

PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF ABBAS LAGHROUR –KHENCHELA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



The Pursuit of an African- American Identity in Black American Literature: Identity and Self-effacement in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture

Candidates:

Dina Maou

Narimane Benghalia

Supervisor:

Ms. Mekhaznia Wafa

Board of Examiners:

Supervisor: *Ms. MEKHAZNIA Wafa* University of Khenchela

President: *Dr. Beddiaf Abderrazzak* University of Khenchela

Examiner: *Mrs. Malek Nacira* University of Khenchela

June 2023

Dedication 1

To every glittering star that shines in my dark sky, leading and encouraging me during my moments of doubt.

To the people who stood by my side and convinced me I can make wonders.

To my dear parents who supported me by all means through my entire education.

To my best friends, online and real life friends, who showered me with love and appreciation.

To everyone who showed me love and support and stayed up with me during my sleepless nights as I was finishing this work.

I dedicate this dissertation for you.

Dina

Dedication 2

To whom who offered my happiness and comfort over hers... my virtuous mother.

To whom I miss with all my heart... my dear safe refuge... to the example of sincerity... my beloved father.

To whom who didn't hesitate to help me one day... my dear siblings.

To the one who provided me with advice and guidance... my dear grandmother.

To everyone who prayed for me...

I dedicate this work to you.

Narimane...

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, praises and thanks to Allah, the Almighty, for his blessings during the course of our research to complete this dissertation successfully.

We would like to offer our deepest gratitude to our research supervisor, Miss. Mekhaznia Wafa for giving us the opportunity to do research under her supervision, and for her patience with us and her supportive guidance throughout this research.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the jury members who accepted to give us some of their time and review our work. Also, we would like to offer our sincere gratitude to our professors; Dr. Ouniss who provided us all with the needed information in methodology to conduct our research, it is a blessing for us to be taught by him. Dr. Beddiaf Abderrazzak who was more than a professor to us, a brother and a friend. Thank you so much for your fun and inspiring lectures. Miss Yousfi Nabila for always believing in her students and giving the best she could, we are grateful for your great efforts.

We are very grateful to our parents, for their immeasurable support, as well as their prayers, love, and constant encouragement in completing this study. We also like to thank our friends for their support and wishes.

ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison is a renowned African American writer known for her portrayal of the ongoing suffering of Black Americans throughout history. Her works, such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987), explore themes of racial discrimination, Feminism, identity, and the impact of racism on African American sense of self. *The Bluest Eye* tells the story of a young African American girl's inferiority complex and low self-esteem due to her skin and eyes color. The novel reveals the white dominance on Black females' attitudes towards their beauty and blackness, as well as the racial and domestic violence against Black girls in both communities. *Beloved* (1987) is based on the real story of escaped slave Margret Garner, set after the American civil war and during the construction era. The novel aims to portray the connection between a traumatic past as a slave and the present of freedom, particularly for female characters. The research aims to examine identity and self-effacement in Toni Morrison's works and explore the results of racial discrimination from a feminist and psychological perspective. The analysis reveals that Morrison, as a modernist writer, successfully exposed the harshness of racial discrimination against Black people and the psychological consequences that followed. *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* demonstrate that racism, slavery, and sexism affected each character physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Key words: Self-effacement, Feminism, Racism, Slavery, Psychological trauma, Self-loathing.

Table of content:

Dedication1.....	I
Dedication 2.....	II
Acknowledgement	III
ABSTRACT.....	IV
Table of content	V
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Afro-American Literature From a female perspective.....	8
Introduction.....	9
1. An Overview of Afro-American Literature.....	9
1.1. Conceptualizing Afro-American literature.....	10
1.1.1. Characteristics of African American literature	11
1.1.2. Themes of African American literature	12
1.2. Black American Issues and Concerns.....	17
1.2.1. Oppression.....	17
1.2.2. Slavery.....	19
1.2.2.1. Definition of slavery.....	19
1.2.2.2 History of slavery.....	19
1.2.3. Self-definition.....	20
2. Origins of Afro-American Women’s writing.....	22
2.1. Eras of African American women writings.....	22
2.1.1 .Slavery era	22
2.1.1. Civil war and reconstruction era	23
2.1.3. Early 20 century and Harlem renaissance era	24
2.1.4. The civil rights and black arts movement	24
2.1.5. The late 20th and early 21st centuries	25
2.2. Representatives of African American Women Writing.....	27
2.2.1. Global feminism, black feminism and womanism	27
2.2.2. The African American writings	30
2.3. Features of African American Females’ Writing.....	31
2.4. Afro-American Female Writers.....	35
3. Identity and Black Identity Construction.....	37
3.1. Definition of Identity.....	37

3.2.Types of identity	38
3.3. Identity and Identity Construction.....	41
3.4. The development of identity.....	44
3.5.Factors effecting identity development	45
3.6. Black Female Identity	46
Conclusion.....	48
 Chapter Two: Feminism in Black American Literature.....	49
Introduction.....	50
1.1. A General Overview.....	50
1.2. A Historical overview.....	52
1.2.1. Waves of feminism.....	53
1.3. Feminism today.....	54
1.4. Black feminism.....	55
1.4.1. What is black feminism.....	55
1.4.2. The history of black feminism.....	56
1.5. Black Women in the Feminist Movement.....	60
1.6. Toward a Black Feminist Movement.....	62
1.7.Black female activists in the feminist movement.....	68
1.8. A Focus on the Black Feminist Movement.....	71
Conclusion.....	75
 Chapter Three: Internalized Racism and Self-Effacement in <i>the Bluest Eye</i>	76
Introduction.....	77
1. Pecola Breedlove's desire for blue eyes and white identity.....	78
1.1. Pecola equates beauty and love with physical appearance.....	78
1.2. Pecola's obsession with white children.....	81
1.3. Yearning for blue eyes to achieve social acceptance.....	83
2. Effects of internalized racism on Pecola's self-esteem.....	85
2.1. Pecola's feelings of self-loathing and unworthiness.....	85
2.2. Blackness: the source of ugliness and hatred.....	87
2.3. The inferiority complex of Pecola.....	90
3. Pecola's self-effacement and rejection of her own identity.....	91
3.1. Pecola's desire to be invisible.....	91
3.2. The belief of unworthiness of love and attention.....	93

3.3. Identity rejection in a racist society.....	94
Conclusion.....	96
Chapter Four: Trauma and Identity in <i>Beloved</i>	98
Introduction.....	99
1. Sethe's traumatic past and its impact on her identity.....	100
1.1. Sethe's traumatic past.....	100
1.2. Slavery effect on Sethe's memory.....	104
1.3. The quest of sense of self after slavery.....	106
2. Sethe's relationship with Beloved as a representation of her past and future.....	108
2.1. Beloved representing Sethe's past.....	108
2.2. Sethe's future hopes via bonding with Beloved.....	110
2.3. Beloved's impact on Sethe's sense of self and identity.....	112
3. Sethe's self-effacement and rejection of her own identity in the face of trauma.....	116
3.1. Sethe's identity effacement to cope with trauma.....	116
3.2. Sethe's denial of her own agency and autonomy.....	117
3.3. The importance of reclaiming identity and history.....	120
Conclusion.....	123
Chapter Five: Confronting Racism and Embracing Identity.....	124
Introduction.....	125
1. The impact of racism on the construction of African-American identity.....	126
1.1. Racism's impact on African Americans' sense of self-worth and self-esteem.....	126
1.2. The ways in which racism has historically denied African Americans access to their own cultural identity.....	127
1.3. The ongoing struggle for African Americans to define themselves in the face of a society that often devalues and erases their experiences.....	129
2. The rejection of dominant culture and embrace of black identity by Morrison's protagonists.....	131
2.1. Morrison's characters' rejection of dominant white culture and its standards of beauty and worth.....	131
2.2. The celebration of African American culture, history, and identity in Morrison's works.....	133
2.3. The importance of valuing and centering African American experiences and voices in literature and society.....	135

3. The importance of self-acceptance and the pursuit of an authentic identity.....	136
3.1. The necessity of self-acceptance and love in the face of racism and trauma.....	136
3.2. The importance of defining oneself on one's own terms, rather than accepting dominant cultural norms.....	139
3.3. The role of literature and art in promoting self-acceptance and the pursuit of an authentic identity.....	140
Conclusion.....	141
General Conclusion.....	142
Bibliography.....	146

General introduction

African American identity has been a major topic in Black literature for generations. From slave narratives to modern works, African American authors have explored the complicated nature of identity and how it relates to race, class, gender, and culture. The Themes of African American identity in literature are numerous, since African American authors have attempted to challenge the established narratives that defined African American identity as one of servitude and inferiority since the early days of enslavement. These authors tried to redefine black identity in terms of the struggle for civil rights and liberation in the years following the Civil War. Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes used their works in the early twentieth century to explore the cultural, social, and political dimensions of African American identity.

In the 1950s and 1960s, African American literature began to explore the nuances of Black identity in the context of the civil rights movement. In their works, writers like James Baldwin and Richard Wright explored the intersection of race, class, and gender. Over the years, African American authors have continued to explore the African American identity. Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Octavia Butler, among others, have used their writing to study race, gender, and class in the African American experience. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison explored the power of memory, while *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker explored the power of sisterhood. Butler's *Kindred* delves into the significance of ancestry. These authors' writing has challenged traditional perspectives about African Americans and presented different viewpoints on what it means to be Black in America. They have done so in a variety of ways, including personal stories, historical research, and cultural analysis. These authors have been able to explore the realities of the African American experience by examining the past, present, and future of African Americans.

Precisely Toni Morrison, her book *Beloved* is a haunting story about the devastation of slavery on individuals and their families. The novel is set in Post-Civil War Ohio and tells the

story of Sethe, a former slave who has escaped to freedom but is haunted by her past. Morrison dives deep into the psychological trauma of slavery and the struggle for survival in its aftermath through the character of Beloved, a mysterious young woman who appears on Sethe's doorstep and disturbs her life.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison addresses the issues of beauty and race through the eyes of a young Black girl named Pecola Breedlove. Pecola, who is poor and lives in Ohio in the 1940s, dreams of having blue eyes because she thinks that if she did, she would be beautiful and appreciated. Toni Morrison's influential prose exposes the damaging effects of racism and the shallow standards of beauty imposed on Black women in American society. She invites readers to examine their own biases and prejudices as well as to acknowledge the humanity and value of every person through Pecola's story.

In addition to Black identity, Feminism as well is an important focus in African American literature because it highlights the struggles of Black women and their fight for equality and recognition within society. The Feminist Black literature has a rich history that dates back to the early 19th century, and it aims to challenge traditional gender roles, racial stereotypes, and societal norms. Remarkable authors such as Sojourner Truth, Zora Neale Hurston, and Toni Morrison have contributed to the movement through their works, they challenged the patriarchal and racist systems of their time and paved the way for women of their race while exploring a variety of themes, including intersectionality, identity, and empowerment.

Toni Morrison works are known worldwide and have been studied in many aspects concerning race, gender, identity, feminism, and dehumanization by a variety of scholars and researchers such as “Identity, Race, Gender In Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” by Rossana Rues Machado Gomes in 2016. The work examines how the novel depicts the themes of

identity, race, and gender, and how they relate to concerns of white beauty standards, self-loathing, and racial pride. And “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: A Study on History, Slavery and Love” by Lekha Nath Dhakal 2022. This article attempts to illustrate how Toni Morrison's work, *Beloved*, deals with a variety of key topics such as the past, slavery, and love. This novel is largely about African American history, slave stories, romantic relationships, and imaginative things. However, our research is based on our personal analysis and understanding of both novels’ events and symbols, also it signifies the study of the self-effacement and identity rejection for Black Americans throughout the history of slavery and racial discrimination of the dominant culture.

Research methodology

We collected data by citing and quoting both novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison in order to come up with a psychological and feminist reading for both books and besides that, we analyzed the characters’ perspectives and other sub-character. In addition, we have collected data from literary books, articles, and relevant websites to support our investigation.

In this research, we will adopt the feminist, the psychological and historical approaches, to deal with the analysis of the character in both novels. The approaches are applied directly on the characters’ behavior, we opted them because Toni Morrison is known as a feminist writer and most of her books highlight the issues of black American women and the discrimination that has affected them psychologically. The research starts by classifying the mental characteristics of characters using individual psychology theories, and then continued by divulge the factors of psychological aspects of the characters.

We have used the descriptive method in our research_ which is a type of research design that aims to systematically obtain information to describe a phenomenon, situation, or

population. The intention behind using this method in our research is to conduct and analyze the psychological trauma of the main characters, also it is used to reach a certain consequence of this problem by gathering evidence from both books.

This research paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, entitled the Afro-American literature from a female perspective is the theoretical part in which we deal with the Afro-American literature, how it started and its features. In addition to that, we are going to trace back the origin of the oppression of women and slavery as well as the causes of the Black women troubled identity. For women since ancient times had been considered as an inferior and they were ranked the second to men. Moreover, we give a clear definition of identity and how Black people constructed their self-concept generally and women precisely throughout the times.

The following chapter entitled feminism in Black American literature is about providing a clear image about feminism and its foundation from the beginning. We shall see the modern feminism and how it aids the black women to express themselves, also to confirm the idea of all black women are inherently valuable and understand the position in relation to racism, sexism and classism as well as other social and political identities. Beside that, we shall discuss Black women in the feminist movement and how they were treated, moving to the reaction toward a black feminist movement and their focus on it.

The third chapter of the research expounds on the internalized racism and self-effacement portrayed in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. The main focus of this chapter is on Pecola Breedlove, the primary character and an eleven-year-old girl, who harbors a fanciful ambition of obtaining blue eyes like the white race to attain acceptance within her community. This chapter delves into the yearning of the protagonist for eyes that are blue and the fixation of the white families on attained standards of beauty. In addition, the present study investigates the

impact of racism on the self-esteem of Pecola, including her sense of self-worth and self-aversion. Ultimately, the study aims to analyze the rejection of Pecola's identity as a Black female within a racially discriminatory society.

Progressing towards the next chapter "Trauma and Identity in *Beloved*", the literary work explores the detrimental effects of enslavement by chronicling the experiences of Sethe, a female African American who transitioned from a state of enslavement in Kentucky prior to the Civil War to her present settlement in Cincinnati, Ohio in the year 1873. Despite her liberated status, Sethe is confined by the harrowing memories of her past as an enslaved woman. The chapter concerns Sethe's distressing experiences as a subservient individual and the arduous endeavor to establish a personal identity in the aftermath of enslavement. Additionally, an analysis will be conducted on the correlation between the characters Sethe and *Beloved*, serving as allegories for the protagonist's prior experiences and forthcoming prospects. Sethe's self-effacement, as well as her rejection of her own identity, has led to an acknowledgment of the significance of reclaiming her personal history and sense of self.

The fifth chapter of the study centers on the confrontation of racism and the embracement of identity among the protagonists in Morrison's works. The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the influence of racism on the formation of African American identity and the repudiation of dominant cultural norms, while promoting the acceptance of black identity and cultural traditions. Moreover, the discussion emphasizes the crucial role of self-acceptance and the pursuit of authentic identities.

Motivation

The reason behind choosing pieces of African American literature is the authenticity and beauty in Toni Morrison's writings, her strong, poetic language makes her novels a work of art, also her success in revealing the true emotions of her people and gathering the missed

pieces from history all together. We chose *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* to show how Morrison presented themes like racism, slavery and self-identity. We wanted to shed lights on the cruelty practiced against Black people in the nineteenth and twentieth century and its psychological effects on the characters. Thus, this study will cover how Black literature revealed the truth of dehumanization against black people generally and Black women specifically, and show the different reactions of the characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, applying the feminist and psychoanalytical approaches.

Research Questions

The general introduction allowed us to select the following research questions:

- What are the basis and outcomes of identity effacement for black Americans ?
- What are the major issues mentioned in Black American literature?
- How did these issues affect the identity of African American people?
- How did racism affect characters in *The Bluest Eye*?
- How did slavery affect characters in *Beloved*?
- How do the main characters lose and rebuild the self-identity as Black women?

Objectives of the study

- Evaluating themes in black literature such as Feminism, racism, identity, community...
- Describing the impact of racism on the Black American women.
- Describing the impact of slavery in its aftermath.
- To find out the psychological issues caused by the oppression.
- Indicating the damages that occurred in women's self-identity as a result of oppression.

Chapter 1: The Afro-American literature From a Female Perspective

Introduction

Racial discrimination has influenced American history negatively and although it was denied, racial divisions existed, which led to racial inequality. Historically, black people have been oppressed and seen as inferior by white people; therefore The African American elite used a variety of movements and techniques to challenge the dominance of white people and win back their freedom as a result of the discrimination and oppression they experienced. One of these techniques is literature; for they were aware of the power that a pen can hold.

In this chapter, we will provide three diverse yet connected sections; the first will be dedicated to examine The African American literature, its foundation, characteristics, and concepts, covering all what makes the black literature stand out. The next section will be more specified with the field of black literature, since it will be dealing with the origins of African American women writing in terms of the drives that pushed black women to write and speak up for their rights through their writings, the movements of feminism that were assisted with such writings, the features of black women writings, in addition to some of the names of female authors and their works. At last, the final section will be talking about identity, providing a description to what it can be defined as according to some scholars and some different types of it, also how it is developed or constructed, then narrowing the topic to the black females' identity.

1. An Overview of Afro-American Literature

Afro-American literature is a term used to describe the literary works created by African Americans. This literature embraces a wide range of genres, including poetry, fiction, drama, and nonfiction, and it has its roots in the African American experience.

Afro-American literature began to emerge in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as slaves and free blacks began to write about their experiences. These works often focused on

themes of oppression, resistance, and freedom. The most notable works from this era include the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, which provided powerful accounts of slavery and its effects on African Americans.

In the 20th century, Afro-American literature continued to flourish, with writers exploring a wide range of themes and styles. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s brought increased attention to African American literature with writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright, gaining widespread recognition for their works.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s also had a significant impact on Afro-American literature with writers such as James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, addressing issues of racial inequality and social justice in their works.

