal about being black in America was defined by J. Saunders Redding and W. E. B. DuBois in On Being A Negro in America (1962) and The Souls of Black Folk (1903), respectively. Redding interpreted this "something" as "a second ego which is as much the conscious subject of all experience as the natural self." 

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2 Huggins, op. cit., pp. 52-65.

writing 50 years before Redding, argued that blacks live in a "state of double-consciousness which entails being a "Negro first and then an American." Both men arrived at the conclusion that this twoness had to be resolved by acceptance of a dual identity and upgrading of the black self-concept. The black writers of the Harlem Renaissance attempted to demonstrate through fiction this twoness by portraying the black experience in American society. They began an attitudinal revolution in which the black self-image was the focus of concern. This revolution can be viewed as a contribution to the improved self-image of black people who refused to accept the white world's estimate of Afro-Americans.

Black writers attempted the task of emancipating blacks from the fictitious past and promoting the rediscovery of heritage and self. Race pride and race consciousness were building in the black communities, compelling blacks to reject old assumptions and old images. The black writers of the Harlem Renaissance had to reassess their culture and their potential contribution to what was considered a basically white civilization. The provocation to find black identity within American society was complicated because of widely accepted stereotypes which defined blacks for white racists and unfortunately for too many blacks as "the obverse of the Protestant Ethic." In essence, the accepted

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2 Huggins, op. cit., p. 58.
3 Ibid., p. 59.
stereotypes of white America presented blacks as lazy and obsessed with sensual gratification, which warranted nothing more than poverty and shame. Furthermore, the types of black characters that white Americans would accept were extremely limited. Blacks were depicted as either pitiable or amusing, loyal or unreliable, obsequious or primitive.\(^1\) Thus, it was a serious task for the black writer who desired to cultivate and publish a black character.

Black critic Nathan Huggins assessed the black artists of the Harlem Renaissance as portraying black characters in terms of "Negro primitivism," "genteel realism," and the "quest for black identity."\(^2\) Huggins saw Negro primitivism depicted through characters who participated in exotic dancing, promiscuity, and indulgences in alcoholic beverages and narcotics. He saw genteel realism as placing blacks in the "context of standard American life" by portraying black characters that believed in honor, self-perfection, and conventional respectability. Those black writers who chose to use genteel realism as their motif concentrated on middle-class blacks. The motif of the quest for black identity was always at the heart of the novel's meaning during the Harlem Renaissance.\(^3\)

Black artists were attempting to create archetypal patterns of development by employing various motifs. According to black critic Juanita Starke, they portrayed characters who were the dominant

1. Ibid., pp. 60-65.
2. Ibid., pp. 65-172.
3. Ibid., p. 53.
embodiment of an idea that arises in literature, attracts emotional responses and recurs as thematic motif in subsequent manifestations.¹

Black writers came to grips with black problems of abuse and discrimination in American society. For, blacks had to realize the significance of their African heritage and their roots in the South as former enslaved men.

In the novel, *Cane* (1923), Jean Toomer chose for his motif the quest for black identity. Toomer used the South as the roots of black people, roots they must define in terms of livelihood, humanity, and heritage. The novel is divided into three parts as follows: (1) series of portraits of women in the South, (2) a shift to black experiences in the North, (3) a return to the South. The first part of the novel depicts life in the "Dixie Pike" with portraits of six women who have sensitivity, beauty, and struggles in southern towns. Their struggles are linked with black ancestral heritage. These six women are incomplete in life because they are rushed into becoming generators of life and love too soon.²

Toomer used the focus of the story on Fern to provide a general statement of the section. Fern submitted herself to men who were "baffled and ashamed" when they left her because of their failure to conquer her heart and soul. The men sought sexual satisfaction from Fern, who was incapable of giving any pleasure. Fern's eyes were a hint of the meaning that she desired something more grand than physical pleasures,

¹ Starke, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-166.
to such an extent that the "something" was nothing. She was searching for self identity. Fern was "on the soil of one's ancestors" where "most anything can come to one." She searched for her ancestral heritage through interaction with nature and people. However, she was resigned to a barren existence in the South without prosperity or fruit.  

The stories in Part I show the multiple problems of being black and denying the black heritage in exchange for middle-class white values. This section shifts to northern centers and the urbanized blacks who have a different kind of emptiness. The black characters go through various changes to discover that their roots in the South and Africa are stronger than the superficial values of white American society. Each character must seek his identity and recognize its worth. This section could serve as a reminder to all blacks that acceptance of self is an important factor in coping with the problems in living.

The story, "Box Seat," in section two is representative of the denial of black heritage. This story is an account of two potential lovers who are uncertain of their relationship as man and woman. Dan Moone loves Muriel, who is a conventional representative of civilized American woman. Muriel wants her man to be respectable and hard-working. Dan does not have a job which makes Muriel relentless in her attempt to make him find work. Muriel breaks a date with Dan and goes to the movies with a girl friend where she sits in a box seat; removed from the

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1 Jean Toomer, Cane (New York, 1923), p. 31.

2 Huggins, op. cit., p. 183.
animalistic crowd but visible to them. Dan attends the movie and watches Muriel as she shies away from a blood-stained rose offered to her. He shouts that "Jesus was a Leper" in order to shock Muriel into understanding self and heritage. But she is unable to recognize the implications of the statement, thus, denying her past and rejecting Dan Moone.

Part III of Cane has the final story, "Kabnis," which is about Ralph Kabnis, a teacher from the North who has gone South to work. He is an object of hatred and resentment by blacks and whites. But Kabnis's problem is deeper; he is afraid of the message conveyed from the South. This message informs Kabnis that he is in the presence of his ancestral heritage, which includes the abuse and oppression of his race. In a fit of self-pity, he shouts toward the heavens and Jesus to "not chain me to myself and set these hills and valleys, heaving with folk-songs, so close to me that I cannot reach them." According to black critic Nathan Huggins, Toomer's response to the quest for black identity, then, is to find one's roots in the southern homeland and to claim it as one's own. It is to look into the fullness of the past without shame or fear. To be and to relive the slave and the peasant and never be separated from that reality is the black man's quest for identity.

Toomer's Cane is significant because of the shift in milieu and the black images which it portrays. It is authentic in its handling of attitudes of southern and northern blacks who were searching for identity.

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1 Ibid., p. 161.

2 Huggins, op. cit., p. 186.
In 1923, the novel combined the behavioral patterns of northern blacks after they acquired educational and economic status in urban areas and the lifestyles of southern blacks who were still caught in the cultural numbness resulting from white discrimination.

Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, and Rudolph Fisher chose as their central characters black Americans who were definitely in search of identity. These writers used motifs of black primitivism and self acceptance. Wallace Thurman, in The Blacker the Berry (1928), treated the discrimination against one group of Negroes by another based on color. In this novel, Thurman focused on the concept of class distinctions carried through intraracial systems. In an ironical manner, Thurman borrowed the black folk phrase "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" for the title of his novel about a very dark-complexioned black girl, Emma Lou, who is the victim of intraracial conflicts.

Thurman's treatment of Emma Lou is a satire which rests on the premise that blacks should not aspire to be white, but to accept their African heritage. Emma Lou is completely unaware of her self-identity; until she is willing to accept her blackness, constant reminders of black cultural heritage lead to a complex lifestyle for the young woman. Thurman describes her features as "unfortunate," in that, she has "a face as black as her father's, and a nose which, while not exactly flat, was as distinctly negroid as her two thick lips."¹ In accordance with the values of the times, Emma Lou is considered ugly and cannot move into the social activities of light-complexioned blacks. As pointed out

in the novel, blackness was thought as synonymous with ugliness, death, and evilness. Thurman states:

It was the custom always of those with whom she /Emma Lou/ came into most frequent contact to ridicule or revile any black person or object. A black cat was a harbinger of bad luck, black crape was the insignia of mourning, and black people were either evil niggers with poisonous blue gums or else typical vaudeville darkies.¹

With these negative black symbols in Emma Lou's mind, it is doubtful that she could have reached a realistic assessment of her true self worth without the aid of external forces.

From birth, Emma Lou had been ridiculed and harassed by her family who are members of the "Blue Vein Society," and organization of light-complexioned blacks, her elders, and her peer group. In an attempt to find solace from ostracizing elements, she enrolls in a large university in Los Angeles where "there are Negroes of every class, color, and social position."² Once there, Emma Lou finds her color a barrier, compounded by the fact that she is not wealthy. From there, she further slips into her world of self hatred by alienating herself from both the fair complexioned blacks and blacks of her own color. Emma Lou flees to Harlem, expecting once again, to escape the narrow mindedness and stigmatism of color. However, she found in the class structure of Harlem that her color was still a hindrance to her employment, to her participation in social functions, and in addition, to an unrequited love affair.

¹ Ibid., p. 25.
² Ibid., p. 36.
Thurman seems to argue that the evaluation of self should be on the basis of self acceptance, inward beauty, congeniality, and race pride. This concept was addressed to the black community in an attempt to clarify misconceptions about color and to perpetuate African heritage and its significance to the black race.

In *Home to Harlem* (1928), McKay chose black primitivism as his motif. In this work, McKay seems to be proud of his identification with the black masses in Harlem street life and contemptuous of all things middle-class. He showed the life of Harlem in a range of cabarets, sexual promiscuity and invasions of Harlem by black and white intellectuals. The central character of the novel is Jake, who has returned to Harlem after being discriminated against by white military men in Germany where he was a soldier. McKay employs an antithesis to Jake's outlook on life with the introduction of another character, Ray. With these two characters, McKay incorporates within the novel's framework a full range of positive and authentic views of the black experience.

Jake is portrayed as a sensual man who is not usually influenced by universal moral codes. Jake believes that living includes sex, drinking, good food, and cabarets. He becomes obsessed with finding Felice, the black prostitute whom he picked up on his first night back in Harlem. Men and women relate to him because of his beliefs and his handsome face and body. Jake believes in sensuality and gives little thought to anything more than self-gratification. His carefree attitude is partially due to the discrimination that he experienced in the armed forces, which taints his belief in the truths of American society.

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As an opposite extreme of Jake, Ray is quite intelligent, and very much concerned with racial problems. He is intent on becoming a writer to record his impressions of the Negro's position in a world dominated by whites. Ray dedicates his existence to "improving" his race and his country. At times, it seems as if McKay is speaking to the black masses in an attempt to arouse the race from its momentary inertia, through Ray's speeches. When Ray is asked about education for blacks, he replies:

... modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snorty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like - like our house. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for.1

Both characters reach a point in life which influences their acceptance of or rejection of self and prescribed roles. Each man must seek his own destiny in view of his discrimination and his self image. Ray is in limbo; Jake is gratified with the features of carefree living.

McKay tried to show the diverse nature of the black experience in America. Through this novel, McKay viewed that the search for self fulfillment leads through varied and thorny paths when one is trying to become liberated and functional in spite of societal conventions and prejudices.

In Walls of Jericho (1926), Rudolph Fisher wrote to expose class antagonism and protest among Harlem blacks.2 His character is Joshua

"Shine" Jones whose major problem revolves around an intense distrust of light-skinned blacks who occupy the middle-class. His distrust of light-skinned and respectable Negros made him despondent until he is drawn into an alliance with Fred Merritt, a near white man who is a lawyer, against a street character, Henry Padmore who is a dark-complexioned owner of a poolroom. This relationship between "Shine" and Merritt is prompted by Padmore's physical assault on Linda Young, a black maid whom "Shine" loves, and the destruction of Merritt's home where Linda was in service. The alliance of classes allows "Shine" to accept Merritt as a man and as a business partner.

Merritt is depicted as a black intellectual who is a member of an exclusive club called "Litter Rat." Merritt chooses to live a peaceful life if allowed to by whites. He is almost pathological in his purpose to move into a white neighborhood, only to assert his rights and to agitate the whites there. Merritt stresses his belief in developing race-consciousness when he says:

All of you know where I stand on things racial - I'm downright rabid. . . . I'd enjoy this house, if they'd let me alone, purely as an individual, just the same I'm entering it as a Negro.1

Merritt exemplifies a positive concept of self and strongly reflects militance. In addition to this, Merritt apparently does not see a class difference in the black race. He is simply being a Negro who wants to live comfortably. Unlike the negative preconceptions of "Shine" concerning light-skinned intellectuals, Merritt seemingly believes in group

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1 Huggins, op. cit., pp. 114-120.
identity for all blacks.

This novel attacks the deep-seated, divisive misconceptions, blacks hold about each other. Apparently, Fisher believed that until the black race recognizes that as a group regardless of color and class, its members share mutual problems, the race can not be unified. Fisher chose to resolve class differences in his portrayal of "Shine" and Merritt by observing the fact that what affects one black influences other blacks. The novel holds an important lesson to blacks to unify against their oppressors as a means of survival and success.

Thurman, Fisher, and McKay captured authentic inside views of black life in America with emphasis on dilemmas experienced in black lifestyles. Their characters are representative of the "twoness" and inner conflicts felt by black Americans. These writers promoted race consciousness, unity, and the quest for black identity. Their works are especially useful for blacks who see within themselves potential greatness and value in a society which attempts to suppress their growth.¹

During the decade of the Harlem Renaissance, genteel realism appeared in the works of Jessie Fausett, W. E. B. DuBois, Nella Larsen and Walter White. Their characters are usually mulattoes who cross the color line or black people in search of a sense of accomplishment. Whatever dilemma arises, their characters always arrive at the conclusion that black life affords more cultural, physical, and spiritual gratification than the white life. Fausett, DuBois, Larsen, and White portray black characters who are white in skin color with their choice of black identity

¹ Huggins, op. cit., p. 148.
as the preeminent problem. Their characters are human beings first, then blacks. These writers tried to project "the image of Negro as exemplary within the context of conventional morality."¹

In *There is Confusion* (1924), Jessie Fausett wrote principally to characterize the lives of middle-class blacks in conventional measures. The novel reflected Fausett's middle-class upbringing. The setting is colored Philadelphia and New York, where sophistication and class distinctions were inherited familial traits. Fausett described the colored section of Philadelphia as follows:

> Colored Philadelphia society is organized as definitely as, and even, a little more carefully than Philadelphia white society. One wasn't "in" . . . unless one were first, an old citizen, and second, unless one were eminently respectable - almost . . . God-fearing.²

Joanna Marshall comes from a respectable Negro middle-class family; her father is an ordinary American businessman in the catering business. The novel revolves around a confusing romance between Joanna and Peter Bye, a member of the mainline Philadelphia Quaker stock. Joanna is so pleased by her father's success that she decides to "be somebody," too. She wants to become a professional singer and dancer. While embarking on her plans, she becomes involved with Peter and prods him into entering medical school. Although Peter drops out of school and leaves Joanna, she does not resign herself to a static way of life. She feels that she can accomplish anything that she desires. She thinks to herself

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Colored people... can do anything that anybody else can do. They've already done it. I'm going to be the one colored person who sings best in these days, and I never, never mean to let color interfere.1

This development in Joanna's character of race pride is the tone of the Harlem Renaissance movement. From her bourgeois society, Joanna emerged as an ambitious young woman ready to tear down the barrier of color that prevail over her race.

Fausett portrayed Joanna as a young black girl who had to go through a transitional period from snobbery to acceptance of people as individuals. Joanna had to overcome her dislike of Maggie Ellersby, a lower-class black girl, who was to eventually marry Joanna's brother. For Joanna could not conceive of a lower-class person uplifting himself to the middle-class structure of "colored Philadelphia." However, she reassessed her outlook on life and arrived at the conclusion that each man has worth and value.

This novel offers a deep insight into character formation. Blacks should be aware of the intra and cultural strife contributing to a hostile environment and inhibiting positive self-concepts or the matura-
tion of healthy individuals. Also, the theme of racial unity is repeated in this novel by elimination of class antagonism.

In Flight (1926), Walter White chose genteel realism as his theme which focused on a society influenced by skin color alone and one which is influenced by race, regardless of skin color. White is concerned with the aspect of passing a crossing of the color line by blacks. The

1 Ibid., p. 45.
father and daughter, Jean and Mimi Daquin, respectively were residents of both societies. They are black Creoles who must come to the realization that Negroes are Negroes, in most white minds. The setting of the novel shifts from New Orleans and Atlanta to Harlem. Each city plays an important part in the shaping of racial attitudes. When Mimi and Jean decide to leave New Orleans, they are quite unaware of the racial discrimination that they will encounter in Atlanta.

A flashback scene to New Orleans is most helpful in qualifying the attitudes of Jean and Mimi. They are accustomed to a life above reproach by whites in New Orleans. Their ancestral heritage dates back to Louis IV's founding of "Ursaline," a school established to instruct black and Indian girls. Because of this heritage, the Daquins are permitted to enjoy the same pleasures as whites in that society. They are proud of their ancestral past and can not conceive of any injuries to themselves by whites. This is due primarily to the prescription of a certain status to them by the whites and their attitudes toward other blacks.

For, these black Creole families are old and established in the community and have accumulated material goods. They feel strongly about their social roots:

The mellow old families militantly proud of their Creole and Negro ancestry, yielded not an inch to that which they never permitted crossing. One of these was family. Another was color. ¹

No doubt, upon the marriage of Jean to Mary Robertson, a black woman, the union is met with prejudice in the Creole community. This factor is

part of the reason for the move to Atlanta.

However, the family's residence in Atlanta is hampered by white racists who judge black people in terms of grouping, not individually. Another form of discrimination is presented by the black community. After Mimi matures into womanhood, she becomes pregnant by an irresponsible middle-class Negro boy. The black community persecutes and harasses her to such an extent that she flees to Harlem.

After arriving in Harlem, Mimi passes for white in an attempt to forget her black past. She marries a prosperous white man and for a time remains content. However, by living on the outskirts of Harlem life, Mimi views the warmth and gaiety of black life in the section. She concludes that only blacks "can laugh... enjoy the benefits of the machine without being crushed by it."\(^1\) Unable to continue her pretense in the cold white society, Mimi casts off her husband and returns to her black race for spiritual and cultural gratification. She undergoes pressures that stem from inner conflict and revitalizes her self-concept as the end product of her flight to accept her life.

Walter White traced the dilemma of Mimi as a satire, warning blacks of the emotional insecurity that can come from denying their heritage. In order to live happily blacks must never forget their past or group worth because of its centrality in their lives.

In Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), she chose to depict genteel realism and incorporated the theme of passing. She depicted the various

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lifestyles of two black women who were trying to function in a world based on race, financial stability, and status.

Clare Kennedy Bellows and Irene Westover Redfield are friends from birth. Both women are light enough to pass for white. Clare chooses to marry a white bigot, while Irene chooses to remain black and marry a black physician. Their different lifestyles reflect different character traits: Clare is exciting, cosmopolitan and a dare-devil, while Irene is safe, stable, and provincial.

Clare's decision to "pass" proves to be a tragic mistake. The Bellows have no offspring, making Clare unproductive and creating a void in her life. To alleviate the emptiness, Clare makes frequent trips into Harlem, which becomes habitual. She risks discovery while attempting to find herself. For her life in the white world lacks the warmth and joy of living that is present in the life of Harlem blacks. Her friend, Irene, serves as a constant reminder that she could have had a black identity.