Today, Afro-American literature remains an important form of cultural expression and a means of exploring the complex issues surrounding race and identity in America. It continues to evolve and expand, with new writers and new perspectives emerging all the time.

1.1. Conceptualizing Afro-American literature

Over time, African American literature has expanded and evolved, with unique writings expressing diverse aspects of Black life. What makes African American literature exceptional is its consistency in expressing a message of power and inspiration to blacks throughout history. African American literature delves on the role of Black Americans in American culture. The authenticity of the experiences as African Americans, as well as the inclusion of cultural, spiritual, social, and political details that are unique to the African American experience, distinguish African American fiction and literature from other fiction that may feature African American characters. In other words, African American Literature has details that are not present in any other genre of literature or fiction. “To have any sense of evolving

African poetics, one must be aware of the socio-political significance of literary expression and the ideological character of literary theory.” Thomas Knipp.

1.2. Characteristics of African American literature:

African American literature may be broadly characterized as writings by people of African heritage residing in the United States of America. However, just as African American history and existence are diverse, so is African American literature. However, this type of literature has traditionally concentrated on subjects of specific importance to Blacks in the United States, such as the position of African Americans within the American culture and what it means to be an American. According to Princeton University professor Albert J. Raboteau (32), all African-American studies, including African-American literature, "speaks to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in this nation." This presence has always been a litmus test for the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, and all-inclusiveness.”. As a result, African American Literature may be considered to examine the very concerns of freedom and equality that have long been denied to Blacks in the United States, as well as other subjects such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, a feeling of home, and more.

African American literature is an important branch of African diasporic literature, influenced by and influencing African diasporic writings in various nations. Furthermore, African American literature exists within the larger realm of post-colonial literature, even though scholars distinguish the two by stating that "African American literature differs from most post-colonial literature in that it is written by members of a minority community who reside within a nation of vast wealth and economic power. “Spirituals, African American gospel music, blues, and rap are all examples of poetry found in African American oral culture. This oral poetry may also be seen in African American Christian sermons, which utilize purposeful repetition, tempo, and alliteration. African American literature, particularly

written poetry, but also prose, has a long history of combining all of these types of oral poetry (135)

While these qualities and topics are present on many levels in African American literature, they are not the sole definition of the genre and do not appear in all works within the genre. Furthermore, there is skepticism about applying Western literary theory to African American literature. "My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than reading it, or analyzing it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions, appropriated from without," said Henry Louis Gates, Jr., one of the most important African American literary scholars.

The majority of African-American literature focuses on the black people, their existence under slavery, discrimination, an individual's fight in a white-dominated society, their desire for identity, and obtaining power and independence among the whites. African-American works have a profound sociological insight, representing the thoughts, dreams, and goals of the unfortunate black people. It also addresses societal topics such as African-American racism, culture, religion, slavery, freedom, equality, and identity. Slavery and civil rights had a significant influence on the lives of African-Americans and played a big part in literature.

1.3. Themes of African American literature :

Although slavery has existed since ancient times, the issue of slavery has been thoroughly examined over many decades. The world of literature reflects this worldwide predicament of humanity through national sufferings and social oppressions suffered throughout generations. "A slave is the property of another, politically and socially [a slave is] at a lower level than the mass of people, and [performs] compulsory labor." Slavery is one of the primary causes of racism in most societies. It caused chaos on American race relations, starting a schism between whites and blacks. Slavery has produced irreversible damage that may still be witnessed today. Even after slavery was abolished in America in the 1800s, racial tensions persisted

among the population. In other words, rather of drawing closer, this caused them to wander away. Slavery also gave birth to White supremacy, which led individuals to believe that they are fundamentally superior simply because of their skin color and ancestry.

The concept of freedom is a pioneering idea that is deeply embedded in America's core values. The aforementioned principle is exemplified in the Declaration of Independence and safeguarded in the Constitution. The attainment of freedom, particularly for the African American community, has been an elusive goal that has required the exertions of several social movements and sustained struggle.

For decades, African American families have faced discrimination and oppression based on their race. Even today, 150 years after the abolition of slavery, and despite economic, educational, occupational, and other advancements for many African Americans, racism is a reality. It may be more commonly hidden and covert than in the past (Bonilla - Silva, 2010), but it is nonetheless a reality. There is strong evidence that African Americans are worse off than European Americans in terms of well-being indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, health-care quality, housing quality, incomes, and accumulated assets. African Americans, for example, have greater rates of unemployment and incarceration, which are evidence that things aren't going well. Discrimination in hiring, police profiling, and attendance in lower-quality schools are all examples of discrimination. However, despite the wealth of documentation on the impact of the racial system on African Americans, there is surprisingly little social science research on how racism affects everyday family interaction.

The renowned writers of African-American literature of the twentieth century displayed a renewed shrewdness. With their notions of ideas like "double-consciousness" and the symptoms and repercussions of invisibility on the African-American identity, writers like Du Bois, Ellison, and Chesnutt ... exemplify this new degree of knowledge. They discovered

how much the outside world and its inhabitants influenced the African-American populace. The hunt for identification in African-American life and literature during the twentieth century was hampered by the fact that identity is determined by color rather than what an individual projected. The ensuing style of existence for African-Americans is distinguished by what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as "double-consciousness," as well as a sense of invisibility in the face of tyranny, in his work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois defines double-consciousness as a gap between one's genuine self and how that self is seen by others. A person with double consciousness feels both American and African-American and is unable to reconcile the two identities. This is similar to Ralph Ellison's notion of invisibility in his work *The Invisible Man*, in which oppressors only see African-Americans through a distorted lens and fail to identify one's identities and deeds. African-Americans experience this sensation of invisibility both internally and externally as they are assessed externally, resulting in a new sense of self-consciousness inside.

The history of African Americans produced numerous political demands; Marcus Garvey invoked the Pan Africanist idea as a means to improve Blacks' living conditions in America. Martin Luther King used peaceful protests to advocate for social and political unity. Malcolm X, on the other side, believed in "separation" as a catalytic mechanism for destroying racist institutions.

Gender inequality between men and women is a social construction issue. The analysis of gender and sexuality in literature focuses critiques on social interactions based on stereotypes, social interactions, emotions, and feelings at the level of race, ethnicity, nation, culture, and global issues. A literary piece might, for instance, discuss sexual assault and gender inequality in numerous spheres of life. Social critique in literature has connections to topics relating to gender and sexuality. . African Americans face discrimination and inequality in the most fundamental rights that whites enjoy, such as health care and employment. Gender

has been used by African writers in general and female writers in particular, to express their rejection of oppression by the opposite sex (female activism against oppression).

Furthermore, one of the most prominent themes in African American literature is beauty. White folks used to think African Americans and their complexion and hair color were unattractive. White ideal beauty standards have devalued and rejected black women and their bodies. Slavery influenced prejudiced ideas on beauty, which led to lighter skin tones being regarded as desirable traits by various populations, including African Americans. Colorism, which impacts African Americans' image of themselves, is linked to the concept of lighter skin tones as the ideal beauty standard, with African women being disproportionately affected. Throughout history and continuing to present day, the bodies and aesthetic appeal of black women have suffered significant societal devaluation within mainstream cultures due to an overestimated emphasis on European-centric beauty standards and an underestimation of those belonging to other racial/ethnic categories, with the exclusion of exoticism. In the United States, fair complexion, blue irises, and straight, elongated, blonde tresses are venerated and commonly regarded as the quintessence of aesthetic allure. The aesthetic features that bear resemblance to African heritage are commonly perceived as unattractive, unappealing, and lacking in femininity. Various factors contribute to shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors, including but not limited to the media, familial and peer associations, and so forth.

The notion of motherhood plays a paramount role in African American female literature and is deeply rooted in ancient African customs. Prominent women authors of the Black community have explored the concept of motherhood through diverse literary forms within their works, highlighting its crucial significance in both personal upliftment and

societal advancement. The authors have drawn from their literary foremothers as a source of inspiration for their artistic creations.

Memory serves as a mechanism for the formation of both individual and cultural identity. Memory is an omnipresent element within all written works that pertain to individual or cultural concerns, and as such, it serves as a literary motif that holds significant significance. According to Davis Ruffins in his book *African American Preservation Effort*:

“Memory is used here to mean the individual or collective memories of people who have lived through a set of experiences. [...], the memories of those who were veterans of a particular war or participants in a singular event constitute a distinctive, personally validated version of the past.[...]. Personal and collective memories were traditionally saved in diaries, letters, and autobiographies. Today, such memories are more typically preserved as oral history or in audio or video form. Embedded in personal testimony are the different beliefs and practices that make individuals, regions, ethnic groups, and religious groups distinctive.” (511)

A community denotes a collection of individuals who are interlinked by one or more specific characteristics. The element that serves as the fundamental link between them is located at the central core of the group and is regarded as the essence thereof. As indicated by the etymology of the term (common-unity), a specific subset of the populace exhibits a shared sense of solidarity linked by a recognizable motif. A community serves as a cohesive unit that fosters collaboration and mutual assistance, thereby promoting collective resilience in confronting challenges and adversities. Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved" illustrates the significant role that communal support plays in the sustenance of an individual's existence. From the onset of slave transportation from the African Coast to America, the importance of forming communities became paramount as it served as a means of uniting Africans who were forcefully taken from their homes and transported to foreign lands with uncertain

futures. The initial step towards developing a communal sentiment was the recognition that there was mutual support among the individuals involved and that they were not isolated. Initially, the segregation of slaves in the United States was due to linguistic and cultural disparities. The Gullah language emerged as a solution to this issue, merging elements of diverse African dialects with those of English. African Americans commenced to amalgamate their cultural beliefs and practices into a consolidated entity. Despite their distinct cultural backgrounds and traditions, the African American populace managed to converge these differences harmoniously, thereby engendering a unified culture known today as African American culture. Although the aforementioned individuals originated from diverse geographic locations, they subsequently came together in union as a unified group. Over the course of time, a collective consciousness emerged amongst the global black community. The phenomenon of collective consciousness entails the recognition among individuals of their obligation to promote and defend their rights, persisting in such efforts until their attainment is accomplished. The formation of rebellions, organization of protests, and acquisition of rights were accomplished gradually through active participation in community activities. Throughout their journey, African Americans remained cohesive, offering each other unwavering support and mentorship in times of success and hardship. It is my fervent belief that through the unwavering determination and cohesive efforts of the African American community, genuine racial parity shall eventually be attained.

1.2. Black American Issues and Concerns

1.2.1. Oppression:

A dictionary definition of oppression is “Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power especially by the imposition of burdens; the condition of being weighed down; an act of pressing down; a sense of heaviness or obstruction in the body or mind” (*Merriam-Webster*

Third International Edition). According to, psychologists Prilleltensky and **Gonick** (1996) conceptualize oppression as follows:

“... oppression entails a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating persons or groups exercise their power by restricting access to material resources and by implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-deprecating views about themselves.... Oppression, then, is a series of asymmetric power relations between individuals, genders, classes, communities, nations, and states.” (pp. 129–130)

Oppression occurs when one group has more access to power and privilege than another group, and when that power and privilege is used to maintain the status quo (i.e., domination of one group over another). Thus, oppression is both a state and a process, with the state of oppression being an unequal group access to power and privilege, and the process of oppression being the ways in which inequality between groups is maintained.

For over four centuries, African Americans in the united States have been subjected to various forms of physical and psychological abuse, which have resulted in their oppression, suffering, and subjugation, following the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865, the eradication of slavery brought forth an array of racial legislations that imposed limitations on the liberties of African Americans, further intensifying their disadvantaged position in society. There is currently a contentious discourse surrounding discussions pertaining to the status of African Americans and the principle of equity within the United States. Numerous states implemented legislation referred to as "black laws" in order to establish racial regulation. A notable historical practice facilitated black men's involvement in occupations such as farming, mining, fieldwork, and domestic service, as well as assuming the responsibility of raising children alongside their female counterparts within the black

community. In regions where racial legislation was in effect, individuals of African descent were compelled to remit yearly taxes, frequently exceeding \$100, as a precondition for obtaining access to certain employment opportunities. As a consequence, a significant number of individuals of African descent were rendered homeless and subjected to sanctions by security personnel.

1.2.2. Slavery:

1.2.2.1. Definition of slavery:

Cambridge dictionary defines slavery as the activity of legally owning other people who are forced to work for or obey you Slavery is the ownership of a person as property, especially in regards to their labor. (Allain, Jean (2012).

1.2.2.2. History of slavery:

The history of slavery refers to the practice of owning human beings as property, where individuals are bought and sold to perform forced labor. This practice has been in existence for centuries and has had a profound impact on the social and economic structures of various societies. Although the concept of slavery has existed in several cultures and civilizations throughout history, the Atlantic slave trade was among one of the most enduring and infamous forms of slavery, in which millions of Africans were captured and transported to the Americas for forced labor.

Despite the abolition of slavery in most parts of the world, contemporary forms of slavery, such as human trafficking, continue to exist and pose significant global challenges. During the antebellum era in the South, individuals who were held in enslavement comprised approximately thirty percent of the overall southern populace. The majority of individuals in that era inhabited either expansive plantations or modest farms, with a considerable

percentage of proprietors possessing not more than 50 individuals in bondage. Landowners aimed to establish a state of absolute reliance of their enslaved population on them by implementing a set of rigorous regulations. Oftentimes, these individuals were prohibited from acquiring literacy skills and their conduct and mobility were subject to limitations.

Numerous masters engaged in the despicable act of raping enslaved women, with those who exhibited obedient conduct being granted preferential treatment, while those who exhibited rebellious behavior were subjected to severe forms of punishment. The maintenance of a rigid hierarchy among enslaved persons, classified according to their relative status as privileged household workers, skilled artisans, or lowly field hands, was instrumental in fostering divisions and curbing their proclivity to organize and resist the authority of their masters. Marriages among enslaved individuals lacked legal validity, although a substantial number of enslaved men and women formed marital bonds, rearing numerous offspring. Despite the fact that many slaveholders condoned this practice, they frequently resorted to selling or relocating enslaved families without reservation

1.2.3. Self-definition:

The significance of history and ethnicity in the process of identity formation for Black Americans who have resided amongst a White populace propagating their perceived superiority over the Black American subculture is noteworthy. The practice of slavery resulted in the dehumanization and objectification of individuals of African descent, who were treated merely as commodities and possessions. This experience proved psychologically impactful for these individuals, inspiring both fear and anger towards the dominant community. As a result, they developed adaptive survival strategies, such as embracing assigned stereotypes and mimicking the behaviors of their White oppressors. Additionally, they found avenues for self-expression through religion, language, and music. During the

period of Reconstruction in the United States, a significant shift occurred in the master-slave relationship.

The emergence of free Black individuals resulted in a fragmentation of the collective Black community, with many adopting an individualistic mindset and losing their sense of solidarity with other Black individuals. Consequently, they began to develop within the psychocultural framework of oppressed individuals, struggling to establish their identity both on a personal level ("who am I?") and as a constituent of the larger Black community ("who are we?"). Erik Erikson believed that identity must be examined not just from an individual perspective, but also in terms of the individual's relationship within the social and historical developments of society. Martin Luther King states in 1968, *"As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery. No Lincolnian Emancipation Proclamation, no Johnsonian civil rights bill can totally bring this kind of freedom. The Negro will only be free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive manhood his own emancipation proclamation. And with a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and to the world, 'I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history, however painful and exploited that history has been. Yes, I was a slave through my foreparents, and now I'm not ashamed of that. I'm ashamed of the people who were so sinful to make me a slave.' Yes, yes, we must stand up and say, 'I'm black, but I'm black and beautiful.' This, this self-affirmation is the black man's need, made compelling by the white man's crimes against him"*.

In addition to that Contemporary academicians and authors persist in tackling the inquiry of identity and nomenclature. Yaba Blay's book, (1)ne Drop: Shifting the Lens on Race, contributes to the ongoing discourse on race by emphasizing the significance of

capitalization in relation to both acknowledging reality and displaying respect for oneself and others. “*Capitalization is a matter of reality and respect – respect not only for other people but for myself.*” (Specifically, Blay contends that capitalization is crucial in acknowledging the importance of her identity as a Black person. “*My identity is important, and therefore I capitalize it.*”

Similarly, Lori Tharps advocates for the capitalization of "Black" in all instances, arguing that it is a necessary way of according proper recognition and respect to the racial group. . As a collective, we constitute a distinct ethno-cultural group characterized by shared ancestry, lineage, and identity. In “The Case for Black with a Capital B” in 2014 Lori argues, “*Black should always be written with a capital B. We are indeed a people, a race, a tribe. It’s only correct.*” The assertion of correctness is made with regard to the concept that being Black encompasses not only physical characteristics but also the processes of self-identification, self-empowerment, and a shared association with other individuals of African descent, thereby signifying a collective sense of belonging and cultural identity. The act of designating "Black" as a proper noun rather than remaining solely an adjective serves to confer upon individuals of African ancestry a level of humanity, respect, and dignity.

2. Origins of Afro-American Women’s writing

“Afro-American woman remained an all-pervading absence until she was rescued by the literary activity of her black sisters in the latter part of the twentieth century.” (Evans, 1985, p.4)

2.1. The Slavery Era

Some of the most notable examples of African American folk art are the quilts representing scenes from the Bible and historical events produced by Harriet Powers who was born into slavery in Georgia in 1837 and freed after the Civil War; they have been conserved

in the Smithsonian and Boston's Museum of Fine Art. Other remarkable quilts were created by generations of women at Gee's Bend, Alabama, and have been displayed across the country at major institutions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The first examples of literature written by African American women appeared around 1859 as part of a general renaissance of Black literature in the 1850s. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's short stories were among them, as was Harriet E. Wilson's autobiographical novel *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861, was the first autobiography written by a female former slave. The book depicted the sexual exploitation that all too often worsened slavery's oppression of Black women; it also presented an early example of Black female courage in the face of adversity.