The character, Irene Redfield, has a family and contentment in the black world. She is so conservative in her life and marriage that it threatens her ability to hold on to this life. The main concern is that her husband wants desperately to leave the confines of white American racism and begin a new existence in Brazil. But this would mean a less settled future for Irene, who needs security. Her feelings threaten her marriage. The love affair that develops between Brian Redfield and Clare also provokes insecure feelings in Irene. Irene's feeling are so intense that she considers exposing Clare. However, Clare's exposure comes from
investigations ordered by her husband resulting in Clare's committing suicide.

Larsen showed the warmth present in black life, but also defined the restrictions placed on it. Through Irene, Harlem was envisioned as provincial and pleasing so long as one could maintain respectability and security. For Irene was an individual who was seeking an American identity while accepting her black self-concept. Larsen's portrayal of Clare indicates that Clare was seeking black identity after acknowledging that status and alleviation of white discrimination was not fulfilling. The "twoness" discussed by Redding and DuBois was apparent in the novel.

W. E. B. DuBois's *Dark Princess* (1928) is a novel which is a combination of genteel realism and political controversy related to the Negro problem. DuBois presented a study of racial problems that existed in America and abroad, that restricted the functions of all ethnic minorities.

The setting in New York, Berlin, and Chicago, where the action revolves around a young black medical student, Matthew Towns. Towns is victimized by white administrators in the university he attends. The whites refuse to register Towns in an obstetrics class that he needs in order to graduate. This is done because of preconceived fears about a black man delivering their babies. When Towns hears this reasoning, he becomes so infuriated that he loses his temper and withdraws from the university. For all of his academic achievements and skill in the medical profession, Towns is rewarded by rejection from the white power structure.
Towns believes that if he leaves America, he will not encounter as much prejudice in foreign countries. However, upon his arrival in Berlin, he is confronted by prejudices from whites and members of other ethnic minorities. His first encounter is in a cafe where a white man was attempting to pick up a beautiful dark woman. Town rescues the woman and strikes the white assailant. He is identifying with the woman on color alone.

Eventually, Towns discovers that the "Dark Princess" is a West Indian who is the head of an organization of darker races that have formed a league to strive for equality and justice for all men. Towns is asked by the "Princess" to represent the American Negro. However, many league members believe that the Negro has not reached such a distinctive level of intelligence as the representatives of other ethnic groups. Many arguments against the Negro's position in the league ensue and an attack is directed against Towns. He must fight fiercely for recognition of the black race by their black brothers. Towns begins to respond vehemently to the accusations of the league members:

America is teaching the world one thing and only one thing of real value, and that is, that ability and capacity for culture is not the hereditary monopoly of a few, but the widespread possibility for the majority of mankind if they only have a decent chance in life.¹

Finally, the American Negro is accepted into the league and Towns becomes the husband of Princess Kautilya. Together, they dedicate their lives to making the world a place for achievement and advancement for all minority groups.

Thus, DuBois has asserted the theme of unity. Unity is needed by the black race in order to strive for independence and voice in a biased society. Like the early writings of David Walker and other black abolitionists, DuBois's novel is another plea to the black masses to unify in brotherhood.

Fausett, White, Larsen, and DuBois portrayed genteel realism in authentic perspectives. Their works show the price of respectability and the pretentions that surround it. Their characters were always ambitiously searching upward for a better life than the present. In the novels discussed, white racism created pressures, but the quest for black identity, protest, and unity served as positive factions that nullified negative pressures.

The black writers of the Harlem Renaissance were further dispensing with old images of the Negro and developing more fully authentic ones. Through their works, they were perpetuating the black literary tradition by the building of race consciousness and defining culture. The social and economic structure of Negro life was depicted by these Renaissance writers. Every type of black man from every level was explored in this fiction. It was during this decade that Negroes' minds and spirits reawakened into beautiful and significant thoughts about their race. In fiction, the portrait of the changed and changing Negro was fostered, with emphasis in blackness.

In 1929, the Harlem Renaissance came to an end and the country was thrown into an economic crisis. In the 1930's and 1940's, the production of black-authored literature diminished because of the economic
depression and World War II. However, those blacks who continued to write persistently portrayed black life in authentic terms. They were carrying on the traditional struggle for black identity. In the following chapter, special attention will be given to show the social and economic conditions which influence black images, especially in fiction for young readers.
CHAPTER III

INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS ON BLACK IMAGES IN THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES

The thirties and forties witnessed changes in the authorship and production of fiction by blacks, but the black literary tradition continued as the dominant undertone in black-authored works. The impact of the depression and second world war on black novels cannot be minimized. To begin with, fewer novels were produced in these two decades than in the twenties. Further, the black-authored novels of the thirties and the forties were attempts to portray a greater social realism of black life than the sensuous novels of the Harlem Renaissance because there was in these two decades an urgency for valid economic truths which affected the themes of those novels. A radical version of social protest began in this period with Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Richard Wright as the most significant spokesmen.

During the thirties and forties, the novels were mostly sociological, depicting some facet of black life in America. More emphasis was on juvenile fiction with Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Jesse Jackson, and Langston Hughes who tried to emancipate young black minds from distorted images previously characterizing blacks in American fiction by white authors. In this chapter, selected fiction that presents positive and authentic images of black characters has been analyzed. These novels range from themes of racial conflicts as in Native Son, Black Thunder, and The Street, to themes of non-racial foci as in My Nine Lives and How
In 1929, America had been thrown into an economic crisis that threatened the survival of the nation's capitalistic society. The crisis affected the literature and the lifestyles of black and white Americans. The Harlem Renaissance was brought to an abrupt end because black artists lost the financial support that would have enabled them to continue the publication of their works.\(^1\) Thus, black productivity was stifled to a certain extent. The lifestyles of most Americans were subjected to change by the economic depression. Many Americans were confronted with problems such as the loss of jobs, homes, and other properties. The despair and misery among Americans were conditions of poverty and suffering in which many blacks had always lived. These years of economic crisis became known as the Great Depression. Then, for the second time in less than fifty years, the world became involved in armed conflict. World War II engulfed the global powers, with two of them, the United States and the Soviet Union, competing for influence over the weaker nations.\(^2\) Ironically, it was during the depression and war years that blacks advanced at a somewhat faster pace toward freedom.

With the depression threatening to collapse white and black economic stability, whites began to join blacks in a concerted effort of demonstrations and strikes to obtain higher wages and better housing. At

\(^1\) Huggins, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

some levels, new economic opportunities and a togetherness of the races persisted during the war years in a direct attempt to make America the strongest of the global powers. When World War II began, blacks enlisted as they did in World War I in an attempt to prove their pride in their country and to assert their right to defend their homeland. Slowly, blacks acquired more political and material influence with which they were able to bring pressure for their rights. Another factor which added to their progression was a steady migration of blacks to urban centers. Blacks became urbanized, industrialized, educated, and politically involved.

The social conditions surrounding the depression and the war linked black writers to a broader tradition of social protest and simultaneously encouraged interest in the black experience. Black writers accepted the racial element as the basis for their work and expanded their "social consciousness in order to cope with it more effectively." With a new element of realism, black writers were able to disseminate more information about black and white society. With the traumatic aspects of the depression and the war including the resilient economy, black writers found more opportunities for a new burst of creative expression.

In these two decades, slavery, black folk culture, the great migration, and the black ghettos of the industrial North were the central

1 Ibid., pp. 498-541.

2 Bone, op. cit., p. 118.
themes of black America's literary offerings. Most of the important novels in this era explored at least one phase of these aspects of black heritage. Many novels were recapitulations of historical development as it affected the black community. As a result of the depression and of war, blacks were moving toward integration in direct response to the relations between the races brought on by these conditions. For black writers, integration provided another theme for their novels.

There was a revolutionary transformation during the thirties and forties. The American color caste system which had regulated interracial relationships since slavery was slowly disintegrating. The federal government was intervening in American life in favor of blacks by passing legislation that upgraded their status. The transformation with its many aspects was reflected in the black-authored novels.

Arna Bontemps and Jessie Fausett chose slavery as their motif in *Black Thunder* and *The Chinaberry Tree*, respectively. These books can be read and understood by young readers. Both of these novels focus on phenomena of the institution of slavery: slave insurrections and miscegenation. These two aspects are treated in artistic measures by Bontemps and Fausett who tried to show the constant search for freedom and self-identity by blacks, regardless of white oppression and racism. Their characters are portrayed as individuals guided by a great internal thirst, prompted by religion and morality, for freedom and acceptance.

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2 *Franklin, op. cit.*, pp. 528-540.
within the scheme of American society. Bontemps and Fausett wrote from the black perspective in an attempt to revitalize the black image that was momentarily facing greater depreciation because of the economic crisis.

Bontemps's novel, *Black Thunder* (1936) is a historical recount of the slave insurrection led by Gabriel Prosser in 1800. Bontemps depicts the character, Gabriel, as a strong leader and hero of the black slaves.

Gabriel feels that he is chosen by God to lead his people out of bondage. When a black slave, Bundy, is run down and killed like an animal by his white master, the slave community under Gabriel's direction is incited to retaliate against white oppression. The feeling of unity is strong in the slaves, and moreover, in Gabriel's attitude toward freedom for his people. Gabriel states:

> I been studying about freedom a heap, me.  
> I heard a plenty folks talk and I listened a heap... Something keep telling me that anything what's equal to a gray squirrel wants to be free.1

Gabriel has an obsession with the idea of freedom and with his vision of God's blessing on him as the chosen one. The strong desire to be free is an emotion so vital that it leads to Gabriel's death as the case with many modern day martyrs for freedom and equality.

The slaves' insurrection failed in history and in *Black Thunder*. Bontemps imbued the sense of race pride because the slaves had organized a unified effort to fight and annihilate the perpetrators of their

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1 Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder* (New York, 1936), p. 82.
oppression. In the novel, Bontemps has shown that black slaves were capable of grasping the cruel realities of slavery as opposed to black characters portrayed by Kennedy in *Swallow Barn* (1824). The thesis of the novel asserted the heroic qualities of blacks that would indicate to black youth that they, too, had heroes during the days of slavery. Not only was the historical Gabriel a virtuous man, but Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey led insurrections to resist the most repressive power in order to break the chains of slavery. In 1936, Bontemps's *Black Thunder* was a recapitulation of the black man's struggle as it was in Vassa's narrative in 1789. The continuity of this struggle through protest and unity was still the dominant theme of black artists.

In 1931, Jessie Fausett wrote *The Chinaberry Tree* which focuses on miscegenation between whites and blacks during slavery. Laurentine Strange is portrayed as a mulatto girl who was conceived in a illicit love affair between her black mother and white father, Sal Strange and Colonel Holloway, respectively. Although Laurentine is not portrayed in the traditional tragic mulatto stereotype, she does experience many painful moments as she searches for her true identity in the black community.

Although Laurentine's father makes provisions for her financial security, there is no such measure for her happiness in a prejudiced society. With the hope of becoming accepted in her society, Laurentine meditates under the symbolic chinaberry tree which "to Laurentine, it represented the future."¹ The tree gives the promise of a brighter day and assurance of the present which is linked to the historic past of

¹ Jessie Fausett, *The Chinaberry Tree* (New York, 1931), p. 27.
slavery. Eventually, Laurentine does accept the nature of her birth and finds a true identity with the black race. For, she discovers the love and security of a black physician who recognizes that Laurentine has not delved into her self-concept as a positive asset.

The meaning of the novel is very clear: the acceptance and perpetuation of ancestral heritage. For it is necessary to accept the past without reservations about the peculiar features surrounding it. Like Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), Fausett's novel is formulated on the themes of self-identity and acceptance of one's heritage, especially color. There is perpetuation of the black literary tradition in this work.

Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes chose to portray black characters in small rural towns. Their works were depictions of the poverty imposed on black communities by economic problems that could possibly stem from the depression years. In their works, Bontemps and Hughes drew black male characters in strong masculine traits instead of emasculated caricatures presented in earlier white authored fiction. Bontemps and Hughes developed their characters in such a way that the reader easily can identify with them and their situation. Both men also wrote especially for young readers and the works discussed here are representations of the skill of these men in an effort to acquaint youth with the black experience in American society by composing authentic portrayals of black life.

In 1937, Bontemps wrote *Sad-Faced Boy* in which he depicted the male character, Slumber. The plot revolves around the exploits of Slumber and his brothers as they leave and return to their home in Alabama,
after pursuing a glamorous life in Harlem. Slumber is referred to as "sad-faced boy" because of his inability to laugh at anything. For, his greatest desire in life is "to make things smile," whenever there are negative factors at work.

When the boys hitchhike to Harlem, they are caught up in the vastness of the city. Here, Slumber tries to make people happy. While observing a fight between two black cooks in the market place, Slumber attempts to disrupt the fight by throwing potatoes at the men. He thinks that this act will draw laughs. However, he and his brothers are driven from the street by the enraged observers. Slumber experiences the impersonal attitudes of city people who do not like interference in their battles with frustrations. Unlike the congenial inhabitants in his hometown, Slumber sees that the people in Harlem have little time for laughter in the frustrations of poverty and displaced hostilities.

Not discouraged by the street experience, Slumber and his brothers form a band which performs to make money and to entertain. The boys draw crowds in the parks, from the theatres, and at street corners, making profits in order to buy ice cream cones for themselves and children in their neighborhood. For a time, the band is quite successful and affords entertainment to the black masses. Through these brothers, Bontemps points up the musical ability and potential talents in many youth.

The boys decide to leave Harlem and to return home. They do not reap sufficient benefits from city life in Harlem. Slumber feels that in the country people can grow their own crops, enjoy green pastures, and
associate better with people. With hope building for the return trip, the brothers take a job to help pay expenses for their journey homeward. Bontemps has cited the realization of blacks to seek their roots in the South. Like Toomer's characters in Cane (1923) and Dunbar's portraits in Sport of the Gods (1902), Bontemps' characters seek an inner awareness of black ancestral heritage that calls the brothers back to their native soil.

In 1934, Bontemps published You Can't Get A Possum. He employs a racial theme, but not in terms of a direct racial conflict as in Black Thunder (1936). He presents a vivid picture of poverty which exists in the black home of the protagonists, "Shine Boy" and his aunt. This family is trying to live off the meagre wages that the aunt receives from her job as cook and maid in a white home. When "Shine Boy" brings a dog home as his playmate, the aunt is very distressed because she cannot afford to feed him. However, she does allow the boy to keep the animal.

A major financial crisis arises and the dog is impounded because he does not have a collar. The family is afraid that the dog will be killed because they do not have "three dollars" for his release. After careful consideration, the aunt pawns her wedding band for the money. This act shows the love and compassion for the animal and the boy, and gives a clear picture of the sad economic state of the family.

Bontemps characterizes "Shine Boy" as an ordinary child who desires to be a friend to everyone. The natural beauty of "Shine Boy" and his aunt are vividly drawn. They have thick lips, dark skin and wooly hair.
From the descriptions and illustrations of these characters, it is quite clear that Bontemps does not attribute negative values to physical features. He states about "Shine Boy's" hair:

He would need to comb his hair. He tried to bring the comb through his tightly knotted wool. There was no use trying that... He remembered that sometimes folks made their hair look slick and fresh by greasing it.1

The passage describes "Shine Boy's" hair as "knotted wool," but Bontemps does not treat the hair as a symbol of ugliness. It is merely of a different texture that is manageable when well-groomed.

This novel conveys a message in twofold to young readers. First, there is depicted the close familial relationship that supports each member. For, it is in the home that youth first receive instruction and discipline. Bontemps shows in the novel, the presence of a positive unit fostering warmth, security and love. Secondly, the inherent physical traits of blacks are not suggestive of ugliness. For, there are many races, creeds, and colors in the world which have various features. To clarify negative conceptions and criteria for beauty, Bontemps has shown that to be different in appearance is nothing to be ashamed of.

In 1930, Langston Hughes published Not Without Laughter. The plot revolves around Sandy Rogers, a typically strong boy, as he tries to evaluate and to find his role in black American life. From birth he is placed under various emotional strains from the atmosphere in his family. The family members present diverse patterns for life.

1 Arna Bontemps, You Can't Get A Possum (New York, 1934), p. 105.
Sandy's grandmother, Aunt Hager, is the mother of three girls, each of whom has a different perspective on life. Her eldest daughter, Tempy, is the only one who has finished high school. She has married a railroad clerk, which classifies her in the middle-class. She attempts to indoctrinate Sandy with middle-class values. The second daughter, Annjie, is Sandy's mother, whose priorities are devotion and love for her reckless husband. She too tries to influence Sandy by demanding that he seek only the bare necessities, because black people can not aspire for anything else. Harriett, the youngest daughter, rebels constantly against the religious and moral ideals of her mother. She is aware that oppression by white racists intimidates non-educated blacks more than educated blacks in American society. She stresses the value of education to Sandy because she believes that with enough knowledge blacks can choose their own lifestyles.

Sandy is constantly approached with his family's perspectives on life. Eventually, he asserts himself and makes significant decisions about his future as a black man and as an individual. He arrives at the conclusion that his love for his parents is not enough to make him hold a monotonous and inferior role in society. Moreover, the comfortable life that Tempy offers, Sandy wants no part of because it includes accepting artificial and misplaced values. Thus, Sandy decides to continue his education, casting off meagre lifestyles, artificial living, and dependency on the whims of the white society that his grandmother has committed her life to. With the financial assistance from Harriet, Sandy embarks on finding his place in black and white society. He emerges as a strong masculine figure in search of true identity.
Hughes has portrayed through Sandy and his family various paths which blacks might take in order to cope with life in American society. Some blacks become resigned to white oppression, while others risk many forms of anguish in a struggle for self-fulfillment in a white world. This novel serves as a reminder that in order to exist and maintain that existence, certain external and internal forces must be met openly. For the performance of each black individual in part relies on his ability to effect change and to perpetuate the traditional black struggle for freedom and equality.

Richard Wright and Ann Petry chose the black experience in urban ghettos as the motif in *Native Son* (1940) and *The Street* (1946). The novels are sociological in content reflecting the black experience in Chicago's southside poverty and Harlem's delinquent atmosphere. The plots show the effects of social constrictions imposed on black people in American society. As a result of these constrictions, the protagonists in the novels become alienated from society and seek diverse routes to maintain sanity. In these novels, there is the element of racial conflict and violent confrontation as in Bontemps's *Black Thunder* (1936).

Wright chose as his setting for *Native Son* (1940) the urban environment of Chicago's black ghetto. In his introduction, Wright comments:

> The urban environment of Chicago, affording a more stimulating life, made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more violently than even in the South. . . . It was not that Chicago segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's physical aspect-noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power
The Chicago environment is useful in establishing the mood of tragedy throughout the novel. The introduction of the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, into this setting reveals him as an adolescent deeply upset and confused by white oppression that imposed poverty and discontent in his life.