2.2. Civil War and Reconstruction

Edmonia Lewis, a sculptor of African American and Native American origin from New York, studied at Oberlin College in the early 1860s. Her work included busts of Robert Gould Shaw (the Boston army colonel killed while leading Black Union Army troops in the Civil War), John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln, as well as sculptures inspired by the Emancipation Proclamation and the narrative poem "The Song of Hiawatha" by Henry Wad.

The Civil War era produced numerous remarkable autobiographical works by African American women, such as Charlotte Forten's diaries, the daughter of a civil rights fighter in Philadelphia. Formerly enslaved Elizabeth Keckley, who became Mary Todd Lincoln's confidante, published *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* in 1868, while Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872), a collection of poetry based on her travels among freed people in the Reconstruction-era South.

2.3. Early 20th Century and the Harlem Renaissance

Following World War I, Black visual artists produced a growing amount of work influenced by African aesthetic traditions. Meta Warrick Fuller, the first Black woman to get a federal commission for her work, was one of the first to do so. Fuller's creations, such as the sculpture "Ethiopia Awakening" (1914), foreshadowed the rebirth of African themes in Harlem Renaissance art. The sculptor Augusta Savage—best known for her busts of Black leaders W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey, as well as a piece for the 1939 New York World's Fair inspired by James Weldon Johnson's poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing"—and the painter Lois Mailou Jones, whose 1938 painting "Les Fetiches" depicted several different types of African-style masks.

Continued racial injustice and widespread accounts of lynchings and other acts of violence during the first two decades of the 20th century generated a body of protest literature, including the short tales, novels, and commentaries of Pauline E. Hopkins, editor of the *Colored American's Magazine*. Naturally, African-American literature flourished during the 1920s, especially in the Harlem district of New York City. Author of the books *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), Nella Larsen was one of the most powerful voices of the Harlem Renaissance. Although Zora Neale Hurston, a New Yorker who attended Barnard and Columbia Universities, produced early short tales during the Harlem Renaissance, her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would go on to become her most well-known work.

2.4. The Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements

African American literature and arts were refocused on social criticism as a result of the Depression and the impending Second World War, as demonstrated by the works of authors like Ann Petry, whose 1946 novel *The Street*, detailed the tribulations of a working-

class Black woman in Harlem. The first African American poet to win the Pulitzer Prize was Gwendolyn Brooks, a native of Chicago whose writing focused on daily life in Black urban communities. The drama "*A Raisin in the Sun*," which debuted on Broadway in 1959, was a huge success both critically and commercially for Chicago native Lorraine Hansberry.

Few Black artists—and even fewer Black women—were welcomed into the mainstream of American art during the 1950s and 1960s. Elizabeth Catlett was a sculptor and printer who spent the majority of the 1940s living abroad in Mexico City. In the 1950s, the House Un-American Activities Committee began to look into her life and work due to her involvement. Sculptures by Catlett include "Homage to My Young Black Sisters" (1968), which is well-known. Alma Woodsey Thomas, an abstract painter, was the first African American woman to have a solo display of her works at the Whitney Museum in 1972, when she was 80 years old.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, writers and artists would actively participate in the civil rights movement. For instance, Gwendolyn Brooks wrote *The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till* in memory of a Black teenager who was killed in Mississippi in 1955; she also incorporated more overt social critique in her book *The Bean Eaters* from 1960. The Black Arts movement, the artistic offshoot of the Black Power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, placed a high priority on poetry as a means of expression. Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Carolyn M. Rodgers, and Nikki Giovanni were significant female poets in this movement, which highlighted the oneness of the African American community. The autobiography of the murdered Black activist Malcolm X, written with Alex Haley and published in 1965, influenced similar memoirs by Black female activists like Anne Moody and Angela Davis, who published her own autobiography in 1974.

2.5. The Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

In more recent years, many African American female artists have proved themselves unafraid of provoking controversy. In the 1970s, the artist Betye Saar played on the theme of “*Aunt Jemima*,” an age-old stereotype of the domestic Black woman in her work. More recently, the California-born artist Kara Walker was the subject of similar controversy over her use of intricate full-size cut-paper silhouettes depicting disturbing scenes of life in the antebellum South.

Walker's 2006 exhibition “*After the Deluge*” was displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Walker has earned widespread acclaim, but has also drawn criticism from other African American artists. Lorna Simpson, a photographer, also explores race and gender stereotypes in her work. In 1990, Simpson became the first African American woman to exhibit at the Venice Biennale and was the subject of a 20-year retrospective at the Whitney in 2007.

The growth of the woman's movement and its impact on African-American women in particular helped fuel a “Black women's literary renaissance” of the 1970s, beginning with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison in 1970. Morrison then published *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* (1977), and her fifth novel, *Beloved* (1987), became the most influential work of African American literature of the late 20th century.

Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall, Octavia E. Butler, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, Audre Lord and Rita Dove, and Ntozake Shange and Suzan-Lori Parks were all African American writers who inspired a generation of younger Black female novelists. Later African American writers include Paule Marshall, Octavia E. Butler, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, Audre Lord and Rita Dove, and Ntozake Shange and Suzan-Lori Parks.

2.1. Representatives of African American Women Writing

Global feminism, black feminism and womanism

The inception of Feminism can be traced back to the historical movements that were dedicated to advocating for the recognition and realization of women's rights. The inception and progression of Feminism commenced in both Europe and America as women became cognizant of their subjugation and endeavored to rectify it. Based on the findings of Barrow and Millburn (1990:128), Feminism can be defined as a principle characterized by a sense of dedication or allegiance towards the pursuit of women's rights and gender equality. The endeavor to attain parity for women in various aspects, commonly referred to as the "women's empowerment movement," has gained significant attention in recent times “a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women” The concept of global Feminism is primarily focused on the advancement of women's rights at a worldwide level. Global Feminism is characterized by the adoption of worldwide concerns and the initiation of movements aimed at dismantling the present dominant system of global patriarchy. Such feminist advocates argue that the structures and mechanisms underpinning this patriarchal system must be dismantled to promote gender equity and justice on a global scale. The Feminist movements have historically and consistently focused on issues that are disproportionately experienced by white women, while neglecting to confront the complex intersections of race and gender which give rise to racialized sexism. Feminist movements frequently fail to address the specific concerns of Black women, who confront significantly elevated rates of police brutality, particularly in the form of sexual violence. Research has presented evidence that demonstrates that the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse is substantially higher among Black women when contrasted with white women. Black women appear to be comparatively less inclined to report incidences of violence perpetrated by their partners than their white counterparts. As a result, womanism and black Feminism arose with

a focus on the concerns specific to women of color. Black feminism is a socio-political framework that prioritizes the lived experiences of African American women. This framework acknowledges the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination, including but not limited to racism, sexism, and classism, within the larger societal structure. Furthermore, Black Feminism places emphasis on the recognition of other social identities and their impact on the lived experiences of African American women in order to create a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. Black feminism underscores and actively addresses the multifaceted facets of inequities pertaining to race and gender

“We are a collective of black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As black women we see black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face “

While feminism aimed at liberating all women from sexism, it overlooked the struggle of Black women and men of color. The focus was primarily on White, middle-class women in America and Britain, instead of striving towards women's freedom on a global scale as it professed to do. According to Collins (1990:7), Black female intellectuals possess a distinct Feminist awareness, though they have historically been inadequately integrated into White Feminist groups. Hooks (1998:1,844) argues that Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is being criticized for the omission of Black/lower class women by White feminists,

which results in perpetuating racism in their writings. The presence of diverse ethnicity and race often hinders the formation of strong bonds among women. The inadequacies of feminism in addressing the concerns of white, middle-class women spurred the development of Womanism, a modified version that caters specifically to the needs of Black women. The term "Womanist" was first introduced by Alice Walker in her literary piece titled *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983. The concept of Womanism creates a framework for the artistic style of literature authored by Black women. According to Alice Walker (1983: xi-xii) a womanist is defined as:

"A black feminist or feminist of color... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally Universalist... loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless; womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender."

In accordance with the words of Julia Hare, as cited in the writing of Hudson Weems (1998:1, 812),) "Women who are calling themselves Black Feminists need another word to describe what their concern are" Weems asserts that African women turn to Feminism because they feel no available framework addressing their particular needs. Consequently, Julia Hir proposes and defines Africana Womanism (Weems 1994:24) as

"...An ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is for grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, need and desires of African women. It critically addresses the

dynamics of the conflict between mainstream feminist, the black feminist, the African feminist and the Africana womanist”

Womanism recognizes triple oppression of Black women (racial, classist, sexist) and fights against it, distinguishing it from Feminism's focus on sexist oppression. It acknowledges the unique needs of Black women and includes male participation in ending female oppression. Womanism is rooted in Black culture and includes family, community, and motherhood in its ideology. It has spread beyond Black America to women in Africa and other parts of the world.

Despite its global aspirations, Feminism has not succeeded in adequately addressing the needs of women on a global scale. The principles of Feminism often cater to the interests and requirements of white women belonging to the middle class. In response to such circumstances, African American women developed the concept of Womanism to specifically cater to the requirements of Black women in America.

The African American writings

Black literature serves as a means of mending the voids in the historical record, providing insights into the experiences of marginalized individuals and neglected communities while simultaneously reconstructing veracity in contemporary society. The significance of Black literature lies in its ability to broaden the perspective through which Black individuals are perceived in the annals of history. Literary works produced by writers such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs have contributed to the presentation of novel viewpoints on issues pertaining to race and subjugation. They were among the trailblazers of the American slave narrative genre. Black literature offers a firsthand narrative of the systemic oppression, traumatic experiences, and acts of violence endured during the era of American enslavement. Such literature serves as an effective tool in the fight against social inequality, discriminatory

practices, and harmful stereotypes. The significance of narratives authored by individuals of Black descent for cultural portrayal is undeniable. This is most evident in the works of Jamaica Kincaid, Marlon James, and Claude McKay, who serve as embodiments of the multifaceted perspectives present within the Black community. Jamaica Kincaid, a writer of Antiguan American descent, undertakes an analysis of the intricate themes of colonialism, gender, and sexuality in her autobiographical oeuvre. This exploration emphasizes the ramifications of imperialism on the Caribbean community. The genre of Black literature serves as a vehicle for the depiction of the multifaceted experiences of Black individuals through narrative means. The authors of literary works have provided insights into the political and economic obstacles encountered by individuals from immigrant backgrounds and communities of color within Western society. Such pieces of literature belonging to the genre of Black literature, narrate genuine accounts of the experiences, identities, and narratives of the Black populace. These accounts deliberately eschew any preconceived notions, prejudices, or stereotypes commonly associated with these communities. Black literature is inclined towards acknowledging the entirety of the Black experience, beyond the adversities pertaining to racism, rather than exoticizing Black bodies. Nevertheless, the significance of African American literature is rooted in its provision of a source of optimism for individuals of African descent and in its empowering qualities, which instill the bravery necessary to advocate for fundamental human rights and citizenship entitlements in America.

2.2. Features of African American Females' Writing

African American female writers have made significant contributions to literature and culture. These unique writers have not only inspired meaningful discussions about race, gender, and social justice via their literary works, but they have also emerged as strong supports for communities of color. Their literary work provides an important forum for people who have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream publishing industry to

express their distinctive ideas and experiences. We can divide their writings into two major aspects, the sexual and racial aspect.

Black women authors are aware of the challenges of Black women in America, so they develop a deep sympathy with these situations. Their novels have the power and purpose of authenticity, social relevance, and the bravery to unravel myths and eliminate presumptions. This has given their work all the energy and dynamism of serious fiction. Since they dealt with subjects like womanhood and stereotyping the Black women, community, and sexism...

Black women had to challenge the stereotypes that females of their race were defined by, thus in the field of literature, a rising number of African American women authors have taken on the task of exposing and denying the harmful misrepresentations and common views of Black women. They have challenged and destroyed one-dimensional perceptions of Black women by creating, engaging, and multi-dimensional characters that reflect the diverse reality of Black women. This stands in a stark contrast to the exaggerated and limited images seen in media. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, for instance, is an outstanding piece of literature that masterfully weaves together a dramatic tale of Black women who display unwavering strength and determination in overcoming difficulties on their different paths. This extremely emotional tale brilliantly removes stereotypes and misconceptions about women of color being passive and submissive, instead emphasizing their amazing determination and creativity in achieving their very own ambitions and goals. They also emphasized the importance of community and acknowledged the importance of connection and support among people of color, and they commonly symbolize the ties and networks that keep them going. In other words, with their writing, authors also contest typical narratives and viewpoints. They give different perspectives and histories while challenging the status quo. These authors offer counter-narratives that are centered on the

perspectives and experiences of oppressed groups while also exposing the ways in which dominant narratives have been developed to sustain power and privilege. Their writing challenges readers to examine and challenge the narratives we tell ourselves about cultures and history.

These writers used their literature to demonstrate how structural injustices may rip communities apart and generate tensions and through their writings, they motivate readers to form bonds and fight for collective freedom. They embraced the concept of intersectionality in their works_ which refers to how different components of a person's identity, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, interact and shape their experiences. And shed light on the complex and varied ways in which several identities interact, as well as how they contribute to the dehumanization and oppression of certain communities. They also demonstrate the courage and drive of those who face these hardships. Further, the continual struggle to form a definite identity and decide self-worth is a frequent issue in African American female writing, for the reason that numerous Black American women authors delve into the rich and multidimensional character of their identities, examining how race, gender, and class intertwine to generate nuanced experiences and distinct viewpoints. They aim to disentangle the complexity of their existence and better comprehend their role in the world via their writing.

The representation of Black women's distinct and various experiences is a common and crucial focus point in African American female writing. These gifted authors usually create compelling narratives about the hardships and hurdles that black women face on a daily basis in American culture. They address difficult issues such as marital abuse, sexual assault, and prejudice, delivering profound insights into the terrible realities that black women face. This is related to the concept of the double burden. This refers to the additional difficulties that Black women face as a result of the collision of racism and sexism. Black

women face two distinct kinds of prejudice that they must face concurrently. This duality of oppression is deeply woven into their writing, which seeks to shed light on the intricate complexities of their intersectional identities. Toni Morrison, for example, explores the complex experiences that Black women go through in their search for independence and liberation in her novel *Sula*, Morrison shows through the protagonist Sula how the confluence of race and gender adds to the difficulties faced by black women. Sula is cast as the "other" because she deviates from the typical roles that are expected of her in her community, drawing criticism from both the White and Black male gaze. Morrison's story highlights Black women's marginalization and the need to recognize their fights against societal restrictions.

In their writing, African American female writers also emphasize the beauty and complexities of Black femininity. They reject stereotypical images of Black women and instead showcase multidimensional and dynamic portrayals of black women; For Black women not only encounter but also overcome obstacles. They underscore Black women's exceptional endurance and resourcefulness, as well as the need of creating mutual support and empowerment among themselves. These writers' literature honors Black women's perseverance, inventiveness, and fortitude while simultaneously highlighting the obstacles and injustices they endure. Their art is a powerful confirmation of the dignity and importance of Black women. The chore poem '*for colored girls who have pondered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*' by Ntozake Shange is a wonderful celebration of the multiplicity and complexities of black women's lives. The audience hears stories of love, tragedy, and success from seven protagonists, each representing a different hue of the rainbow. The finished sculpture is a testament to black women's strength, beauty, and tenacity.

Eventually, Writings by African American women may also be a source of healing and empowerment. They write about their trauma and oppression experiences, as well as their perseverance and fortitude. Their writing may be a place of healing and catharsis, as well as an inspiration and source of empowerment for other black women.

2.3. Afro-American Female Writers

Toni Morrison (1928 -2019)

Toni Morrison is an essential addition to any list of Black authors. Morrison has received acclaim in modern writing for her strange and disturbing depictions of Black life in America, particularly Black female life. She was born in 1931, died in 2019, and awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Morrison's debut work, *The Bluest Eye* is beautifully tragic tale, published in 1970, portrays a young Black girl who becomes obsessed with white beauty standards and longs for blue eyes of her own.

Her works: *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*

Maya Angelou (1928- 2021)

Maya Angelou is a widely recognized Black female novelist who is best recognized for her seven autobiographical books. She is a poet, a professor, and a civil rights activist. She was a renowned civil rights activist who collaborated with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), her debut autobiography is a disturbing and riveting narrative of her first seventeen years. This novel is responsible for Angelou's widespread and long-lasting fame. She talks about the problems of her shattered family and home, racism in America, and the trauma of abuse in an intensely intimate and emotional manner.

Her works: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Gather Together in My Name*, *Letter to My Daughter*...

Alice Walker (1944- Present)

Alice Walker is a novelist, writer, and social activist from the United States. Her most renowned work is *The Color Purple* (1982), her third novel, which earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1983, making her the first Black woman to do so. Alice Walker was raised in a sharecropping family in southern Georgia, amid segregation and discrimination. After going blind in one eye by accident and turning to writing as a creative outlet for her sorrows, she began writing poetry, short stories, and novels at a young age. Walker is well-known for her writing on cultural and social revolution, female empowerment, and racial equality. Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, which won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, made her renowned. It is the harrowing story of many young Black women subjugated to the sexist and racist society of 1930s southern America. Steven Spielberg directed the film adaptation in 1985. (Which featured Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg).

Her works; *The Color Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar*, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*...

Bell Hooks (1952- Present)

Bell Hooks is a feminist activist who campaigns for radical change. She is a scholar, social activist, author of more than 30 books, and lecturer on problems of race, class, and gender. Bell hooks, born Gloria Jean Watkins, writes under a pen name to be more anonymous and relatable, as well as to memorialize her beloved great-grandmother. Her work, *Ain't I a Woman* (1981), is a critical reflection on Feminism and social revolution that ranks high among the work of Black female authors. She analyzes how racist and sexist attitudes instilled in America during enslavement continue to impact Black women now.

Her works: *Ain't I a woman*, *Feminism Is For Everybody*, *All About Love*...