Bigger feels an intense hatred and resentment of "white" folks who seem occupied with an active conspiracy to keep Negroes from having any rights and privileges. He realizes that white racism has alienated the black man through segregated housing, recreational facilities, and ignoring black problems. Overwrought by white oppression, Bigger states:

God-dammit look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. . . It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knothole in the fence.

Bigger is disillusioned with his black existence which he implies to be synonymous with the confines of a jail sentence. Consumed with hatred and suppressed anger for whites, Bigger can not understand the white family which ostensibly tries to help him. In panic and confusion, he kills accidentally the daughter of this family. The killing leads to another, his girl-friend. With the thought of these murders upon him, Bigger flees for safety but is captured and is executed. His last statement before execution was: "I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em." Through acts

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1 Richard Wright, Native Son (New York, 1940), p. 9.
2 Ibid., p. 17.
3 Ibid., p. 393.
of violence, Bigger vents his displaced hostilities and acquires peace and serenity within himself.

Wright created a classic situation of black life that is usually regarded as negative. However, much insight can be gained from this work. Blacks are placed in a unique position in American society that demands a vast amount of tolerance, endurance, and positive attitudes. It is a matter of survival that blacks maintain a kind of paranoia about "white" America. Although all blacks and whites are not directly responsible for racial conflicts, it should be instilled in blacks that they are an integral segment which must fight for its rights, whether with violence or non-violence. Wright does not portray Bigger as a submissive individual; he is strong and staunch in his beliefs against white America's restrictions on blacks.

In The Street (1946), Ann Petry chose the setting of the Harlem ghetto. Petry depicts the cultural environment as a tool in shaping the personalities of its inhabitants. Lutie Johnson, the protagonist, is portrayed as an individualist who seeks to live and to rear her son in an environment which can positively influence his maturity. However, she is met with external obstacles that block her good intentions.

Lutie enters Harlem as a single woman with a son. It seems common knowledge that the pattern of life in the ghetto for women is to get married, to be abandoned by the husband, and to become a prostitute to support the family. However, Lutie is determined to maintain her moral outlook on life and raise her son as best she can. Eventually, the woman must weaken in character because of the immoral advances made toward her by two men, one white and one black. Lutie is trapped in a
malicious triangle with this pair of parasites on women alone. To compound Lutie's pressures, her son is caught stealing and punished by law. Distressed by her well-laid plans in that urbanized environment, Lutie kills the black man who is taking advantage of her and flees from Harlem.

Petry has shown that Lutie's criminal action is brought on by her environmental conditions which breed vicious and frustrated people. As her presence and involvement in a delinquent community become more coupled, she is forced to retaliate. Her dream of respectability is doomed. Petry shows the negation of Lutie's outlook in her description of a November wind. It seems that "it did everything it could to discourage the people walking along the street."¹ This is the wind in the streets of Harlem which warns the people of the ominous environment. As in Wright's Native Son (1940), the protagonist resorts to criminal action owing in part to fear and to hatred for oppressors. In the case of Lutie Johnson, the fear is created by her inability to conceive that black life has to be as it is in the ghetto. In essence, she believes in the goodness of her race to acquire respectable status.

Jesse Jackson chose integration as his motif with the publication of Call Me Charley in 1945 and Anchor Man in 1947. In each of these works, Jackson uses the protagonist, Charley Moss, as conveyer of his feelings toward integration. Charley is portrayed as a black youth who tries desperately to make his way in a white middle-class community, without losing his self-identity. In Call Me Charley, the Moss family has moved into white Arlington Heights where the parents are employed as

cook and chauffeur by a white doctor. Charley begins a paper route in the neighborhood. The plot revolves around Charley's assimilation and acceptance into an all-white neighborhood in terms of schools, friends, and social activities.

Charley and a white boy, Tom, become very good friends and companions. They work, play, and eat together. However, Charley does not receive a warm welcome from other whites. He is constantly reminded that he is black by schoolmates, the principal, and proprietors of various businesses. Charley does not try to establish any kind of rapport with these people who throw derogatory remarks at him. This muteness on his part causes his one friend, Tom, to have second thoughts about their friendship. However, Tom's father defends Charley's actions by saying to his son that "when you are treated unfairly just because your skin looks different from other boys, and when you feel that you are not wanted, you learn to keep your mouth shut." Eventually, Charley becomes more acceptable to the whites.

Charley's life in Arlington Heights continues in Anchor Man (1947). In this work, he is a high school senior trying to make the track team. The plot revolves around Charley who is confronted directly with racial identification and conflict. A fire in the black section of the city has destroyed the school, which results in some blacks being transferred to Arlington Heights High. The black and white students begin to imply that Charley has to choose which group he wants to be associated with. After hearing of these remarks, Charley is driven into depression because

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he has to weigh his own feelings about the problem.

Eventually, the crisis arises in the community. Black students are thrown from a white-owned cafe which Charley often attended. With the assistance of black and white students, Charley helps organize a picket line protesting the action of the cafe owner. The demonstration is successful and the black and white students see that Charley's loyalties are to all students.

In both works, Charley is portrayed as an individual whose only difference from whites is skin color. However, his father believes that blacks are blacks regardless to what whites do and he discourages Charley from associating with them. Jackson employs the "Uncle Tom stereotype in Mr. Moss to show the comparison between old impressions of blacks and the new approach to the black man's survival. While Charley's father believes in blacks "staying in their place," Mrs. Moss encourages Charley to reach out for a better life. Thus, he is equally balanced, in regards to accepting or rejecting either parents' ideas. However, it seems that Charley becomes neither black nor white, only a person who wants to do the right thing.

The reader of these two works by Jackson should keep in mind that Charley has lost his identity. These works are not particularly positive, but expose a small segment of blacks that take on this quality of color blindness. However, the novels convey that regardless of color anyone can achieve success and a fulfilling life.

Countee Cullen contributes to fiction for young readers with his publications of The Lost Zoo (1940) and My Nine Lives and How I Lost
Them (1947). These two books are raceless in content and quite interestingly enough about animals. The first work is about an imaginary zoo which has animals that are not found in ordinary ones. These animals are one-of-a-kind that lived many years before animals became domesticated. In the latter work, Cullen uses for the plot the activities of a cat family. The cats are given the gift of speech and speak naturally in "standard English." The title of the story is taken from one of the infant cats that has accidentally lost his nine lives very foolishly. These two works by Cullen are artistic attempts to provide mere entertainment and suspense for young readers.

Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Richard Wright, and Ann Petry attempted to show through their works the great capacity of blacks to mature and to excel in the face of racism. These writers reconstructed the negative forces which tended to usurp the black entity and devised routes of escape from this oppression. Jesse Jackson and Countee Cullen worked within the framework of partial racial conflict to raceless themes. Jessie Fausett incorporated history and her imagination to portray the black experience in relation to history. The black writers in the thirties and forties were basically following the pattern of historical activity and perpetuating the black literary tradition that originated in the late eighteenth century. As the nation became involved with economic crisis and wartime struggles, black writers were creating situations and characters to correspond to the country's state of affairs. With the more militant aspects developing in the fifties and sixties, the appeal to the reading public to transform their lives to correspond with the times was constantly stated.
The various motifs used by black writers of the thirties and forties were expanded and reiterated throughout the next two decades. After the war ended, blacks were concerned about their future in American society. Many black soldiers had fought and died on the battle fields as did whites. The nation was confronted with urgent questions - would blacks be allowed to eat, to sleep, to live, or to die with whites back in their own country? During the fifties and sixties, the black man was demanding that America keep and revise its promise to him. Various tactics were used to instill in all blacks that they had a proud heritage that deserved the ideals of the nation. The tempo of the fifties and sixties, then, soulfully stirred the black masses to gladly sing their praises of the beauty of blackness and the power of black unity.
CHAPTER IV

BLACK IMAGES IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

During the fifties and sixties, the black literary tradition was perpetuated in such works as Ralph Ellison's, *Invisible Man* (1952); James Baldwin's, *Go Tell It On The Mountain* (1953); and Sam Greenlee's, *The Spook Who Sat By The Door* (1969). The tone of black writing showed the black continuity in struggle and incorporated racial pride and militancy. The fiction of the fifties and sixties, then, recapitulated self-examination, unity, protest, and the quest for black identity. The black authors of these two decades celebrated blackness and black manhood. They were concerned with indoctrinating every age group and class in an attempt to unite toward the goals and needs of the black race. Many authors were pressing the idea that blackness was not the evil feature that white civilization had labelled it. Black authors, from James Baldwin in the 1950's to Sam Greenlee in the 1960's, spoke in rebellious tones to their brothers about the beauty of blackness and the necessity of resisting white oppression with loaded words and loaded guns that would awaken a nation of proud and liberated black people.

These two decades witnessed the intensified tempo and demands of the black protest movement. The fiction, as well as other forms of literature, was characterized by "a spirit of youth, freedom of expression, a growing sense of awareness of the black man's worth, and increasing rejection of standards that were regarded as white."1 With these

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features in fiction, black authors contributed to the shaping of a
group identity, which took vigorous hold on the lives and inflamed the
imagination of black people throughout the nation. This group identity
was added fuel which perpetuated hope for social equality through the
Civil Rights Movement.