Zora Neale Hurston (1891- 1960)

Zora Neale Hurston, an active and assertive woman, is at the top of the list of Black female authors because of her long-lasting effect on the Harlem Renaissance and following writers. Her celebrated literature investigated and supported Black mythology and culture, but she did not achieve full recognition for her works until much later in her career. She was buried in an unmarked cemetery, and it was located and marked by Alice. *Her Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is featured on the list of notable works published by Black female writers because of its effect on women and African-American literature. The explicitness with which Hurston recounts the pain that the female heroine, Janie, suffers in her search for identification caused it to be banned at one time.

Her works: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Barracoon: The Story Of The Last 'Black Cargo'*, *Hitting A Straight Lick With A Crooked Stick*

3. Identity and Black Identity Construction

3.1. Definition of Identity

According to Oxford's dictionary, identity can be defined as:

1. A phenomenological sense of oneself as a separate individual being with a distinctive personality and a 'true self' persisting over time; a self-image.
2. (Philosophy) The problem of whether 'the same person' can exist over time.
3. The social particulars of an identifiable individual.

Identity can be defined as a person's sense of self, which is formed by their unique qualities, connections, and social roles. Furthermore, identity has continuity, as one perceives themselves to be the same person over time despite significant changes in their surroundings.

The roots of identity are established throughout a person's childhood, when their caretakers have the most effect. However, as people progress from childhood to adolescence,

they begin to wonder who they are and where they fit in society. As a result, teenagers set out to uncover their notions of self by experimentation with various roles and behaviors (Erikson, 1956). Adults continue to review their identities throughout their lifetimes, although the changes are typically minor. According to Erik Erikson, a prominent psychologist, this considerable identity development throughout adolescence is crucial for creating a stable self-concept and developing a life path (Erikson, 1956).

Erik Erikson proposed a theory of development based on multiple phases of life. He also came up with the term "ego identity," which he defined as an ongoing sense of one's identity. The ego identity assists in combining all of one's identities—including the sexual self, the parent self, and the career self—into a single, cohesive totality so that, in the event of a crisis, there will still be a sense of self.

The mind, according to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, is formed of the id, which is driven by instinct and desire, the superego, which is motivated by morals and values, and the ego, which moderates the two and creates one's identity. Ego functioning is influenced by many characteristics, such as insight, agency, empathy, and purpose.

3.2. Types of identity

Identity has a verity of types, some of them are:

Gender Identity: indicates which gender group a person belongs to, such as masculine, feminine or non-binary

Sexual orientation is an identity trait that indicates the sexual preference of an individual, such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, etc.

Racial identity: refers to a person's sense of racial belonging, such as Asian-American, white, etc. This identifying attribute continues throughout a person's life.

Ethnic identity: indicates a person's affiliation with a specific ethnic group, such as Japanese, Malaysian, etc.

Geographical identity is the trait of a person that reveals their geographical belonging. A resident of the United States, for instance, might identify as a Midwesterner, Southerner, New Yorker, Texan, etc.

Family identity: includes all the roles that a person plays in their family. Even though a person may perform multiple roles at once (such as daughter, sister, granddaughter, or cousin), they typically have a primary role, such as daughter. However, as new roles are added to a person's repertoire (such as wife, mother, aunt, mother-in-law, grandmother, etc.), these roles—and subsequently a person's primary family identity—can change over time.

Body identity: stems from a person's body shape and size. Although some traits remain constant over time (i.e., height), others may fluctuate (i.e., weight, body shape, etc.)

Generational identity is also referred to as age identity. It reflects a person's affiliation with an age group, such as child, adolescent, elderly, among others.

Religious identity of a person reflects their spiritual belief system. People may be born to families that practice a specific religion. Yet, sometimes individuals adopt a different religious identity as they get older or become more or less religious.

Class identity of an individual reflects the social stratum they belong to, such as middle-class, upper-middle-class, etc. A person may not notice their class identity until they interact with someone from another social class.

Educational identity: depends on the level of education a person has or the types of schools they have attended. Examples include ivy-league educated, high-school drop-out, private school student, public school graduate, among others.

Career identity forms when a person selects a career path and may evolve with the changes to the person's job titles and responsibilities. Some examples are doctor, scientist, teacher, superintendent, CEO, artist, miner, etc.

Cultural identity: Culture is the standard set of values and practices that all members of a group. A large part of our identities is tied to a community with a common culture. Therefore, our cultural identities contain a range of identifying qualities, such as ethnic, racial, religious, generational, and regional identities. Members of an ethnic community may, for example, have unique traditions that are unique to them. People who follow the same religion may share similar ideals, similarly. In addition, people from the same area could share a regional accent and a similar history, which both influence culture and, by extension, a person's sense of self. People generally value belonging to a group since they are social beings by nature. Fitting in and feeling a sense of belonging to the group we are a part of are both influenced by our cultural identities. Additionally, it influences our worldview and understanding, which may differ from that of people from other cultures. As an illustration, what is regarded as acceptable or nice in one culture may be viewed as unfriendly or disrespectful in another. When people from various cultures think that their way of doing something is the best way since each culture has its own norms and standards, conflicts may arise. In recent years, political identities have added to the list of areas where we observe this tendency.

Political identity: Politics is the collective decision-making regarding the governance of a group of people. In a democracy-based political system, individuals vote for the candidates

they support in regularly-held elections. However, how we vote in elections can reveal a lot about us, our values, and our priorities. The political identity of an individual refers to their political inclinations and affiliations, and can influence their attitudes, beliefs, and decisions beyond the voting booth. This carryover effect of political identity has been associated with the politicization of previously neutral issues, such as school curricula and wearing face masks, and social distancing during a respiratory pandemic.

3.3. Identity and Identity Construction

There are countless of theories on the identity and how it is developed. The self, according to the Scottish philosopher David Hume, is nothing more than a bundle or collection of different experiences that follow each other extremely quickly and are in constant flux and movement (Hume, 1739). To be more specific, he believed our identity was a combination of our material and non-material attributes, including our ideas, beliefs, values, and memories, as well as our body and all of our material belongings. All of these things contribute to our uniqueness and shape our identities. However, as we grow and develop, so does our bundle. According to Hume, new traits replace old ones; hence our identity is continually changing and never constant.

Social Constructionism is the underlying philosophical view that believes our meanings about the world are co-created by people rather than being reflections of “objective reality”. This theory significantly changes the perception and understanding of the identity, as a person is a project of the society he or she lives in. Individuals grow up to fulfill their gender, culture, ethnicity, and other types of roles, and their thoughts, goals, values, and dreams are the result of social exposure. This theory significantly changes the perception and understanding of the identity, as a person is a project of the society he or she lives in.

On the other hand, Freud's Ego theory is far from explicit. It is being created from both a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic standpoint, with a focus on perception and consciousness (Pcpt.Cs) and the goal of survival in mind. It has some autonomy since it must meet the demands of the Id, the Super-Ego, and external reality. As the seat of protective mechanisms and signal anxiety, the Ego dynamically expresses the defensive side of the neurotic conflict. Economically, the Ego must handle the function of synthesis. In his early theories, the internal separation is already central, and there is no black-and-white division, and the split is within the Ego itself.

So we meet three aspects of human identity here, for the reason that Psychoanalytic theory argues that the Ego is made up of representations that contain an internal divide generated by a protective procedure implemented by the Ego itself. This separation is expanded in terms of conscious and unconscious, and Freud attempts to explain this in *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, one of his most important metapsychological investigations. He defines the Ego as an organization of associatively connected representations imbued with endogenous energy, the goal of which is to block fundamental processes in order to avoid the formation of displeasure. Three of Freud's works are fundamental in this regard, with primary themes of narcissism, melancholia, and the Ego.

Freud's theory of the origin of the Ego is implicit in his "Mourning and Melancholia," where he situates the origin of the Ego in identificatory processes. His developmental reasoning suggests that the Ego begins with an original identification and is subsequently enlarged by successive identificatory layers, each one returning to a specific object relation. In "The Ego and the Id," Freud states that these layers are the basis of one's character.

Also Freud's theory that the Ego is built through representations tackles the issue of consciousness. His response is that linking internal processes to language representations

converts them into conscious perceptions. The Ego is the construct that is built on top of the Id and is based on these perceptions through the relationship to language representations and the direct effect of the external world. The Ego's role is to communicate external requirements to the Id, while the Id is the driving source.

The three approaches to identity theory state that identity is a construct that emerges in connection to the other. Sigmund Freud stresses the development of drives in children, whereas Lacanian and psychoanalytic attachment theories highlight the active involvement of the other in the formation of identity experience. According to Fonagy and his colleagues, mirroring can be both enough and insufficient, resulting in either adequate or foreign self-states.

The most important details in this text are the cases of famous feral children, such as Anna, a little girl who spent almost six years of her life locked in a small room. After a year of extreme care and observation, she started walking and talking like a two-year-old, and passed away at the age of nine. These cases show that those who had no previous exposure to society, had no sense of identity and were reduced to animals with no sense of self or distinguishing intellect, were reduced to animals with no sense of self or distinguishing intellect. These cases show that those who had no previous exposure to society, had no sense of identity and were reduced to animals with no sense of self or distinguishing intellect, were reduced to animals with no sense of self or distinguishing intellect. Personal identity has reviewed three theories of identity: the body theory, the mind theory, and the soul theory. Hume's theory states that identity is an ever-changing bundle of material and non-material properties, and that it is created by society. Berkley's theory answers the question of what will remain after one dies: the memories of the person. We possess a set of characteristics and features that create us as individuals, but we cannot have an identity without society. The

article concludes that we are individuals with our own identity, but at the same time, we are part of the greater power.

3.4. The Development of Identity

Erikson proposed that one's identity evolves over the course of a lifetime, which he divided into eight phases of psychosocial development. He believed that different stages of life nurture the development of one's individuality. He proposed that identity has both dysfunctional and adaptive responses to the crisis that occurs after a stage of psychological development. This copying results in the creation of some identity components. Erikson's eight phases of psychological development are likewise followed by identity development.

The first stage is Trust vs. Mistrust, This stage sets a base for the formation of an individual's identity. Even when threatened, it contributes to the fundamental virtue of optimism and a sense of trust and security. When resolved maladaptively and marked by a lack of affection and inconsistency, however, it leads to skepticism, unpredictability, high expectations, mistrust, and anxiety in a newborn while interacting with others.

Second, Autonomy vs. Shame, when dealt with adaptively, this leads to the development of willpower and courage. Maladaptive resolution, on the other hand, causes low self-esteem and mistrust in one's ability.

Next, Initiative vs. Guilt, This stage develops the purpose and initiative that become a part of one's identity and, when not resolved adaptively, causes restricted creativity and engagement.

There's also Industry vs. Inferiority, which is characterized by the development of competence inside one's own identity. A person who receives validation and support is more likely to acquire a positive and confident attitude about his or her ability and talents, whereas one who does not will not, and will feel inferior.

The stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion For the formation of the fundamental ego identity, that phase is the most crucial. Another name for this phase is "identity crisis." When it is resolved, it produces a unified identity characterized by assurance, a solid self-concept, and role clarity.

Intimacy vs. Isolation, Association with social groups like families, friends, love partners, and organizations results from this stage. Such associations result in the construction of an identity marked by the virtue of love when they are replete with acceptance, understanding, commitment, and accommodation. Without intimacy, a person may feel alone, isolated, and unhappy.

Generativity vs. Stagnation, This phase of a secure existence includes a well-established family, employment, network of friends, and social environment. It is distinguished by the requirement to be generative, opportunity-seeking, and changing. Inability to generate results in stagnation, boredom, and a sense of being unproductive.

And finally Ego Integrity vs. Despair, This final stage is defined by the battle between guilt and fulfillment. When one considers their life to be fruitful, satisfying, and rewarding, they gain ego integrity. Due to a perceived incapacity to handle life's accomplishments and failures, a lack of such ego integrity causes unhappiness, sorrow, and frustration.

3.5. Factors Affecting Identity Development

Erikson proposed three major factors that influence an individual's identity development.

Genetic

These traits are passed down from one's parents and ancestors. Erikson stated that genetics merely serve as a foundation or propensity for other variables to use in determining whether a particular feature of an individual's ego identity is present.

Environmental

The influences on one's perceptions, beliefs, learning, and perceptions of various events include those from one's family, society, and other personal experiences. As one advances to later phases of psychosocial development, these factors play a larger impact.

Contemporary factors

Erickson intriguingly added that the contemporary crisis in historical development has a significant impact on the individual's life crisis and may vary depending on place and time. For instance, a youth's dilemma during India's freedom movement might have been more national in nature than a youth's issue today.

Eventually, Identity is an important part of one's being and has been conceptualized over time by many academicians. They gave great insight into the concept of identity and how it develops over a lifespan.

3.3. Black Female Identity

The matter of skin color and hair texture has garnered much debate within the context of the identification of Black females. Despite the extensive and enduring prevalence of colorism within the United States, there exists a notable paucity of knowledge regarding the manner in which messages pertaining to beauty, skin color, and hair interplay with socialization messages concerning race. The notion of colorism is a pervasive and ubiquitous global ideology that deprecates individuals of darker skin pigmentation and tightly coiled hair, both of which are unmistakable physical characteristics that are commonly associated with African heritage. Recent research has indicated that individuals with lighter skin pigmentation are commonly bestowed with advantageous treatment across various domains of life, encompassing education, housing, courtship and marriage, economics, and health. Numerous research studies conducted spanning several decades and encompassing various fields of inquiry have provided conclusive evidence that colorism has discernible implications for

African-American females residing in the United States. Based on empirical evidence, it can be inferred that female individuals possessing darker skin pigmentation tend to experience inferior mental and physical well-being, self-perception, and socio-economic status in comparison to those with lighter complexion. Academic sources demonstrate that Black women possessing lighter skin complexions are often perceived to hold a higher social status. Robinson (2011) and Hunter (1998) have posited that the phenomenon of light skin color is a socially constructed status symbol, and a hallmark of aesthetic excellence (p. n).

The present study underscores the role of social capital and beauty as drivers of the skin lightening industry, which has emerged as a multi-billion-dollar global enterprise and an increasingly prevalent skin bleaching trend. The pigmentation of the skin and the texture of hair have a discernible impact on the manner in which Black individuals are perceived by external parties, as well as their own self-perception. The intricate styles of hair in Africa have long been recognized as an emblematic representation of an individual's social standing, political or religious association, age, marital status, and even sexual orientation.

According to Opiah (2014) and Byrd and Solomon (2004), Black women continue to spend a significant amount of time and money on enhancing their hair in order to obtain social acceptance. Natural hair is regarded as unprofessional, ugly, and unfeminine, and it has been linked to unfavorable socio-professional results. According to Tate (1983), when Black women go out for employment, they straighten their hair because if they go in with their hair natural or braided, they are unlikely to receive the job. This issue has historical origins that date back to the 1700s, when black hair was compared to wool and animals.

Black feminist theory, critical media literacy, and critical consciousness provide an outline for criticizing and conceptualizing how Black females are molded and narrated in public discourse and the media. A Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity

considers Black females' intersecting identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Critical media literacy is a screening mechanism for examining a wide range of media venues, as well as a technique for analyzing and rejecting false images, personalities, and caricature representations of Black females.

Historically, black women's bodies have been locations of sexualized marketing and spectacle for the white mentality (Henry et al. 2010). Their bodies signified production and reproduction under slavery, allowing slave owners to grow their property while fulfilling their lust.

Conclusion

Racial prejudices always leave a deep impact in the people it's practiced on and their history. And especially the Black people who have traditionally been persecuted and viewed as inferior by White people, so for that reason, the African Americans attempted to oppose their white counterparts' authority and reclaim theirs. Literature was one of the ways that aided and provided strength and empowerment.

The next chapter will be dealing with the Feminism and Black Feminism in African literature. It starts by the general and historical background of Feminism and its waves, continuously, to today's Feminism and then the latter will be devoted for Black Feminism, its definition, and its historical overview. And including the situation of Black women in the Feminism Movement and the reasons of creating the Black Feminist Movement. Last but not least, we will see some Black female activists in the Feminist Movement and finally we will deal with a focus on the Black Feminist Movement.

Chapter 2: Feminism in Black American Literature

Introduction:

The plight of African-American women is rooted in racial isolation stemming from the historical enslavement of this community. Furthermore, it originates from the unjust treatment of individuals based on their gender. They were subjected to the agonizing experiences of gender bias, inflicted not just by Caucasian males but also by males of their own ethnicity. Black women often prioritize collective Feminism over individual Feminism and place emphasis on cultural rather than political factors. Subsequently, they often prioritize the unique cultural principles pertaining to women within their own ethnicity over those of women as a whole. The questions that have stimulated black feminists to contemplate profoundly and compose about topics and issues relevant to Black women's culture are particularly captivating. This movement gained significant momentum from the backing of prominent authors including Toni Morrison, Claude McKay, Sterling Allen Brown, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, and various others who passionately depicted the experiences and challenges of Black women in their literary works. The emergence of the new African American literature was remarkable due to its foundation on the genuine ins and outs, incessant struggles, and afflictions of black folks living in bondage way back before the civil war. Given that black literature stems from the genuine life experiences and hardships of African Americans, it has an inherent capacity to captivate and resonate with readers.

In this chapter, we will shed light on the general and historical background of the term Feminism. And the next title will be dealing with the Feminism of today. The fourth one will be launched with the concept of Black Feminism, moving to the status of Black women in the Feminist Movements. Furthermore, the following title will focus on the search for Black feminism, neighboring the last element, which is a focus on the black Feminist Movement.

1.1. a general overview

The term Feminism has been derived from the Latin word *femina* which means woman and was first used with regard to the issues of equality and woman's rights movement. The Oxford dictionary defines Feminism as a state of being feminine or womanly. Feminism has many different meanings to different people, Feminism is described by Chaman Nahal in his article *Feminism In English Fiction* as "*a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is a husband or a father, or the community, or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.*"

Feminism is the belief in certain fundamental principles of social, economic, political, and judicial equality. In a society in which women and men have traditionally received unequal treatment, Feminism seems a reasonable and long-overdue corrective to the historical lack of access women continue to experience. Merriam-Webster defines feminism as: (1) The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; and (2) Organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines it as: The belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. And Bell Hooks (2000) defines feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. On the face of it, it would seem that all women, and most men, would identify with the goals of Feminism.

Feminism is one of the globe's oldest ideologies. There is no universal definition for Feminism, but it boiled down to abolishing gender discrimination and achieving gender equality, within this goal, there are several varieties of Feminism including:

Black Feminism: is a philosophy centered on the status of black women in patriarchal, white dominated, capitalist occidental culture, who experience oppression both on

the basis of race and sex. Largely disregarded by the first and second feminist waves, as well as early Black male dominated liberation organization. Black women formed their own space to discuss the particular oppression and injustice they face on a daily basis. The national Black feminist organization NBFO was formed in 1973 to guarantee that mainstream civil right organization demands did not overwhelm their rights as autonomous human beings.

Liberal Feminism: Mainstream Feminism, also known as "Liberal Feminism," focuses on obtaining women's rights and social justice via legal and political reform of current social systems. Liberal feminists in the mainstream are concerned with abortion rights, sexual harassment, affordable childcare, reproductive rights, and domestic abuse.

Marxist and socialist feminism: Marxism has a direct influence on socialist feminists, who contend that capitalism was purposefully constructed to promote patriarchal structures and foster women's subjugation. According to socialist and Marxist Feminism, attaining gender equality would necessitate the demolition of capitalism economic structures that exploit and undervalue women's work.

Radical feminism sees patriarchy and sexism as the primary causes of women's oppression, calling into question the fundamental structure and ideology that has led to women's subordination. It is sometimes referred to as the women's movements, which sprang from civil rights, peace, and other liberation movements at a period when people were challenging many types of oppression and authority. Radical feminists have offered the primary theoretical knowledge that has acted as the inspiration and analysis that has guided women's movements across the world.

1.2. A historical overview:

Feminism can be traced back to the 18th century Enlightenment period, when thinkers including Mary Wollstonecraft started to stand for women's rights and education. However,

Feminism did not emerge as a widespread movement until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with women organizing and mobilizing around causes such as voting rights, reproductive rights, and employment equality.

And Throughout the times, Feminism was split into three major waves.

1.2.1. Waves of Feminism.

The first wave of feminism arose in the late 1800s and early 1900s with the goal of emphasizing the achievement of political and legal rights for women. The achievement of voting rights, which were granted to women in many nations during this time, was one of this movement's great successes.

In addition to fighting for women's ability to vote, early feminists also worked to improve the working circumstances, educational possibilities, and reproductive autonomy of women. They persisted in their pursuit for gender equality despite encountering resistance from people of all genders.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of feminism rose to prominence, placing emphasis on a wide range of social and cultural issues. Esteemed advocates like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem fought for equality in the workplace, reproductive rights, and an end to violence that was perpetuated based purely on gender.

The modern feminist movement developed the idea of intersectionality, which recognizes the various forms of oppression that women may face based on their race, sexual identity, or cultural background. This approach aims to address all women's diverse experiences and prioritize their individual needs over any pre-established norms.

The third wave of feminism began in the 1990s and is still going on today. It focuses on intersectionality, or the idea that various forms of oppression intersect and affect people differently depending on race, class, sexuality, and other factors.

This movement has also emphasized the value of individual choice and agency, and has been linked to concepts such as sex positivity and body positivity.

1.3. Feminism today

Modern Feminism or Feminism of today is the belief in the equality of people of all gender. A set of values aimed at dismantling gender inequality and the structure that uphold it.

According to activists, modern feminism acknowledges the interconnectedness of gender, race and sexuality, similarly to Black and Queer feminist theories that it borrows it. Over the previous 100 years, women liberation (Feminism) has worn a numerous faces. As we saw in the title historical background of Feminism, we have skilled 3 waves, every extraordinary distinct that the wave that got here earlier than it. The women's suffrage movement was the first wave of Feminism, focusing on securing women's voting rights and other fundamental rights. Women identified inequities in their society and resolved to speak up and effect change, resulting in the movement that is still going on today. The new platforms adopted by the movement included equal treatment in the workplace, reproductive rights, and the battle against female objectification, which has remained a distinguishing feature of the feminist movement to this day. However, the emphasis of the second wave shifted from safeguarding women's fundamental rights to striving for their emancipation. Women had won the right to vote, but this was not enough for them, and they began to speak up against other injustices they observed in the world. The success of the women's suffrage movement inspired and encouraged individuals in the

second wave of Feminism. The movement's new platforms included fair employment treatment, reproductive rights, and the fight against female objectification. The continuation of previous conflicts and the establishment of new platforms is a defining aspect of the still-existing feminist movement. The last wave which is the third wave, which began in the 1990s and includes groups such as the #MeToo movement and Black Feminism, places a strong focus on reproductive rights and the acceptance of various identities. According to gradPSYCh magazine who recently spoke with a cross-section of self-proclaimed feminists in psychology about the future of Feminism including Karla Gomez, (an undergraduate French and psychology major at New Mexico State University who attended the Div. 35/APAGS convention meetings.) about the meaning of modern Feminism, she adds *“It's being who you are-being the woman that you are, without fears of judgment or a joke. It's being successful, not in a materialistic way, but in the way you want to be. It's about doing what you want to do in life, fighting for what you want-not waiting for others to give you what you need. There are still obstacles for women in doing that. People are still surprised when I say I'm thinking about getting a psychology PhD, and I think that has to do with me being a 21-year-old woman.”*

1.4. Black feminism

1.4.1. What is black feminism?

Black Feminism focuses on Black women's lived experiences, allowing them to discuss and highlight the various aspects of their identity and how they relate to gender inequality.

Black Feminism examines how the patriarchy, as well as capitalism and racism, oppress Black women. They argue that Black women have been excluded from mainstream feminist movements because of their race, while Black liberation movements have excluded

them because of their gender. As a result, Black feminism is critical to ensuring that Black women's voices are heard.

Many Black feminists believe that Black and minority-ethnic, working-class women face the most discrimination in society. Thus, Black feminism often takes an intersectional analysis, emphasizing the variety of oppressions that Black women suffer (Brewer, 2020).

There are many different types of Black feminists. For example, radical Black feminists advocate not only anti-racism but also anti-capitalism and the abolition of patriarchy. Liberal Black feminists, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on reforms that will promote equality for Black women within current social systems (Brewer, 2020).

One of the key bases of Black Feminism is the concept of intersectionality, which recognizes that people have multiple identities and face different forms of oppression based on the intersections of these identities.

A Black woman, for example, may face prejudice not only due to her color and gender, but also due to her financial status or sexual orientation. Intersectionality recognizes and addresses these multiple forms of oppression, with the goal of developing solutions that include all oppressed groups.

1.4.2. The History of Black Feminism

The origins of Black Feminism can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement of the past. During this time, Black women played a crucial part in organizing and making efforts towards change. However, they often found themselves pushed to the side and dismissed due to their race. Because of this, they came together to create their own groups and movements in order to be heard and represented properly.

Bell hooks, a notable scholar and activist, played a vital role in the development of Black feminist theory. Her book titled *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* sheds light on the fact that mainstream Feminism has traditionally overlooked the experiences and struggles of Black women. For Hooks, genuine liberation entails recognizing and confronting the interlocking oppressions that marginalized groups encounter.

Sojourner Truth

In the 1800s, the early feminist movement was connected to the abolishment of slavery, with speakers such as women's rights advocate and abolitionist Sojourner Truth speaking out on this issue.

In 1851, Truth gave a speech at a women's rights convention in which she challenged both racism and sexism faced by Black women. Her speech was titled '*Ain't I a Woman?*' In which her words vividly contrasted the character of oppression faced by white and Black women.

Truth noted that while white middle-class women have traditionally been treated as delicate, over-emotional, and needing help from men, Black women have been vilified and subjected to racist abuse.

Anna Julia Cooper

In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper established and co-founded several organizations to promote Black civil rights causes. She believed in educating and encouraging Black women's success which would, in turn, improve the African American community.

Cooper also published a book titled *A Voice from the South*, in which she described the importance of the voices of Black women for social change. This book is widely

acknowledged as one of the first expressions of Black Feminism, which led to many giving her the title of ‘the Mother of Black Feminism.’

Ida B. Wells

Ida B. Wells was an activist and journalist who published her own newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee. When three of her friends were murdered in the 1890s for being Black, she turned her paper into a powerful weapon against lynching.

She was forced into exile when racists threatened her life and destroyed her offices. When this happened, she launched an effective crusade against lynching. She traveled to many cities and towns all over the United States, calling for all to oppose the reign of lynch laws.

Her tour abroad encouraged Europeans to organize solidarity campaigns against the lynching of Black people in the United States (Davis, 1981).

Second wave feminism

During the civil rights movement, many Black women experienced intersectional racism within the feminist movement while simultaneously experiencing sexism within the civil rights movement.

In response to the racism and sexism faced by Black women and other women of color in the 1960s came the development of organizations against their oppression.

Black women from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed the Third World Women’s Alliance in 1968. This group helped to create space in anti-racist organizations and leftist racial movements for women’s voices and issues.

In 1973, a group of notable Black feminists formed the *National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO)*, which addressed the double burden of sexism and racism faced by black women. They also emphasized economic survival issues important to Black and working-class women (Brewer, 2020).

In the 1970s, a group of Black feminists formed the Combahee River Collective. This group recognized that the double burden of sexism and racism was integral to the distinction between their movement and white Feminism.

The group's statement linked Black women's liberation to anti-imperialism, dismantling patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism .

Fourth wave Feminism

One of the most famous Black movements of the current wave of Feminism is the Black Lives Matter movement, created around 2013. This movement was developed by three Black community organizers – Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi in protest of anti-Black violence, especially in the form of police brutality.

While this movement does not explicitly apply to only Black feminist issues, it draws on Black feminist understandings of intersectionality and solidarity between all Black lives, regardless of sex, class, age, sexual orientation, immigrant status, religion, or ability.

1.5. Black Women in the Feminist Movement

Throughout history, black women's huge contributions to the feminist movement have been ignored. Regardless, their constant efforts have been visible in the most decisive of moments, from Sojourner Truth's legendary '*Ain't I a Woman?*' talk in the nineteenth century to the current overwhelming effect of the Black Lives Matter movement. Black women have

established themselves as major advocates in the pursuit of racial and gender equality via their persistent dedication to defining social justice.

Black feminists have long criticized traditional feminist theories for their failure to address the experiences of women of color. For example, white feminists often assume that all women share a common experience of oppression, regardless of race or class. Black feminists argue that this approach ignores the unique experiences of Black women, who face racism and sexism simultaneously. They have also challenged the idea that gender is the primary axis of oppression, pointing out that race and class are also important factors.

Pauli Murray was an activist, writer, Episcopal priest, and legal scholar who cofounded the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966. She had romantic relationships with women but did not consider herself a lesbian. Murray wrote and theorized extensively on her experiences of black womanhood, asserting that gender, race, and sexuality could not be separated. Despite the political connections between the women's movement and anti-racist activity, Murray soon became disillusioned with NOW as she saw the organization distance itself from economic and racial justice.

Pauli Murray was the only female student at Howard University Law School and developed the term *Jane Crow* to describe the sexism black women faced. Her legal work connecting race-based and sex-based discrimination led to the inclusion of sex-based discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause. Despite this, Murray's legal and theoretical parallels between racial discrimination and gender discrimination set the stage for feminist thinkers to follow.

Alice Walker used the term "womanist" in 1983 to designate "a Black feminist or a feminist of color." Her concept indicated a more communal and humanitarian interpretation of

feminism that acknowledged queer black women and harmonized with long-standing traditions of Black women's thought and activity. Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* is one of the key womanist literature published during this period. Lorde discusses the interconnected themes of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism in her essays and speeches, while advocating for new approaches that highlight these intersections.

Black women tend to be at a disadvantage due to racism and sexism, yet some Black feminists see their situation as one of possibilities. They say that in the struggle for liberation, those who have been most exposed to various forms of tyranny know best how to demolish them. While late-nineteenth-century Black Feminisms were based on heterosexual Black women's bodies, radical Black feminisms at the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century grew to center on queer and Trans Black women, girls, and gender nonconforming persons.

Black feminists are often seen as an outgrowth of other freedom struggles, but they have never been derivative and do not fit neatly into feminist history. For Black women and other women of color, race and gender are inseparable, and Black feminists resist all movements that ignore this reality. They have developed theoretical frameworks and practices born of their experiences since before Sojourner Truth sold her "shadow," to get "freer and freer and freer." Dr. Treva Lindsey, a Black feminist scholar, argues that a Feminism which does not incorporate different experiences of womanhood cannot achieve full liberation.

*"I rarely talk about feminism in the singular. I talk about feminisms. And, even when I myself refused to identify with feminism, I realized that it was a certain kind of feminism . . . It was a feminism of those women who weren't really concerned with equality for all women..."*Dr.

Angela Davis August 5th, 2019, Oral History Interview, National Museum of African American History and Culture.

1.6. Toward a Black Feminist Movement

“We exist as women, who are black, who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle—because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world.”

Michele Wallace, *“A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood,” Village Voice*, July 28, 1975, 6–7.

A group of Black feminists who have been meeting since 1974, committed to reject racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression. They regard black feminism as the appropriate political movement to oppose the multiple and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color suffer. They committed to establishing integrated analysis and practice based on the assumption that the main oppressive systems are interconnected and that the synthesis of various oppressions determines the conditions of their lives.

Black Feminism is rooted in the life-or-death struggle for survival and independence of Afro-American women, which has been dictated by their membership in two subjected racial and sexual castes. Black women activists have long been conscious of how their sexual identities intersected with their racial identities to make their political fights distinct.

Since the late 1960s, Black feminists have been active in the American women's movement. The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) was founded in 1973. Black feminist politics are clearly linked to Black liberation movements, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Their experience and frustration with these groups, as well as their experience on the fringe of the white male left, compelled us to establish an antiracist and antisexist politics.

Black Feminism is a political realization formed by individual Black women's personal experiences. Before becoming aware of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal authority, and Feminism, Black feminists frequently discuss their experiences of madness. The fact that racial politics and racism are widespread in their lives did not allow them to delve further into their personal experiences and describe the variables that shape their lives and make their oppression unique to them. Black women began to see the similarity of their experiences through consciousness-raising and life-sharing, and from that sharing and developing consciousness, they began to build a politics that will alter their lives and end the oppression. Resulting the Black youth to gain access to educational and employment opportunities, allowing them to combat oppression. This has allowed them to build an antiracist and antisexist stance.

The politics of Black feminists arose from the shared belief that women of their race are inherently valued and that their freedom is an important concern. They are the only ones who care enough about their own independence to work for it, and their politics stem from a healthy love for themselves, our sisters, and the community. The notion of identity politics embodies this focus on their own oppression. They believed that the most meaningful and potentially radical politics emerge directly from their own identity, rather than seeking to end the oppression of others. In the case of Black women, this is a particularly revolting, dangerous, frightening, and so revolutionary thought since it is clear from all previous political revolutions that no one is more deserving of freedom than a black person. They opposed pedestals, queenship, and walking ten steps behind. It is sufficient to be regarded as a human, although a level-headed human.

Black women believed that sexual politics under patriarchy are equally prevalent as economic and racial politics. They frequently find it difficult to separate racism from class and sex oppression, as they are often experienced continuously. They stand in unity with

progressive black males and against the fractionalization demanded by White women. They fight against racism and sexism with Black males. They also realized that the disappearance of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy is required for the liberation of all oppressed peoples. Socialists believe that labor should be structured for the communal benefit of those who generate it, and that material resources should be divided fairly. Black women are underrepresented in the work force, and Marx's theory must be expanded to account for their particular economic condition.

Essentially, one of the primary focal points is the expansion of the feminist ideology, which posits that the personal domain is intrinsically intertwined with the political sphere. Furthermore, the movement also addresses the dismissal of the effectiveness and aptitude of other sexual orientations separatism as a viable political approach or methodology. A significant amount of effort has been expended by women of African descent towards comprehending the cultural and experiential aspects of their subjugation. The ideology of queer separatism has been eschewed as it suffers from a flawed framework, which excludes a vast number of individuals, primarily people of color, specifically men, women, and children who belong to the African diaspora. There exists a considerable amount of censure and antipathy directed towards the socially constructed roles that men are expected to fulfill within our society. However, it is important to note that this does not entail a misguided belief that an individual's inherent masculinity is the determining factor in shaping their identity. An essential inquiry for consideration concerns the appropriateness of lesbian separatism as a viable and progressive political analysis and strategy, given its complete disregard for any institutional sources of women's subjugation beyond their sexuality, while failing to acknowledge the influence of class and race factors.

Although Black feminist organizations have gone through victory and failure, happiness and sorrow, they have struggled to form organizations around Black feminist

problems and have made an effort to figure out why. Merely they went through a lot of hardships such as engaging in political activities which was a major source of difficulty because individuals without racial, sexual, heterosexual, or socioeconomic advantages have minimal access to resources and power, thus making it challenging to navigate complexities inherent in such events.

In addition to the underestimated psychological burden experienced by Black women and the resultant challenges in achieving political awareness and engaging in political activism necessitate further scholarly exploration. The current social norms are characterized by a pervasive devaluation of the psychological well-being of Black women, exhibiting manifestations of both racism and sexism. Despite being afflicted by personal hardships, Black feminists attempted to enhance their own state and bettering the situation of Black women as a whole. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since their freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

Also, Black people viewed feminism as dangerous because it challenged the notion that gender should determine power dynamics, as evidenced by a Black Nationalist booklet from the 1970s.