With a younger generation angered by continued delay of social re-
forms, black leaders and authors turned to tactics that provoked a uni-
fied and mutual effort to alleviate much abuse of blacks. Black power
advocates and black Muslims gained influence while white America grudg-
ingly acceded to the black man increased equality of opportunity with
due respect. During the fifties and sixties, radical measures were
taken in fiction to foster a deeper perspective of the black man's
struggle in America. Black authors perpetuated the black literary tra-
dition by securing the point that "history records the deeds of a
people, but literature registers their hopes, fears, and dreams." ¹

Black authors portrayed their characters as typical human beings
set in a specific time, place, and situation, who must satisfy their
basic needs and be free from indecision about resolutions of problems.
During these two decades, there was an increased production of books
designated for young readers. An analysis of selected books will pro-
vide a closer look at the black man's struggle for freedom and unity.

Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Frank Bonham, and Kristin Hunter chose
to depict black life and characters in urban ghettos. The ghetto seemed

¹ Nick Aaron Ford, The Contemporary Negro Novel (Washington, 1936),
p. 17.
to serve as the symbolic stage upon which a large number of blacks conducted the rituals of their race. These black authors show that blacks want to escape their induced cultural environment, in order to find their true identity and worth. Their characters are transformed from delinquents in some respects to individuals who are positive in accepting their lifestyles and assessing the forces that inhibit them from achieving true identity. Ellison, Baldwin, Bonham, and Hunter create in the lives of their characters pressure that comes from the white and black communities. These pressures force the characters to protest, to unite, and to re-examine self-concepts. Thus, the black literary tradition is further perpetuated.

In *Invisible Man* (1952), Ellison portrays the life of an unnamed protagonist who tries to find his identity and goal in both a southern and northern setting. The protagonist arrives at the conclusion that from adolescence to maturity, he is an "invisible man" that people simply refuse to see. Ellison portrays the character as though he were "as transparent as air."\(^1\)

The novel begins around the time of the protagonist's graduation from a Negro high school in a southern community. The protagonist is persuaded to recite his commencement address before a group of prominent white citizens. Honored by the invitation, he accepts graciously, only to find that he will appear on the same program with a white stripper. The protagonist is dismayed, but gives his speech as eloquently as possible. While delivering the speech, he realizes that the whites who are

present regard his speech as a ludicrous burlesque of intellectual accomplishment. This realization dampens his spirit which is partially re-vitalized by his receiving a leather briefcase containing a scholarship to a Negro college.

The scholarship marks the beginning of his journey into the world of distortions and ambiguities. While in attendance at the college, the protagonist feels that he is preparing for a future of service to the country and for the improvement of his race. He believes that the white trustees, the Negro president and faculty are genuinely sincere in assisting black students to plan their destiny. Accidentally, he discovers that the institution as a whole is an elaborate sham of progress, concealing an acceptance of the black's prescribed role in American society.

After the protagonist is expelled from the college, he is sent to New York for employment. He is given seven letters of recommendation from the black president to secure him a job. A stark reality comes into focus. As the prospective jobs become less, the protagonist discovers the contents of the letters. A white potential employer informs the protagonist that the letters contain derogatory statements about him, in that, his presence at the college "threatens to upset certain delicate relationships between certain interested individuals and the school."1 The impact of this news is distressing to the protagonist and launches him on another search for his identity.

The protagonist, failing to achieve any employment, seems to find

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1 Ibid., p. 168.
acceptance by members of the "Communist Party," both white and black. Eventually, he learns that the party accepts him as a naturally gifted speaker and as a representative of the victims of white racism, not as an individual. He is merely accepted as a useful instrument in helping the "Brotherhood" indoctrinate the black community with communistic ideals.

Ellison has created a black character who fell into the pitfalls of life, totally innocent to its entrapments. The protagonist, only through traumatic experiences, becomes educated with life and his cultural environment. He has felt the wrath and prejudices of blacks and whites, realizing that in no part of society is there acknowledgment of a black person. The protagonist believed that he had to define himself as Frederick Douglass did.

...Douglass came north to escape and find work in the shipyards; a big fellow in a sailor's suit who, like me, had taken another name. What had his true name been? Whatever it was, it was as Douglass that he became himself, defined himself.¹

The perpetuation of the black literary tradition is obvious here. As Douglass protested the injustices of slavery, Ellison's protagonist protested against the ambiguities of black lives that rest on the attitudes of white racists.

James Baldwin, in Go Tell It On The Mountain (1953), presents his black characters as a religious group of people who believe in, to some extent, the Prussianical codes of living. The religious element embodies each character to make him adhere to the sanctions of the church and the

¹Ibid., pp. 330-331.
rules of societal conventions established for blacks. From this milieu, John Grimes, the protagonist, is kept in perpetual limbo between acceptance of the narrow and constricting life prescribed by his family and rebellion and escape in an effort to obtain a more fulfilling life outside the ghetto.

John Grimes is fearful of his existence in the black community. However, he rebels against this fear through his rebellious imagination. This is his sole power over his self-concept, to be visualized as a person, not an object of scorn and abuse. John strengthens his hold on life in the ghetto by escaping into fantasy, where he becomes the hero of battles with anxieties in life.

In part one, entitled "Seventh Day," John comes to grips with his deeply-rooted fears. From the onset of the novel, he contemplates his fear of domination by God and his adversary, Gabriel Grimes, who is his stepfather. John also fears the type of life that blacks lead in his community; he wants more out of life than the "darkness of his father's house." The solution to his fears, according to John, is in religion and to excel in academic achievements.

For John excelled in school... and it was said that he had a Great Future. He might become a Great Leader of his People. John was not much interested in his people and still less in leading them anywhere, but the phrase so often repeated rose in his mind like a great brass gate, opening outward for him on a world where people did not live in the darkness...  

However, John is automatically committed to the "darkness" when he is

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converted and joins his father's church. Religion was a dominant and
leading principle in John's family. Its importance resulted from the
hardships and broken promises for the black man which the North, far
from alleviating, often exacerbated.

John, who once thought of "getting religion" as an anachronism,
after his conversion realizes that it is a process which uplifts one's
self-concept. With his rationalization of conversion, John interprets
the religious experience as isolating him from his fears of God, of his
father, and of the black community. He faces the reality of his sit-
uation with a deeper perception in that he is going to pray to God for
perseverance and endurance.

Baldwin portrayed John Grimes as an individual in quest of his
identity. Just as Dunbar's The Sport of the Gods (1902) depicted blacks
forgetting their roots in the South, Baldwin employed the re-examination
of self in accordance with acceptance of one's roots in the South. As
pointed out in the novel, the various family members sought the North as
a haven from the vindictive South, but received no refuge from their
heritage. Baldwin has perpetuated the black man's struggle for identity
and the tradition of protest in Afro-American writing. Through his
interaction with positive internal forces, the protagonist was depicted
as acquiring a positive outlook on life. Baldwin seemed to stress the
relevance of religious influences on black life. Apparently, religion
served as a purifying agent to those who had misconceptions about their
self-concepts.

In Nitty Gritty (1968) and Durango Street (1965), Frank Bonham chose
to depict the black life in urban ghetto environments which tend to transform their inhabitants. Bonham stressed the various negative influences that were present in these settings and promoted delinquency. However, he incorporated into the framework of each novel a positive agent to direct his black characters in a rewarding destiny. Bonham attempted to demonstrate the importance of positive factors to blacks who seem to have lost their initial calling in white America.

In *Nitty Gritty* (1968), Bonham chose Charlie as the protagonist who is subjected to discrimination and malice because of his being black and of his status in the ghetto. Charlie and his family are portrayed as a black unit trying to maintain pride and civility in the face of white racism. They desire to improve themselves, but find that it is difficult escaping the ghetto environment. Charlie's father explains: "Been in jail, followed the crops, rode garbage trucks, washed dishes... Every place a Negro's supposed to go before he goes to the grave."¹

Charlie has been brought up in this negative experience and becomes quite determined that his father's unfortunate past would not be his future. In order to avoid this destiny, Charlie goes to school dedicatedly to better his chances of obtaining an equal and fair position in his life. He becomes particularly interested in a class taught by Mr. Toia. This class was a subject pertaining to relevant materials about events concerning blacks in American society. Charlie is so inspired by the dramatics of this class that he pledges his life to learn about his people and escape the ghetto's delinquent atmosphere.

In *Durango Street* (1965), Bonham again chose the setting of the urban ghetto and its effects on its inhabitants. The protagonist, Rufus Henry, had been a resident of the projects known as "the flats," when he was sent to reform school for grand auto theft. The novel begins at this frustrating point in Rufus's life. He is faced with leaving the safety of Pine Valley reform school and returning to the dangerous streets of his hometown.

Because of good behavior, Rufus's sentence is suspended with parole. Rufus is not too happy about returning to the roaches, the violence, the harassment from gangs, the discrimination from whites, and the intimidations from parole officers and policemen in his neighborhood. However, he composes a philosophy for the government of his life, which he hopes will subdue all negative influences. He states: "There's a lot I don't like about the world. But it's not getting me down. I'm staying on top."\

The first day home Rufus is warmly received by his family and parole officer. Later, however, Rufus and his sister are chased by the Gasser gang whom they have reported to the police for throwing bottles at them. A little earlier than expected, Rufus is caught up in gang wars with enraged policemen, and with delinquency which were prevalent in the projects. The incident demands Rufus' courage and ability to protect his family from harm. He remembers that he cannot join a gang for it would violate his parole. But, circumstances demand his immediate affiliation with a group.

With the assistance of the Moons, a gang that ruled the flats,

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Rufus sets out to avenge his sister. The war is begun resulting with the Moons as victors. This is the last fight which the Moons gang will participate in because Rufus becomes the leader. With the help of a dedicated social worker, Rufus creates a different image of gangs, it is transformed into a social club for the improvement and entertainment of the black community. The Moons begin to sponsor dances and attend other recreational outings, without the outbreak of violence.