“We understand that it is and has been traditional that the man is the head of the house. He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser. [...] After all, it is only reasonable that the man be the head of the house because he is able to defend and protect the development of his home. [...] Women cannot do the same things as men—they are made by nature to function differently. Equality of men and women is something that cannot happen even in the abstract world. [...]. The value of men and women

can be seen as in the value of gold and silver—they are not equal but both have great value. We must realize that men and women are a complement to each other because there is no house/family without a man and his wife. Both are essential to the development of any life.”

(Mwanamke Mwananchi 4/5)

Beside The majority of Black women do not have the material means to disrupt the sexual and financial structures that provide some level of stability in their lives. Many Black women are well aware of both sexism and racism, but many choose not to fight against both at the same time because of the restrictions that permeate their daily lives. And Black men's reaction to Feminism has been negative because they worry that they may organize around their own demands and be forced to shift their sexist interactions and treatment of black women. Black Feminism being accused of dividing the black struggle is a major impediment to the development of an independent Black women's movement.

Due to racial and political conflicts, a group of Black feminists in 1976 went through several months of inaction and internal strife. They decided to form a study group at the start of 1976 and spoke about creating a Black feminist newspaper. They went on a retreat in the late spring, using the opportunity to talk politics and resolve individual conflicts. To show other black women the reality of their politics, they are currently planning to compile a collection of Black feminist writing. Through writing and disseminating their work, they feel it is imperative to show other black women the realities of their politics.

When it comes to their issues and activities, the Black feminism activist studied and worked on a wide range of topics that are especially important to Black women. Working on battles where oppression is simultaneously based on race, sex, and class is something they were particularly devoted to. Among their plans starting a rape crisis center in black areas, picket a hospital that is reducing health care, or get active in workplace organizing at a plant

that hires women from the Third World. Organizing in response to welfare or daycare issues could also be a priority. The amount of labor that was done and the numerous problems that it raised demonstrate how widespread their suppression is. They also focused on issues such as sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape, and health care. They had done workshops and educational on black feminism for college campuses, women's conferences, and high school women.

Racism in the white Women's movement is one issue that Black feminists are very concerned about and have started to publicly address. They continuously and brutally reminded of how little White women have done to comprehend and address their racism, which calls for them to have a deeper understanding of race, color, and Black history and culture, among other things. White women must struggle to end racism in the White women's movement, so Black feminists will continue to raise this issue and call for accountability.

In their political practice, Black women activists believed that the end always justifies the means. Many terrible and harmful crimes have been committed in the name of pursuing "correct" political objectives. As feminists, they did not want to wreck people's lives in the name of politics. They believed in communal action and a nonhierarchical power distribution inside their own organization, as well as in their vision of a revolutionary society. As an essential component of their practice, they are dedicated to a continuous evaluation of their politics as they evolve through critique and self-criticism. As Black women and feminists, they have a very specific revolutionary duty to complete, and a lifetime of work and fight ahead of them.

1.7. Black Female Activists in the Feminist Movement

Sojourner Truth

“If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there.”

Born a slave, Truth escaped to freedom in 1826 and spent her life advocating for equal rights for all. Her famous “*Ain’t I a Woman?*” speech addressed the lack of recognition towards Black women in the promotion of equal rights.

Anna Julia Cooper

“We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritism, whether of sex, race, country, or condition.”

Cooper was the fourth African American woman to receive a doctoral degree, and was a strong advocate for the voice of Black women. She founded the Colored Women’s League of Washington in 1892, and assisted in opening the first YWCA chapter for Black women. Her book, *A Voice from the South* is a foundational text of Black Feminism.

Ida B. Wells

“The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”

Wells was a famous investigative journalist and Civil Rights leader. A founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Wells spent her life uncovering injustices and fighting prejudice. As a civil rights activist, she documented the horrific lynchings in the United States and frequently spoke about the intersection of race and gender.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

“So close is the bond between man and woman that you cannot raise one without lifting the other. The world cannot move ahead without woman’s sharing in the movement.”

Watkins Harper was a poet, writer, abolitionist, and activist. Born free, she helped slaves with the Underground Railroad and wrote anti-slavery pieces for newspapers. She later was a co-founder and vice president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and served as director of the American Association of Colored Youth.

Mary Church Terrell

“A white woman has only one handicap to overcome – that of sex. I have two – both sex and race... Colored men have only one – that of race. Colored women are the only group in this country who have two heavy handicaps to overcome, that of race as well as that of sex.”

Terrell was the first African American woman to earn a college degree, a founder of the NAACP, and the first president of the NACW. She also co-founded the National Association of University Women. An activist all her life, Terrell spoke about the difficulties of being a woman and being black, and how those issues intersected.

Shirley Chisholm

“I want history to remember me... as a black woman who lived in the 20th century and who dared to be herself. I want to be remembered as a catalyst for change in America.”

Chisholm was the first African American woman in Congress and the first African American woman to seek a major party’s nomination for president. As a congresswoman, Chisholm co-founded the National Women’s Political Caucus and introduced over 50 pieces of legislation. After leaving Congress, she founded the National Political Congress of Black Women.

Pauli Murray

“True community is based upon equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. It affirms the richness of individual diversity as well as the common human ties that bind us together.”

Murray was a civil rights and women’s rights activist, and the first African-American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest. Murray was also a co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and sat on President Kennedy’s Presidential Commission on the Status of Women.

Dorothy Height

“A [black] woman has the same kind of problems as other women, but she can’t take the same things for granted.”

Height was a civil rights and women’s right activist who served as President of the National Council of Negro Women for forty years. She frequently offered advice to Eleanor Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson, and helped organize the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Rosa Parks

“Racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome.”

Parks, “the first lady of civil rights,” was an activist famous for her role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Later in life, she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development for Detroit Youth.

Audre Lorde

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

Lorde was a civil rights and women’s rights activist, as well as a writer and poet. Her poems mainly pertain to Feminism, her identity as a Black lesbian woman, and intersectionality.

1.8. A Focus on the Black Feminist Movement

Black feminist thought refers to a compilation of concepts, literature, and expression that communicates a unique viewpoint that champions the interests of African American women who belong to the global black community. Black feminist thought characterizes Black women as a distinct category that occupies a specific position in American social interactions, where complex factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation contribute to the formation of Black women's personal and collective awareness, identities, and behaviors (Collins 1991, 1998). Black feminist thought views identities as intricately linked, constantly evolving, interdependent, and multi-faceted "positions" that are shaped by their historical context. This idea is rooted in standpoint theory and has been expounded upon by scholars such as hooks, Collins, Smith, and James & Sharply-Whiting. The foundation of black feminist thought is rooted in the past experiences of black women, particularly with enslavement, segregation, Civil Rights and Black Power movements, anti-lynching crusades, patriarchy, sexual politics, and capitalism.

Black women undertook various movements and initiatives to substantiate that the scope of feminism transcends the confines of white women and that their ideas and convictions can be materialized in practice. Here are the important organizations:

NATIONAL BLACK FEMINIST ORGANIZATION NBFO In May and August of 1973, African-American women convened at the offices of NOW in New York, by Margaret Sloan-

Hunter and others resulting in the creation of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). The NBFO made a commitment to tackle the challenges of bias that African-American women encounter as a result of both their racial and gender identities. In their Statement of Purpose from 1973, the group stated that it was important for them as black women to define their own self-image, rather than conforming to societal expectations set by either white men or black men. They also emphasized the need to avoid being put on a pedestal, as even white women were rejecting this treatment. The NBFO was dedicated to challenging negative portrayals of African-American women in the media, raising awareness about sexual abuse within the community, and advocating for better wages and greater political representation for African-American women. Numerous major regions in the United States were grouped into chapters. The national organization ceased to exist in 1977 despite its presence in certain cities such as Chicago and Detroit.

Black Panther party

The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change The BPP, also known as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was established in Oakland, California in October 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale crossed paths while studying at Merritt College in Oakland. The organization was groundbreaking in their philosophy of promoting Black Nationalism, socialism, and the use of self-defense as a means of protection against the excessive force of law enforcement. As a faction of the Black Power movement, it veered away from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's mission of integration and nonviolent protesting under the leadership of Dr. One could rephrase this statement as follows: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The BPP adopted its name from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, an independent Black political party in Alabama, which had recently utilized the Black Panther as its symbol.

The National Association of Colored Women

The organization titled "National Association of Colored Women's Clubs" can be rephrased intelligently. The NACW came into existence in July 1896 by joining two organizations, the National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women. The combination facilitated the NACWC to operate as a nationwide governing body overseeing Black women's associations on both a local and regional level.

At the conference, held in 1896 in Washington, DC, Mrs. Ruffin is quoted as stating *“The reasons why we should confer are so apparent...We need to talk over not only those things which are of vital importance to us as women, but also the things that are of special interest to us as colored women, the training of our children, openings for our boys and girls, how they can be prepared for occupations and occupations may be found or opened to them, what we especially can do in the moral education of the race with which we are identified, our mental elevations and physical development, the home training it is necessary to prepare them to meet [the] peculiar [special; difficult] conditions in which they find themselves, how to make the most of our own...opportunities, these are some of our questions to be discussed.”*

Mrs. Ruffin's explanation is the establishment of the NACWC Mission. The persevering soul of the articulation has encouraged and motivated clubwomen, who have for about 120 a long time, given their vitality, time, ability and their funds to serving their communities.

Our predecessors had formed groups aimed at improving themselves and doing charitable work long before the establishment of our organization. Harriet Tubman and Helen Appo Cook, who were both founders of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), along with prominent women such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and

Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, led these organizations. The era of Ida B. was also in progress at that moment. Wells Barnett authored the extensive Red Record, which chronicled instances of lynching among African American individuals.

The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs comprises women of color who are dedicated to the amelioration of women, children, families, the home, and the community through various means such as service, community education, scholarship assistance, and the facilitation of racial harmony among individuals. These efforts are aimed at enhancing the ability of those served to assume their rightful roles in society as citizens, community leaders, parents, and family members.

Black Feminist Future

Is a centralized location for politics that highlights the potential in uniting the social and political influence of Black females, young girls, and gender diverse individuals with the goal of achieving freedom. Its approach involves empowering and supporting strong Black feminists to become leaders, strengthening organizations and movements that share their values, and changing social attitudes and behaviors. The movement was initiated by Paris Hatcher.

Black Women Radicals

Is a Black feminist advocacy organization dedicated to uplifting Black women and gender expansive people's radical political activism. Rooted in intersectional and transnational feminisms and Womanism, we are committed to empowering Black women and gender expansive activists and centering their political, intellectual, and cultural contributions to the field of Black Politics across time, space, and place in Africa and in the African Diaspora.

On the other hand, there are numerous hashtags that promote black feminism, like #blackgirlmagic and Black Girl Magic were created to celebrate the accomplishments and general amazingness of black women. It is used as an expression of positivity and empowerment. Also the #SayHerName movement, initiated in December 2014 by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS), aims to bring into focus the names and experiences of Black women and girls who have been subjected to racist police brutality but have gone unnoticed. This movement also extends support to their families in need.

Conclusion

The core principle of the feminist movement should center on emphasizing the significance of making an individual choice to imbue Feminism with personal significance. Acknowledging the rights of others to engage in the same activity is imperative. Despite the robust presence and influence of the feminist movement, it is lamentable to note that certain regions across the globe, akin to the African American race, persist in undergoing gender-based discrimination and exploitation. Hence, it is imperative to engage in the practice of intersectional Feminism.

Chapter Three: Internalized Racism and Self-Effacement in *The Bluest Eye*

Introduction:

Toni Morrison made her literary debut with her novel "*The Bluest Eye*", her first novel, which came out in 1970, taking place in Morrison's birthplace of Lorain, Ohio. The novel narrates a tale of Pecola Breedlove, an eleven years old African American girl who grew up following the great depression. The girl strongly believes that she is ugly and unattractive because she equates beauty and social acceptance with whiteness, so she yearns to have lighter skin and bluest eyes. Pecola experiences psychological and physical abuse from both her familial and societal circles, ultimately succumbs to the distressing effects of this maltreatment and manifests symptoms of mental derangement.

The novel delves into contentious subjects beyond racism, such as the mistreatment and suppression of African Americans in the United States, including sexual harassment. *The Bluest Eye*, a literary masterpiece, is regarded as a crucial depiction of the African American encounter in the aftermath of the Great Depression, and has earned the status of an enduring American classic.

As it was written above, this present chapter will be presenting a psychoanalytical reading for the character of Pecola, based on our own understanding and perceiving of the novel's messages and symbols. This chapter will be divided into three sections, each section discuss and idea. The first section will be dealing with Pecola Breedlove's desire for blue eyes and white identity. The second section is about the effects of internalized racism on Pecola's self-esteem. The last section is about Pecola's self-effacement and rejection of her identity.

1. Pecola Breedlove's desire for blue eyes and white identity

1.1. Pecola equates beauty and love with physical appearance:

One notable representation of white supremacist is the utilization of whiteness as the paradigm of attractiveness. According to the perspective that deems whiteness as superior; individuals who possess this characteristic are inherently considered more aesthetically appealing. Consequently, those of differing racial backgrounds whose physical features do not align with this standard are often viewed as unattractive.

Morrison posits the notion that physical beauty represents a manifestation of racial reification, and that this perception has a significant impact on the social and personal maturation of the Black characters featured in the novel. Within *The Bluest Eye*, the Black characters are indoctrinated to regard whiteness as the ultimate standard of attractiveness.

In the novel, the implicit notion of white superiority and its corresponding whiteness is reinforced through various imageries, such as the presentation of a white baby doll to Claudia, the glorification of Shirley Temple, the prevailing belief that the fair-skinned Maureen is more visually appealing compared to her black counterparts, and the idolization of white physical aesthetics in mainstream cinema.

The protagonists were persistently exposed to depictions of white racial identity in a wide range of mediums, including but not limited to motion pictures, literature, confectionery items, periodicals, playthings, and promotional campaigns.

“Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspaper, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (page 18)

Many adult females and young girls harbor feelings of animosity towards the darkness of their bodily pigmentation. Pecola was primarily afflicted by the prevailing white beauty

norms. The protagonist posited that the acquisition of blue ocular features would serve to supplant negative treatment with kindness and esteem.

“It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and flat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.”(Page 44.)

In this scene, Pecola contemplated on how her peers at school mocked her physical attributes, and thought that possessing blue eyes would transform her into a more attractive and distinct individual. Moreover, her agony would vanish if she possessed physical attractiveness. In another sections of the book, she expressed that her eyes served as a gateway to the outside world, and if they were more aesthetically pleasing, people may react to her in a more favorable manner.

“He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluishgreen. The light made them shine like blue ice. Pecola rubbed the cat’s head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her.”(page88)

When the boy lured Pecola into his home by promising to show her some kittens, Junior threw the family cat, which had black fur and blue eyes, in her face. Pecola tried to leave, but Junior stood on the other side of the door and shut her in. The cat began to rub against Pecola, and its friendliness distracted her from crying. When she looked at the cat's features, she confirmed the idea that having blue eyes will make her look pretty and lovable.

Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, draws a clever comparison by using the symbolic representation of Mary Jane - a candy brand - to mirror Pecola's longing for beauty. An example can be seen in the characterization of Mary Jane, who was depicted with a cheerful countenance and tousled blonde locks, with her clear blue eyes emanating a sense of tranquil ease. The tone of "a world of clean comfort" exuded a sense of yearning and even jealousy, which effectively conveyed Pecola's deep dissatisfaction with herself to the reader. The work exemplifies her conviction that life would be less challenging if she was deemed attractive. Immediate to this segment, Pecola consumed the candy and ponders, "In some way, to consume the candy was akin to ingesting the eyes, ingesting Mary Jane." Adore the plant known as Mary Jane. "Emulate the traits of Mary Jane". Pecola's increasing fixation on achieving *white beauty* was evolving into an obsession, as she spared no effort to attain the perception of being beautiful.

"Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair ingentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to Eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane."(page48)

The correlation between whiteness and beauty extends the notion of physical attractiveness to encompass broader concepts of an individual's significance and merit. Pecola maintained a strong conviction that her physical attractiveness was the chief determinant of her societal, communal, and familial worth. Moreover, she thought that if she had beautiful body, the world will love her and accept her. *"If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too."* (Page44)

Pecola Breedlove, an African American girl, was influenced by white culture to believe that having blue eyes and white skin would make her beautiful and appealing. Consequently, this became a significant principle for her.

1.2. Pecola's obsession with white children:

In the beginning of the novel, the author mentioned a preface from children's reading assignment for school, called Dick and Jane reader. For many years, this instructional tool for building reading abilities has been utilized to teach students of various races, including whites and African Americans. The book dates back to the 1940s and is intended for primary education. To sum up, the primer portrays a perfect white American family that appears happy and impeccable, consisting of a strong and dependable father, a kind and cheerful mother, a well-groomed son named Dick, and an attractive daughter named Jane

“Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green- and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. «

Pecola had internalized the white community's notion of the standard of beauty. Part of that concept included having blue eyes. According to white society, the combination of blonde hair and blue eyes were generally regarded as the perfect standard of physical attractiveness.

Throughout the novel, Pecola expressed effusive admiration towards the physical attributes of Shirley Temple.

“We knew she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face”pp21

“Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face. Frieda and she had a loving conversation about how cu-ute Shirley Temple was.” (Page17)

Pecola viewed drinking milk as a means of absorbing white beauty into herself. Shirley's flawless beauty and pure image, similar to the whiteness and purity of milk, create a captivating allure that can be likened to a magical elixir of beauty. Pecola consumed milk with the belief that it would act as a charm to enhance her appearance as she aspired to transform into a beautiful being by consuming something considered beautiful. Pecola's behavior appeared as a desperate bid to attain beauty standards set by white society. She resorted to using the cup frequently and consumed large quantities of water from it to immerse herself in the idea of beauty. Shirley Temple played a significant role in shaping societal beauty ideals, being a prominent figure in their enforcement. Her enormous influence on society and culture persisted to such an extent that she was still recognized as America's Little Darling even in contemporary times.

from an initial belief to a persistent fixation. Ultimately, this fixation became an all-consuming dream that was critical to her sense of contentment and fulfillment.

1.3. Yearning for blue eyes for social acceptance:

Throughout Pecola's existence, the sensation of being attractive has eluded her. This was mainly a result of the sexual abuse she experienced from her father. Due to the consequences, her self-confidence had been shattered; she was yearning to experience affection and adoration.

Pecola became fixated on the notion that if she possessed blue eyes and adhered to the standards of beauty imposed by white society, she would attain happiness. She argued that her own perception of her beauty will be influenced by how others perceive her attractiveness.

Engaging in prayer, Pecola sought the bluest eyes as it holds the key to unlocking the enigma of her existence.

“Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time” (page44)

In the story, Pecola experienced societal exclusion. One major reason for her rejection is attributed to her physical appearance. Pecola was unable to understand the reason for being labeled as "unattractive" and facing such profound social alienation. She eventually perceived herself in the same manner as the world perceives her.

“A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes.”(page172)

Her desire for blue eyes was rooted in the belief that they were indicative of aesthetics and allure. She assimilated the societal norms that govern beauty, regulations that proclaim that *attractiveness* is symbolized by having *blue eyes*. Pecola desired blue eyes with the hope of gaining similar admiration and affection like Shirley Temple.

“I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.”

“Help you how? Tell me. Don’t be frightened.”

“My eyes.”

“What about your eyes?”

“I want them blue.”(page172)

According to Pecola, her life would have been different if her eyes looked different or were considered beautiful. Her belief is that possessing blue eyes would provide her with the sense of belonging that she yearned for. The longing of Pecola served as the foundation of her prayers in her perspective, as it presented the solution to all the uncertainties in her mind.

By the same token, Alice and Jerry story book represented what should Pecola be. As a black girl who wants blue eyes and yellow hair:

“Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes.

Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes.

Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run

with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty

blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest’s

blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes” (page44)

The white culture's narratives, including those of Dick, Jane, Alice, and Jerry, had a significant impact on Pecola Breedlove. She was inspired by these books to aspire for blue eyes as she believed they represented beauty and acceptance in a society where skin color discrimination is prevalent and the explanation behind individuals' joy. Subsequent to Pecola's descent into insanity and her belief that her eyes had changed color, Claudia contemplates the sequence of events that sparked her transformation. ***“A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment”*** (page202)

Pecola continued to talk obsessively about her newly acquired blue eyes with an imaginary companion due to her conviction in their existence. Pecola, who was once a gentle and unobtrusive girl, transformed into a conceited and superficial individual after she became convinced of her beauty. *“Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again. See how pretty they are.”*(Page199)

In the societal context, beauty standards hold significant weight in determining human values. Unfortunately, racial discrimination perpetuates this norm, causing Pecola to desire white beauty and disdain her own unique features

2. Effects Of Internalized Racism On Pecola’s Self-Esteem

2.1. Pecola’s feeling of self-loathing and unworthiness:

Toni Morrison explores the theme of rejection, self-loathing, and disconnection experienced by the black community due to the dominance of white culture by depicting it through the character of Pecola, a twelve-year-old girl.

On the whole story, Toni Morrison illustrates Pecola' self-hatred and unworthiness through different chapters. It started when Pecola was experiencing similar levels of distress like her brother Sammy as a result of their parents' fights. Occasionally, he ran away, prompting Pecola to contemplate the rationale behind his persistent avoidance of her company (page 43). So she secretly thought that potentially altering her physical appearance, specifically having blue eyes, might lead to a change in her circumstances. The perception of her, both among her peers and instructors, would undergo a notable change, ultimately leading to a corresponding shift in her self-image. *“Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her; white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’*

toilet,..." (Page 60) Here, Pecola described how her friends and teachers treated Maureen, the new yellow-skinned girl. She felt jealous, envy, and she wished to be treated like her.

Eventually, Pecola would see herself as beautiful instead of an unappealing young female who experienced feelings of revulsion upon viewing her reflection in the mirror. *"Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school by teachers and classmates alike."* (page43)

During her walk, Pecola paid attention to the dandelions growing on the pavement, In chapter autumn, it was stated that she found the plants aesthetically pleasing, while pondering on why others deem them insignificant and undesired weeds. She expressed compassion towards them. *"The dandelions at the base of the telephone pole. Why, she wonders, do people call them weeds? She thought they were pretty."*page45

The storeowner, Mr. Yacobowski, was disgusted by Pecola's unattractive appearance, causing a shift in her perception of the dandelions when she began her journey home. She currently held a negative view towards them, finding their appearance unattractive, and this had caused her to become agitated. These things trigger her insecurity about her appearance, reminding her of how people perceive her as unattractive. She was overwhelmed with a sense of rage as she despised her own appearance.

"outside, Pecola feels the inexplicable shame ebb. Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, "They are ugly. They are weeds." Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame."(page48)

Furthermore, Pecola was bullied by her black male mates and they made fun of her because, she was blacker and uglier than they were. They projected their insecurities onto her. Bullying Pecola made them feel superior for being less ugly and black. It revealed their insecurity about their identities. *"A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove...they gaily harassed her. "Black e mo. Black e mo. Ya daddy sleeps nekked. Black e mo black e mo ya daddy sleeps nekked. Black e mo..."* (page 63) *"She also knew that when one of the girls at school wanted to be particularly insulting to a boy, or wanted to get an immediate response from him, she could say. "Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!" and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused"*(page 44)

Due to her intense self-loathing, Pecola craved blue eyes despite knowing that they were unattainable for her. Pecola firmly believed that her beauty will only be recognized and appreciated by others in society. Consequently, she felt that her life lacks beauty. The mixture of societal pressure and Pecola's personal loathing led her to descend into a state of insanity. After becoming mentally unstable, Pecola came to believe that she now possessed the coveted blue eyes she had always yearned for. The main character believed that possessing eyes of a blue color would alter the way others perceive her like the famous child actress Shirley Temple.

In conclusion, Pecola held a belief that she was unattractive due to her acceptance of the prevailing white beauty norms in her societal surroundings. She observed that individuals with brighter skin, lighter eyes, and smoother hair are perceived as more attractive and appealing, unlike black skin and kinky hair.

2.2. Blackness : the source of ugliness and hatred

Creating a joyful and fulfilling familial unit necessitates cultivating an environment where individuals feel appreciated and loved in each other's presence.

However, the author of "The Bluest Eye" portrays an alternate view regarding families and communities that deviates from our commonly held idyllic, flawless perception. For children to become cheerful and strong, it is essential that they receive affection from their relatives. If children do not receive respect and affection from their parents, it may lead to a negative self-image in adulthood. In a society afflicted by racism, individuals may experience self-doubt and seek inclusion in the white dominant culture. Like the story of Pecola and her burning desire for blue eyes as she sees them as the reason of attractiveness, since she perceives herself as unattractive. Pecola was experiencing intense feelings of sadness due to the lack of love from her family and her belief that she was not good as the other girls. The young girl was driven to insanity as she lived in a society where those who held power and held prejudiced attitudes towards other races lacked the love she desperately needed.

Pecola believed that she was unlovable and ugly, in the whole story, because of her blackness. Toni Morrison illustrates the lack of love in Pecola's life from the inside, her family members, to the outside, her classmates and society that lead her to hate herself and longed for the blue eyes in order to be accepted and loved by the society. Pecola and her family realized that they were ugly because they were poor

"The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to the cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family—Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove—wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had

high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands.."(page36)

Even her mother's attitude toward her was not good. *"But I knew she was ugly. "She had a head full of pretty hair, but Lord, she was ugly."*(page124). Pecola thought that no one will like to see her because of her terrible blackness. *"She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her blackness. All things in her are in flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dreadful. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes,"* (page 47). Also, when Maureen insulted her due to her blackness, she said, *"I am cute! And you're ugly! Black and ugly black emos. I am cute!"*. Likewise, Junior, who bullied Pecola, he saw her as an ugly little girl because of her skin tone. *"Nobody ever played with her. Probably, he thought, because she was ugly."* (page86)

Since Pecola didn't witness love from her classmates and her parents, especially her mother, who loathed her and ignored her, through her mother's obsession of the pink, white, and golden world of the Fishers, Pecola realized that she was ugly, unacceptable, and especially unloved. She had no idea what love means or how to be loved. *"What did love feel like? She wondered. How do grown-ups act when they love each other?"* (page55) *"How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?"* (page30)

So, she thought that no one will love her and treated her well because of her blackness. The narrator points out that even her classmates made fun of her because of her ugliness and

did not love her. So eventually, Pecola went to Soaphead Church to ask for blue eyes. Pecola believed that only through her blue eyes will she remedy her desperate life and make people love her.

2.3. The inferiority complex of Pecola:

There are some cases when individuals feel inferior and weak in their community because of their lack of ability to do something or reach certain values in society. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, the main character, suffers from this feeling and strives for superiority.

The novel revolves around the dominance of white values over black Americans. Pecola longs for a pair of blue eyes that will make her beautiful; this is the aftermath of feeling inferior because of her physical appearance, family situation, and interaction with society.

After analyzing the novel, *The Bluest Eye* sheds light on the effects of the white dominant culture on the blacks' daily lives. Pecola admired the idea that having blue eyes will make her beautiful, so she despised her own eyes because they were the source of her ugliness. Pecola was consumed by the white culture standards. Her desire for superiority showed when she prayed for white beauty standards every day and every night, glorified Shirley Temple, and ate Mary Jane. Eventually, she made efforts to visit the spiritualist in order to make her wish come true. The protagonist wanted to be dominant and lived in the superior community, but unfortunately, her life took another turn and she became insane.

Secondly, Pecola's family conditions lead her to feel inferior; she witnessed her parents' everyday fights; they did not give them the love, peace and respect they deserved.

Sequentially to that, Pecola was ignored by her mother and get raped by her drunken father. Additionally, their economic status meant they live in poverty, which made them

search for financial sources and pursue their happiness while neglecting their children. Moreover, the segregation of white people over black communities and the discrimination of black men over black women and girls develop the inferior problem in Pocola life.

Lastly, in the novel, Pocola experienced social exclusion and isolation due to her self-perceived unattractiveness and the belief that she was invisible to those around her. Over the course of four chapters, Toni Morrison unveils the mistreatment she received from her community. She faced neglect and harassment at the hands of her teachers and peers, who targeted her and subjected her to ridicule and bullying on account of her race.

The book *The Bluest Eye* effectively reflects the grave repercussions of racism and oppression on the black community, highlighting the deeply ingrained prejudices of white culture that marginalize and belittle people of color.

3. Pecola self-effacement and rejection of her own identity

3.1. Pecola's desire to be invisible

Invisibility pertains to the disregard or exclusion of a particular social or ethnic minority group from their surroundings. The segregation leads to a sense of insignificance and a lack of self-worth among the individuals belonging to these groups.

Pecola, an eleven-year-old black girl, was the victim of racial inequality that caused her insanity. *"But there are some who collapse silently, anonymously, with no voice to express or acknowledge it. They are invisible."* (forward) *Toni Morrison*. In the book, Pecola was an invisible character. Morrison creates friends, neighbors, and classmates to talk about Pecola's thoughts, the only things that Pecola confessed by herself were her intense desire for blue eyes and her imaginary friend at the end, when she was insane.

Pecola's familial fights made her wish to disappear from this world, so she asked God to make her disappear.

"She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went one by one, and then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be really still and pull. Her stomach would not go away. But finally, it too went away. Then her chest and her neck The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left" (page43)

This passage shows that Pecola grew up in an abusive family, they didn't accept her as a member of this family. She thought that if she was beautiful, her life would be good, with no fights. It occurred to her that if she possessed blue eyes, her family would be happy and would give her the love that she deserved. In other words, Pecola was invisible because of her ugliness and thus her blackness. Also, her relationship with her parents, the lack of love, and bad treatment led Pecola to choose to be invisible.

Breedlove's daughter made herself invisible to society because she was neglected by the people around her. She internalized that she was rejected because of her blackness. *"There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time. Perhaps the feeling is merely indifference or mild annoyance, but it may also be hurt."* (Forward). More clearly, Pecola confirmed that she was invisible when she went to the small store to buy Mary Jane candy. Mr. Yacobowsky didn't want to touch her little hands or see her. *"He cannot see her view—the angle of his vision and the slant of her finger make it incomprehensible to him."* (page47) *"She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And*

something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness" (page 46). The only ones who accepted her were the three prostitutes and her friends Claudia and Frieda.

Pecola hated herself because she was ugly due to her blackness, so she tried to make herself invisible in her community, which was affected by white beauty standards. Pecola was driven by her disdain for herself to yearn for blue eyes, which can be traced back to her previous aspiration to remain unnoticed and insignificant.

"Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them". (Page 43) The girl despised her eyes and wanted them to disappear from her body that is why she prayed for a pair of blue eyes in order to avoid the discrimination of her society and to gain love and respect. Pecola was seeing herself through the eyes of others, she absorbed the negative thoughts and feelings of white people towards blackness to such an extent that she perceives her own dark complexion and African features as signs of a shamed racial identity. As a result, she yearned to be unseen or to possess blue eyes in the hope that she will be embraced and valued by others.

3.2. The belief of unworthiness of love and attention:

In the book, the African American girl who struggled with feeling of self-loathing and unworthiness. Her belief that she is unworthy of love and attention is the result of a multiple circumstances.

Within and out her familial barriers. Morrison in her book points out that Pecola faced racism and negligence of her community. Pecola grew up in a place where the people worship the white beauty and despised their blackness in which they considered it the source of poverty and ugliness. *"Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was*

what every girl child treasured.”(page18)Pocola pioneered the idea that having the white beauty standards will make her lovable. Her biggest wish in the novel was to be loved and gain attention from people surrounding her, she attempted to make her wish came true by going to change her eyes' color when she went to Seophead church in order to help her“*I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.*” “*Help you how? Tell me. Don’t be frightened.*” “*My eyes.*” “*What about your eyes?*” “*I want them blue.*” (Page172)This passage illustrates that Pocola was insecure about her physical appearance and she assumed that her eyes and her body were the reason of her unworthiness of love.

Pocola was a naive and timid character in the novel, she didn’t know how to show the feeling that she wanted to be loved because she was isolated due to the bad treatment from her classmates and teachers. “*She ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk*”(page43). Shown that Pecola didn’t receive the love from people, she was aware of her unworthiness of love because she was hideous and no one would exchange love with her.

In another hand, Pecola's parent didn’t provide a good example of loving parents. Both of them put out their self-hatred on their daughter who didn’t feel loved. Pecola was unloved by them; her father was abusive and ultimately raped her. Her mother did little to help her; she neglected Pecola because she viewed her as ugly. “*Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication.*” “*Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you...work....get on out...*” (page107) Pecola’s life reflects the lack of love in it.

3.3. Identity rejection in a racist society:

Family, friends, interests, values, culture, and environment are characteristics that help shape one's identity. There were a lot of reasons that made Pecola Breedlove deny her own identity as a black American girl in her community after years of self-loathing from the people around her, from her small family to the whole society due to her belief that she was ugly and worthless. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison traced the changing of Pecola's identity from being stable into insanity at the end of the novel.

As explained above in Chapter 1, identity can be affected by environmental and genetic factors. Pecola's identity was shaped by those factors, and hence she rejected her race, body, and class identities. (Erik Erikson)

Children imitate their parents in everything; that is what happened to Pecola; the rejection of her identity was an outcome of imitating her parents. Pauline Breedlove was obsessed with the whiteness of actresses and wished to live their lives, which is why she named her daughter Pecola *“that the name of the girl in Imitation of Life?”* (Page 65). Pauline hated herself because she had a deformity on her foot that prevented her from having fun with her peers when she was younger. Because of this lack, Pauline was unable to relate herself to her peers, and her ability to form an identity at a young age was thwarted. So she made the movie theater her home when she found in it love, acceptance, and security. The white beauty devalued the value of black girls and made them assimilate into white culture and reject their identity in order to find respect. *“She went to the movies instead. Therein the dark her memory was refreshed and she succumbed to her earlier dreams. Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another—physical beauty”*(page 120)

On the other hand, Cholly found obstacles to forming his identity caused by the absence of his ancestral past. He was abandoned by his parents when he was nine days old and was not named after his father. Cholly didn't experience any confidence during intimacy because he was unable to bond with his parents, and the lack of confidence in his personality

made identity formation difficult for him. This led him to hate the other sex, criticize his wife, and rape his daughter. In a simple way, Pecola's parents suffered to build their identity, and they transferred this lack of identity to their children. Pecola followed the path of her mother in equating beauty with acceptance and respect, allowing it to confirm their weakness.

Otherwise, the environment plays a major role in raising the sense of self; Pecola, through the novel, was invisible and worthless. Because of the blackness of her skin, she was isolated and aligned. Pecola was affected by society's norms, which idealized white beauty standards. The racism made black people less valuable in front of white people. The bad treatment, rape, and miscarrying pushed the latter to madness because of her inability to defend herself against the outside attacks from her community and her loss of ability to express her pain. Pecola didn't interact with her classmates and friends, so she suffered to form her identity as a black girl. She strived for superiority and being as dominant as the white people; consequently, she prayed to have blue eyes.

Lastly, Pecola rejected her own identity because she thought that her race was the reason for her social negligence and her miserable life. *"As long as she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them"*(page43) additionally, the protagonist wasn't satisfied with her physical appearance, and she longed for blue eyes and white skin in order to be accepted in her environment. Moreover, she considered that her family situation was the cause of her suffering. Being poor means being ugly, and being ugly means having no respect and losing your sense of self in that racist society.

Conclusion:

In The Bluest Eye Toni Morrison intricately responds to the pervasive systems of racism, sexism, patriarchy, and capitalism that disproportionately impact the African

American population. Additionally, Morrison delves into topics of ethnicity, culture, and politics. This exemplifies the entrenched nature of oppressive systems strengthened by the structures of white supremacy and patriarchy. “I didn’t want to speak for Black people and I wanted to speak to, and to be among them... it’s us. So the first thing I had to do was to eliminate the white gaze.” From the documentary film Toni Morrison: The pieces I am. The Bluest Eye effectively criticizes the imposition of European beauty standards on African-American women, which leads to the erosion of their cultural identity. This work presents a thorough evaluation of the prevalent ideals of beauty embraced by many individuals within the black community. Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" showcases her advocacy for ethnic cultural feminism, wherein she investigates the challenges encountered by underprivileged African Americans who confront the lack of self-confidence. Pecola symbolizes the difficulties associated with grappling with emotions of undesirability and disregard resulting from her belief of being black.