Bonham had portrayed in Rufus the quality of endurance and confidence in himself. He depicted Rufus as a black adolescent who overcame the antagonisms of the police, street gangs, and the delinquent environment which bred criminals. Bonham has transformed a delinquent in an ominous environment to a well-adjusted young man. Both of Bonham's protagonists have found the way to self-identity and purpose in black society. The continuity of the black literary tradition is carried over by Bonham in these two works, Nitty Gritty and Durango Street. The quest of identity was as clear in these two books as it was in Ellison's Invisible Man (1952).

In Soul Brothers and Sister Lou (1968), Kristin Hunter chose as her setting an urban ghetto scene with her protagonist, Louretta, as a strong female character. Hunter portrayed the girl as a very sensible and impressionable person who tried to steer her friends in the right direction.

On the street where Louretta lives, there are many reasons for black youth to get into trouble. The black youth have no recreational facilities provided by the city. When a building is vacated, Louretta persuades her brother William, to rent it for his printing business.
However, she makes the request that he allow her friends to use a section of the building for an entertainment room. The arrangement works pretty well until corrupt policemen demand money from William to protect his business. As a result of this demand and William's refusal to pay, a black youth is killed and the building closed.

This incident almost incites a dangerous riot. But, Louretta, with the best interest of her friends in mind, talks them out of demonstrating violent action. Another course of action is revealed to the black youth, which entails peaceful but strong messages. The youth compile a newspaper and compose a ballad to the dead youth. Both compositions have an impact on the black and white community and create a desire for justice. As a result, the building is re-opened and the black youth are provided with recreational facilities by the city.

However, the one person responsible, Louretta, remains a little detached. Louretta is somewhat alienated from members of her race because she is very light-complexioned and has reddish brown hair. She is called "toasty," a name given to stuck up, conceited, and light-complexioned blacks. Louretta is jealous of darker complexioned youth who do not have to declare their rights of blackness. However, she thrusts her vibrant personality on all to attain acceptance. After the death of her friend, Louretta discovers the meaning of being a "soul sister." She learns that "soul" is a state of living acquired by blacks only by suffering. In essence, Louretta finds that "she was not different from the soul people at all; she was one of them." \(^1\) With this in mind, she dreams

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\(^1\) Kristin Hunter, The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou (New York, 1968), p. 236.
of assisting other blacks in the delinquent atmosphere of the ghetto. For, she has found her true identity and affinity with the black masses.

Hunter has re-enacted a component of the black literary tradition. Through her protagonist, Hunter has instilled the quest for self-identity and group worth. Hunter portrayed Louretta as a light-complexioned black girl who knew that black was always beautiful. Like Jessie Fausett's, *The Chinaberry Tree*, Hunter's novel stressed the inability of a smaller segment of blacks to assimilate easily into the color scheme of the black community. However, these persons acquired that self-evaluation which corrected the misconceptions about their color. The protagonist of Hunter's novel was not depicted as a tragic mulatto as in works by white authors. She has provided a medium of interchange for blacks who have varied opinions on protesting white oppression. As displayed in the novel, negative conditions bred delinquency, but intervention of positive elements produced desired results without a bombardment of violence.

Lorenz Graham and Sam Greenlee wrote novels depicting the effects of integration versus segregation and white oppression against blacks, whether in small towns or urban centers. Their protagonists go through transitional periods because they are a minority and are expected to react in a certain manner. In accordance with the civil rights movement, these black authors have portrayed in realistic and authentic presentations the gamut of urban racial conflict.

In *North Town* (1965) and *South Town* (1958), Graham traces the lives of a black family in a southern town to the urban northern environment. This family is placed in situations due to segregated practices imposed on them by white oppression. Each dilemma facing the family is dealt
with in the manner of logical, clear thinking. Graham portrays authen-
tic problems that confront blacks in white American society.

The Williamses in *South Town* (1958) live in a southern town and are
discriminated against by white employers, housing authorities, and even
school officials. In an attempt to improve his home and provide more
money for his family, Mr. Williams is forced to seek employment in north-
ern cities. When the factories in the city are closed, he is without a
job and returns home. With poverty near, the man refuses to return to
his former position with the Ford agency. This creates problems for him
and his family which results in racial tensions between the family and
white racists who want to keep blacks "in their places."

David Williams, the son and main focus of attention in the novel,
is bewildered by the racial prejudices of society. He does not under-
stand why white people react the way they do towards blacks who have com-
mitted no injuries to them or broken any laws. He feels that if more
whites were approached by educated blacks that the racial conflict would
be dispensed with.

If a colored man had enough education and good common
sense, he ought to be able to make white people understand.
He could speak out. He could make his voice ring out for
his people. He wouldn't have to be especially brave, he
would just have to know.  

David dreams of the day when his voice will be ringing out in the silence
as a black doctor for his people in the South. However, his fantasy is
interrupted by the cruel reality that education does not alleviate all
racial problems. Moreover, most whites view education for blacks as

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absurd, especially his employer, Mr. Boyd, who asserts that blacks are "getting too high-minded."

The Williamses face dangerous and near tragic incidents because of the family's will to subdue and protest any harassment from neighboring whites. The family is used as an example by white racists as a warning to other blacks to stay in their places of subordination. The father is beaten and thrown in jail on false charges; David is fired from his low-paying job; and the family is threatened with the loss of lives and home. However, the black community and members of the white community support the Williamses in their crisis which results in the death of a white friend and jail stays for other supporters. After the outsiders have publicized the cases, the officials of "South Town" release the people and the Williamses decide to leave unpleasant memories and "South Town."

The novel, North Town (1965), picks up the lives of the Williamses in a northern city. In this work, integration is the major emphasis. As a result of the prejudiced behavior of whites in "South Town," the Williamses are having a difficult time adjusting to integrated facilities in the North, especially David.

David is portrayed as a black youth trying to sort out his attitudes towards whites. When he enters the first day of school, white students begin to talk with him as though he was not "inferior or anything special." David realizes that regardless of location, all blacks have a common problem. However, some of his new black acquaintances believe that equality and status are handed to a few blacks making them unconcerned with black problems. Fortunately, David believes in getting ahead
on the basis of his own merit. For he feels that all whites are his potential enemies who have to be regarded with extreme caution.

Mr. Williams becomes quite ill and David must take on the responsibilities of man of the house. With this new responsibility and burden, he abandons his dream of becoming a doctor. David learns again the discrimination that exists for blacks. He takes employment as a janitor and continues to go to school in the daytime. However, Mr. Williams miraculously recovers and pressures David to pursue his dream.

In South Town and North Town, Graham has portrayed an entire family unit's search for identity in a biased society. He shows the opposition to the Williamses struggle for liberation from negative factors that tended to intimidate all blacks. Through these characters Graham has authentically recounted episodes in black life that provided a clearer picture of injustices, but also a strong determination by blacks to remove barriers from their paths of satisfaction from life by protest. The Williamses were representative of group cohesion present in the black community. Through unifying efforts, the family was able to function in the societal confines of white America. Graham was demonstrating the black literary tradition as it recurs in lives of contemporary blacks who have not been enslaved with chains, but with societal conventions and confines.

In Spook Who Sat By The Door (1969), Greenlee portrayed the character, Dan Freeman, as a black militant whose primary aim was to secure his race's rights in American society. Greenlee's novel reflects that a violent revolution is necessary to curtail white oppression and constant denial of the black man's rights in America.
Dan Freeman is informed that the C.I.A. has to integrate its staff. He decides to apply and to train for undercover agent or spy, a position that he observes any black is qualified for because of the masks which blacks have worn from slavery. With an artistic disguise: a phony accent, an "Uncle Tom" approach, goldrimmed teeth, and bad fitting clothes; Freeman begins to gain knowledge and skill from the white power structure to rebel against it.

After he is employed, Freeman takes on the characteristics of a "good nigger." He obeys all the physical and educational requirements of the agency. For five years, he takes unorthodoxed treatment from white authorities. Freeman is given the job which never permits him to leave his post by the door. He becomes "the spook beside the door." Eventually, he resigns from the agency and begins working as social worker in Chicago. Freemenn knows enough now to eliminate some of the negative elements of society.

In Chicago's southside, Freeman converts a gang, the Cobras, into an effective group of underground freedom fighters. He teaches and indoctrinates them with the meaning of black pride which means unity as a result of mutual experiences, aspirations, and feelings that classify people into collective groups. By planning a series of robberies, the group has obtained a large amount of money to invest in modern weapons for the revolution.

Greenlee has recapitulated the black literary tradition through his portrayal of Dan Freeman who believed in unity and protest. Freeman was a strong and virile black character who pointed out the inequities in society, black unity as the key for survival, and protest as an effective
way to provoke change. Greenlee perpetuated the recurrent themes of the black man's struggle as Vassa pointed out in his narrative in 1789. Also, the novel was filled with the same themes as Arna Bontemps's *Black Thunder* in 1936. Thus, the perpetuation of the black man's struggle becomes updated in literature.

During these two decades, attention was drawn to the identification of blacks to Africa and its cultural heritage. Much emphasis was attached to the slogans "black is beautiful," "black unity," and "black power." Many black artists, created stories which were representative of these slogans, such as Arna Bontemps and Virginia Hamilton. These two authors drew their characters from slavery and from the contemporary era, marked by each character's need to identify with some facet of black awareness. The black perspective of Bontemps and Hamilton was survival in terms of black revolutions of the mind concerning economic and social problems.

In *Chariot in the Sky* (1951), Bontemps recounted the formation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers as a group which promoted race pride in spirituals sung by slaves. There was special emphasis on the character development of Caleb, an ex-slave and member of the "Singers."

As the novel begins, Caleb is a slave who runs away from the "Willow Plantation" and is recaptured because of inadequate preparations for the escape and insufficient information about which direction to take for freedom. Eventually, the Emancipation Proclamation is signed and Caleb is freed. He is so filled with joy that he shouts:

I'm free! I'm free... I'm not a slave
No more. I'm what they call a freedman.
Caleb Willows, freedman. That sounds good
Caleb is free from slavery, but not yet free from struggle as a black man.

With his new freedom, Caleb ventures to Chattanooga and begins to teach freedmen how to read and to write. However, Caleb wants to learn more in order to help his people. So he goes to Nashville and enrolls in the Fisk School for Freedmen. From the very first day, he is involved with the controversy of whether blacks should sing the spiritual and the slave song instead of classical and white compositions.

Under the leadership of Mr. White, a group of youth have formed a singing group where the controversy is more apparent. The group is split in its feelings for singing songs which only perpetuates memories of slavery or singing songs which are wonderfully entertaining music. The conflict is not resolved until the group has an engagement to perform before a group of Congregational Ministers. As the meeting is approaching the end, it looks as though the Fisk Jubilee Singers will not be permitted to perform. Mr. White, the director of the choral group, instructs the "Singers" to sing "Steal Away," regardless to the nature of the meetings' procedures. As they sing, the song has a magical effect on the crowd resulting in monetary compensation. From that moment on, the controversy is resolved and there exists unity within the group.

In the novel, Bontemps had incorporated the quest for black identity and race pride. The dilemma to accept or reject black oriented music provoked a re-examination of the black characters' ideals. The black...

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group had to decide on identification with cultural heritage which had its roots in African and American soil. Bontemps made his characters rediscover the beauty of blackness and develop a greater sense of race pride in the productivity of their ancestors. Like Jean Toomer's *Cane* in 1923, the novel was a plea for acceptance and respect of black ancestral heritage, regardless of its nature. Again, the black literary tradition of struggle was continued.

In *Zeely* (1967), Virginia Hamilton portrayed Zeely and Geeder as two strong, black female characters. Each character has sought to identify with some ideal that was not her self-identity. Hamilton skillfully showed the realization of self within her characters by drawing parallels from African descent.

As the story begins, Geeder and her brother are going to visit their uncle in the country for the summer. When they arrive, each participates in different ways with country living. Toeboy plays with other children in games. But Geeder is happy fantasizing about a black woman she has seen.

Zeely Tayber was more than six and a half feet tall, thin and deeply dark as a pole of Ceylon ebony... She had very high cheekbones and her eyes seemed to turn inward on themselves.  

Moreover, Geeder finds a picture of an African Watuzi queen that resembles Zeely. With this picture, Geeder begins to make up stories about the woman and her ancestors to her friends.

Zeely goes to the farm and requests a meeting with the impressionable

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girl. Thoroughly thrilled with this rendezvous, Geeder puts on her best dress and manners to attend the "queen." She expects confirmation of the stories that Zeely is a queen from Africa. However, Zeely explains that she was born in Canada and is not a queen. She does assert the fact that she is of African descent as are all blacks. Moreover, she assures Geeder that a person should always be himself and not pattern his life after someone else. Finally, Geeder realizes that "its not what a person stoops to do . . . it's what's inside. . . ."¹

Virginia Hamilton has presented the acceptance of oneself as the only qualifier in life. She has given a black perception of self-identity to a young black girl and an older black woman. Geeder, an eleven year-old girl, was introduced quite subtly to race pride and identity in African heritage. Hamilton has portrayed the image of an unaware black youth who must undergo a metamorphosis to adequately assess the relationship of blacks to one another. The themes of acceptance and unity were prevalent in the novel. Hamilton incorporated the lesson that being an individual in thought and action was an important factor in acquiring any knowledge about one's self-image, race pride, and group identity.

These black artists of the fifties and sixties exemplified through their works the continuity of the black literary tradition. They chose the black experience in American society as the premise and basic material for their works, hoping that increasingly more sophisticated usage of economic and political power by blacks would provoke action where moral focus had failed. Black authors were forcefully drilling in

¹ Ibid., p. 150.
their works that blacks should strengthen their black pride, black unity, and critical awareness of the world's around them. These dominant themes created and/or reflected significant revolutions in the psychological, social, and moral aspects of black life. By the mid-1960's, most blacks were accepting the emphasis on black awareness which can still be seen in the wearing of afros, the forms of address used among blacks (brother and sister) and the community emphasis on black culture.
CONCLUSION

The correlation between history and literature prompted a unique black literary tradition centering on self-identity, protest, and unity; and that tradition took various forms in the representation of black images, including fiction for young readers. As has been shown, there were basic archetypal patterns and general classifications of individuals by black authors and sharply contrasting major stereotypes by white authors. Within each category, shifts in black portraits significantly paralleled changes in cultural attitudes and ideologies. American slavery instituted into the core of American society a severe dilemma which accounted for some of the most controversial characteristics of blacks in fiction. This dilemma prompted the Civil War, Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction and its aftermath giving rise also to various black portraits in fiction. During the following years, the social conditions in America included World War I and II, the migration of blacks to urban areas, the depression, the Civil Rights Movement and outbreaks of violence between the races. The autonomous emergence of the black literary tradition during slavery was perpetuated through the twentieth century as more blacks wrote of race pride and assertion of positive self-concepts. Black authors portrayed authentic and realistic black life situations and characters whereas white authors generally tried to belittle blacks.

In retrospect, the major cultural conflict has been the inability of blacks and whites to relate negotiably in a culture dominated by the myth of black inferiority and white superiority, a condition that still
hinders contemporary interaction toward national coexistence in a free and open society.

White writers used stereotypes which reflected images of blacks and patterns of relatedness that whites would accept, reject, or ignore without guilt or depth of emotional response. In these patterns, black characters were degraded in ways that helped whites upgrade themselves. For example, white authors emphasized in black portraits animal-like, physical descriptions, in contrast with white figures whose portraits contain few, if any, of these characteristics. Another stereotype was the brute Negro which white authors made vindictive and cruel because they defied prescribed rituals of race relations. A counter image to the brute Negro was the contented slave who was portrayed as the epitomy of loyalty, honesty, and service. Another stereotype was the comic Negro whom white authors made inept and irresponsible. These stereotypes were created to solicit derision of hatred for a particular character. In essence, the black portraits were designed to justify and perpetuate white supremacy.

At the same time, a unique black tradition away from these patterns became evident in the few early portraits of blacks created by black authors. The early black portraits demonstrated self-knowledge, independent responsibility, and proper relatedness with other people. Unity, protest and liberation were dominant undertones in black-authored works. Nineteenth century literature records a continuity of the tradition as its black authors asserted that blacks were human beings entitled to social justices. Simultaneously, the concept of brotherhood appeared in opposition to the dominant concept of inferiority. Gradually, fiction
reflected this trend with individuals in transition from submissiveness to self-assertion. In twentieth century black-authored literature, the tradition increased in incidence, becoming significant, giving substance to changes in interpersonal and intrapersonal relations.

In the early 1900's, the black literature expressions in America included slavery, "freedom," and the First World War. The main literary intent was revival of the black literary tradition to revitalize a proud, unified, and defiant black race. Between 1920-1930, in the period referred to as the Harlem Renaissance, black writers liberated blacks from the fictitious past and promoted re-discovery of black self-concepts. Throughout this decade, black writers promoted race consciousness and definition of black culture. Black attitudes and spirits awakened into beautiful and impressive thoughts concerning the black experience. Black characters were portrayed in terms of archetypal patterns: "black primitivism," "genteel realism," and the quest for black identity. In all three patterns, the traditions of protest, unity and identity of the black literature were perpetuated. The goals of black maturity and freedom were strengthened and became a preoccupation in relatedness to the roots of blacks throughout the diaspora.

Between 1930-1950, the perpetuation of the black literary tradition continued to flourish and permeated fiction for young readers. Black authors were attuned to the needs of all their people, resulting in transformation of the dominant themes of protest, unity, and liberation into fictional works for young readers. Portraiture was focused on sociological themes: integration, protest, and self identity in a racially prejudiced environment. Black authors of these two decades presented
pictures of the social ills in American economy such as poverty, crime, and racial discrimination resulting from depression and the Second World War years. In brief, the depression and war years gave blacks a different perspective about the black experience and a growing black audience that was receptive to authentic appraisals of black oppression.

During the fifties and sixties, the black literary tradition reached another climax in American literary and historical happenings. Black authors offered through their characters positive criteria for living and urged changes in black communities. As the black protest and Civil Rights movement gained followers, black authors portrayed characters as radicals, militants, and strivers for black humanity. Genuine effort was made to link the prism of 300 years of the black man's struggle for self-identity, unity, and liberation. The black authors celebrated black manhood and the positive concepts of blackness. These black assertive forces permeated fiction for young readers, forcing young blacks to move from shame to black pride, from ignorance to self-knowledge, and from despair to militant action. Fictional works reflected the contemporary level of black aspiration and its limited tolerance of existing conditions. The themes of black authors voiced and reflected significant revolutions in the psychological, social, and moral attitudes of the blacks in white America. As the early black writings prompted an evaluation of the black identity and black potential, just so did the black writers since that time continue to re-examine and to reevaluate the black experience in the black literary tradition.

As the study has shown, black authors have perpetuated the black pattern of cultural protest and survival which originated in the
eighteenth century. This tradition indicates that black authors will continue to wage the literary war against social injustices and prejudices. White America's constant denial of the needs and rights of black Americans can only promote and force blacks to perpetuate the black literary tradition.
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