Chapter four: Trauma and Identity in *Beloved*

Introduction

Morrison's novel "Beloved" is deemed as her most remarkable piece of literature, owing to its complex narrative style. The novel is based on a real story of Margret Garner, it is set after the American civil war and during the reconstruction era, it is written for the sake of Black Slaves who were traumatized and silenced forever. In her novel, Morrison attempted to portray the connection of a traumatic past as a slave with the present of freedom_ especially for female characters. It shows the brutal reality of a Black mother, a former slave, and expresses the perspectives of daughters, grandmothers, men, and some other community members. Sethe Suggs is the protagonist through whom Morrison delves deeper into the psychological consequences of oppression and uncovers the emotional devastation of slavery to the mother-child relationship.

Sethe's life was simply hard. She used to struggle against slaveholders brutality and abuse, and then she began to struggle against society which described her as a cruel and savage mother, and her children who she was trying to protect accused her of murder. In addition to that, Sethe was fighting very tough inner battles that harmed her more than anything else, such as the unescapable memories from her past. All of this influenced her in a negative way.

This chapter presents a psychoanalytical reading for the character of Sethe, based on our own understanding and perceiving of the novel's messages and symbols. It will be divided into three sections; each section will discuss and provide analysis of parts from Sethe's life. The first section will be dealing with Sethe's experience as a slave and the trauma she endured. The second section is about Sethe's relationship with Beloved, the two women's impact on each other and how Beloved represents her mother's past and future and finally, the last section will highlight Sethe's self-effacement and rejection of her own identity in the face of trauma.

1. Sethe's traumatic past and its impact on her identity

1.1. Sethe's traumatic past

“Any life but that one” (Beloved, page55)

In her staying at sweet home, Sethe went through a series of brutal acts practiced against her by her owner Schoolteacher and other times, his nephews. As a slave, Sethe was helpless and obliged to live that miserable life.

The conditions in sweet home pushed Sethe and other slaves to plan their escape, so Sethe sent her three children with her mother in law and waited for her husband when she was caught by Schoolteacher's nephews. They held her down, raped her and took her milk_ as she described, and when she told on them to Mrs. Garner, she was whipped on her back, which lead to splits in her flesh that took a form of a chokecherry tree. All that when she was pregnant with her daughter Denver.

Sethe talked about the whipping scar, saying ***“I got a tree on my back”*** (Beloved, page19)

“After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.”(Beloved, page21)

This specific event influenced Sethe's sense of humanity. When recounting this story to Paul D, she was focused only on the fact that her baby's milk was taken, it was the only thing she could offer to her children and it was robbed. She saw herself as only a source of milk, more than a human being with feelings. The incident had affected Sethe deeply to the point she was disgusted with herself and denied her humanity.

Sethe also lived with the terror of losing her and her children's freedom. For her, death was much better and easier than life in Sweet Home. The idea of her children going back to Sweet Home plantation and live the same life of their parents and ancestors terrified her, so she proceeded to end their lives before that would happen; for she believed that was an act of mercy and love. She admitted that even though she felt sorry for murdering her daughter, it was the right thing to do and she didn't allow herself to grieve over it. She also justified her action by saying *"how if I hadn't killed her; she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her."*(Beloved, page256)

"It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that." (Beloved, page211).Sethe had taken pride of what she did because in her perspective, she was saving her child from a terrible fate.

The act of murder equaling an act of love can be justified and seen by Sethe's relationship with her own mother. Being abandoned by her mother affected Sethe, she was almost a stranger to her and there was no real relationship or bond between the two. Her memories about her mother were blur and buried deep, until Beloved asked about her.

"... I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks --that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was...."

Sethe didn't remember much contact with her mother, but she recalled being slapped by her which formed a definition of mother's love in her subconscious. Also, her mother was hung when she was trying to escape, signifying that she was abandoning her daughter Sethe and leaving her behind to face the misery of slavery. Sethe's relationship with her mother was

effecting her decision making on a deep level, she refused to be like her and leave her children being tortured in Sweet Home, so she sent them to their freedom before her and she refused to let them live without a mother because she knew that type of pain, and that is why she risked her life to reach them and take her baby's milk to her, and when there was a possibility of going back to slavery, she chose to kill them instead of letting them live a humiliating life. These behaviors are explained that Sethe wanted to do to her children what her mother did not do to her, to be what her mother could not be, and to offer what her mother could not offer.

Sethe expressed her anger and disappointment about not getting the chance to be her mother's daughter, to spend more time with her, to get milk from her and to be chosen by her to run away from the farm.

“Which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one. You know what? She'd had the bit so many times she smiled. When she wasn't smiling she smiled, and I never saw her own smile. I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running, you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now? Leave her in the yard with a one-armed woman? Even if she hadn't been able to suckle the daughter for more than a week or two and had to turn her over to another woman's tit that never had enough for all.”(Beloved, page 260).

Sethe seemed to be dissociated before the appearance of Beloved, it was her way of coping with the trauma since the days she was a slave and after her freedom, she had no sense of time. The loss of temporal awareness was apparent in the following quote.

“I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there...”(Beloved, page 47).

“this here new sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began”(Beloved, page 211).

The pain of certain memories made her stop believing in the existence of time, she was trapped in the hints of the past and terrified of the future, thus she was left with nothing but to stay at the present moment, protecting herself and her child. It is also revealed in the way she rejected the future Paul D promised, since she was fearful of the unknown and the ambiguity of tomorrow.

“To Sethe the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay...” (Beloved, page 55).

Which takes to the other point, her relationship with Paul D that is affected by the past_ they did have a shared history and mutual agony. Paul D offered life and love to Sethe and protection to both of her and her daughter Denver, he wanted to be the man of the house and keep both ladies in it safe.

"Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need. I told you, I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for seven years.”(Beloved, page 60).

But Sethe's wounds were an obstacle, she was hesitant she only replied with ***“I don't know.”***

To conclude, Sethe went through terrible and traumatizing events like physical and sexual abuse in her experience as a slave and it was something she needed to endure for the sake of her family and children.

1.2. Slavery's effect on Sethe's memory

Memories give our lives purpose and let us reflect on the experiences we've had. However, not all memories are pleasant, and In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, memory affected most characters negatively. Sethe for example was trapped inside her own head and was unable to free herself from the memories of her time as a slave. *Beloved* is a living embodiment of Sethe's memories and the past, she presents the past and demonstrates the influence that memories from the past have over individuals.

The very first sign that a reader can notice is the ghost in Sethe's house_ her daughter's ghost as she believed for almost two decades, they just accepted its presence as a sad entity ***"the soul of her baby girl."***(*Beloved*, page 6). Sethe believed that this ghost was her baby's because she could not escape neither the guilt, nor the memory, the regret and intensity of her murdering her own child. The ghost wouldn't go; it just stayed there to remind Sethe of her crime until the appearance of Paul D.

Paul D's arrival was also triggering to Sethe and her past memories, for the fact that both of them had a common past at Sweet Home, so seeing him again brought back pieces of her past through their conversations. She told him how she was sexually abused, he told her what happened to her husband and as the story progressed, she spoke about murdering her daughter.

"How come everybody run off from sweet home can't stop talking about it? Look like if it was sweet you would have stayed." (*Beloved*, page 17).

This quote means that even though Sethe successfully ran from Sweet Home and her former owners, she wouldn't stop talking about it. And the more she talked, the more she remembered.

Beloved was the manifestation of Sethe's memories into her reality. Toni Morrison herself confirmed that Beloved symbolized memory, she stated in one of her interviews that memory can come in and sit now next to you at the table, which was the case with Sethe. She could not let go of her dead daughter and Beloved clung into her the same way the past clung.

“Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt everything in it was painful or lost” (Beloved, page 75).

Beloved kept bringing up Sethe's past and got all those buried wounded on the surface when Sethe tried hard to dig them deep. It was such a discomfort because she wasn't used to narrate much to anyone. Sethe did not want to talk about her past though it was in front of her every day; her daughter's death and its results staying there as a ghost, Denver isolation from the community and the community itself leaving Sethe outside because of her crime.

Sethe described her brain as a greedy child that accepts everything it was given to; this indicates her weakness in dealing with her past and memories. She wanted to erase them, to reject them and run away from them, but her rebellious brain accepted them all. This implies that she desperately wanted to escape her memories, but then, again, she was unable of that.

“She shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it reused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say, No thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full God damn it.” (Beloved, page 90).

Considering all of this, Psychological damage from past trauma makes it harder to take control of the present since the past has such a strong hold on our memory.

1.3. The quest of sense of self after slavery

Morrison conveys the idea that having a sense of self is freeing and empowering and that without it, a person might feel depressed, lost, and trapped, particularly through the character of Sethe. When reading *Beloved* psychoanalytically, the reader becomes acutely aware of the significant differences between a character's conscious actions and words and their subconscious thoughts and feelings and how that is related to their sense of self.

Slaves are defined by their owners; the owners decide who or what their slaves are. When Mr. Garner ruled Sweet Home, it was *who*, he treated his slaves as humans, as men and women. But after his death, Schoolteacher took over and treated the slaves as *what*, as subhuman or animals. He stripped them off their human characteristics as Sethe overheard one of his lessons. He asked his pupils to list the characteristics of Sethe and separate the human characteristics from the animal ones, then told them to ignore all what his human and treat the slaves accordingly to their animalistic traits ***“...I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up.”***(*Beloved*, page 247). His words were stuck in Sethe’s head; she had to ask what a characteristic? She knew she was being studied and measured to something inferior, acknowledged as an animal and that bothered her to the point she lost sleep. And due to this incident, she found a trouble defining herself.

Sethe was once a wife married to Halle. It is clear to the reader that Sethe’s only definition at Sweet Home was her relationship with Halle, she belonged to Halle and acted the way he did, so she was already known for that as Paul D described

“The prickly, mean-eyed Sweet Home girl he knew as Hall’s girl was obedient (like Halle), shy (like Halle) and work crazy (like Halle).”211

Her husband strangely disappeared after their escape from the farm and she assumed he waived her and their children. So her sense of self and last bits of sanity were shattered the moment she learnt why her husband never showed up, Paul D explained that Halle witnessed the sexual assault practiced against her.

“He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?” Sethe was disappointed that her husband saw what happened to her and didn’t save her from that brutality, thus her identification as his wife turned to fragments.

She was full of a past that she did not want to recall it as it’s clear in the following quote ***“She shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it reused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say, No thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft--hiding close by-- the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at all. And not stopping them --looking and letting it happen. But my greedy brain says, Oh thanks, I'd love more--so I add more. And no sooner than I do, there is no stopping.....Then there is still more that Paul D could tell me and my brain would go right ahead and take it and never say, No thank you. I don't want to know or have to remember that”*** (Beloved, page 90).

She was in a state of defeat, where she accepted everything thrown her way so she wished she could say “*no, thank you.*” but she wasn’t capable of that. And another definition that Sethe set for herself was once again broken.

Besides being a former slave and a wife, Sethe was a mother as well. One easily can notice that in the novel, she summed up her entire being into being a mother. In the aftermath of slavery, she was the mother of Denver, the two boys and the ghost who later manifested as Beloved. Sethe strongly believed that the woman who appeared on her porch was her dead daughter coming back to give her another chance “*she had no choice but to come back to me in the flesh*”(Beloved, page 256).

It seems that Sethe existed only to meet other people needs; a slave for her masters and her children needs, she barely had time to explore herself and her own needs.

In brief, we can say that after being a slave her entire life Sethe didn’t know how to be free, she needed to belong to something or to serve for something in order to feel her individuality.

2. Sethe’s relationship with Beloved as a representation of her past and future

2.1 . Beloved representing Sethe’s past

Toni Morison's book Beloved is an in-depth explanation of events that serves as an example of previous thoughts and memories, to relive the suffering that African Americans went through during the era of slavery. The voice of memory serves to express the reality of slavery for both men and women. The book is a reflection on the legacy of slavery and the mother-daughter relationship it created between Beloved and Sethe.

Sethe suggested moving away from the rage of the baby’s ghost in the house to her mother in law, which she replied to “*not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters*

with some dead negro's grief ..."(Beloved, page 6). Baby Suggs explained that there was no benefit of moving away, because there would be always a ghost. No matter where they go, they would live with a Black ghost and its sorrows, and they should be grateful that their ghost is just a baby. So eventually, Sethe learnt to live with it. This scene points that even after escaping slavery and freeing themselves, the slaves were still haunted by the trauma and the traces of their past wouldn't simply go_ just like ghosts.

As Beloved appeared, no one had a clue who she was and where she came from, but it is noticeable that Beloved was the physical manifestation of past and history, the same way she represented the reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter. Simultaneously, she was there to bring Sethe's wounds on the external level instead of letting them be suppressed ***"Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt everything in it was painful or lost"*** (Beloved, page 75). Beloved did not stop questioning, she was eager to know every bit of Sethe's story, all what she talked and never talked about, which was a great discomfort to Sethe since she wanted to run away from her past_ although it has a grip on her. It was enough to her to live with it daily, watch it manifest with her eye rather than speaking about it and acknowledging it.

When she was around Beloved or interacted with her, she found herself forced to sit with her past and live her memories once again. She was also obliged to explain everything to her and justifying her choices.

Beloved didn't only represent Sethe's past. She was, in fact, history itself and more than what she looked like_ as Denver claimed. Beloved possessed more than her mother's memories, she had her own memories of *the other side* and *the bridge* she was at.

“We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud noises I am not dead the bread is sea-colored I am too hungry to eat it the sun closes my eyes those able to die are in a pile I cannot find my man the one whose teeth I have loved a hot thing the little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push them through with poles the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine they fall into the sea which is the color of the bread she has nothing in her ears if I had the teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the circle around her neck bite it away I know she does not like it now there is room to crouch and to watch the crouching others it is the crouching that is now always now inside the woman with my face is in the sea a hot thing” (Beloved, page 269).

Beloved was talking about a slave ship transporting Africans to America, with references to rape, sea-colored bread, branding irons, and white captors. So she served as a collective memory of her ancestors, she pointed out the pain of every enslaved black person. Beloved was the reminder of her mother's trauma and the generations before her.

2.2. Sethe's future hopes via her bonding with Beloved

Motherhood is one of the major themes in Beloved. The bond between a parent and a child is a fundamental and an essential aspect of human relationships, especially the mother daughter bond which is based on physical and emotional affection. Mothers see themselves in their daughter and that is seen in Beloved.

After her arrival, Beloved instantly created a bond with Sethe_ due to her interest in Sethe that can be perceived as an obsession. Sethe did not allow herself to grieve for the loss of her child because she thought she wasn't deserving of it, however she couldn't simply control these emotions and Beloved bore all the features of the child; from her name that was

similar to the one written on the child's grave, to her childlike appearance and behavior and finally, the memories of a time that no one witnessed but the dead child. Sethe gathered all these evidences and convinced herself that Beloved was her dead daughter, that her love was strong enough to bring her back ***"But my love was tough and she back now."***

Sethe felt relieved that her daughter was back because first, it would take off the burden of the crime that she carried for years and second, because Sethe seemed to lose interest in everything and in life generally, she was on survival mode for the sake of Denver. But with Beloved reuniting with her, she'd start looking at things and appreciate them, so her absent daughter would as well.

"Oh but that's all over now. I'm here. I lasted. And my girl came home. Now I can look at things again because she's here to see them too" (Beloved, page 257).

Sethe began to create scenarios of how life would be with Beloved, the readers can sense the rush and excitement in her tone. She wanted to live with Beloved and teach her things a mother should teach. She was already planning with so many hopes, which is something unusual for Sethe since she never spoke about the future or her plans for it.

"Think what spring will be for us! I'll plant carrots she can see them, and turnips.... Beloved because you are mine and I have to show you these things, and teach you what a mother should" (Beloved, page 258).

Sethe started to do more activities, she took the girls out skating and they enjoyed their time. It was certain that Sethe felt so happy in such moments and after thinking about how magically her daughter came back to her, she began to build up hopes about her sons too. She thought that if Beloved came back from nowhere then her two boys can do the same.

“The three holding on to each other skating the night before; the three sipping flavored milk. And since that was so--- if her daughter could come back home from the timeless place--- certainly her sons could , and would, come back from whenever they had gone to” 232

2.3. Beloved’s impact on Sethe sense of self and identity

White people gained control over Black people through destroying their sense of self and their Black identity, which established the idea of Black inferiority that stays rooted in their subconscious even after being freed.

Sethe had always struggled with her sense of self, it was hard for her to recognize her own identity; who she was and what purposes she could have. She went through many painful experiences that influenced her psyche, made it fragile and easily affected by any circumstances, specifically after the interaction with Beloved.

Beloved had a great impact on Sethe because since her appearance at 124, they easily bonded, and it was refreshing to Sethe’s drained life. The unspoken memories flew in the form of flashbacks and stories to tell as Beloved brought with her hopes for a better life and a construction of a small, loving family among the three women. Sethe believed that being forgiven by Beloved would take some of the heavy weight off her shoulders.

“I lasted and my girl come home. Now I can look at things again because she’s here to see them too.”(Beloved, page 257).

Sethe was overwhelmed with feelings of fulfillment thanks to Beloved’s presence that gave her a meaning and a purpose, she was her second chance in life because she only felt whole when her children were under her wings as expressed in *“The world is in this room”*(Beloved, page 233).

“And instead of looking for another job, sethe played all harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk. If the hen had only two eggs, she got both. It was as though her mother had lost her mind...” (Beloved, page 304).

“But it was Beloved who made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire. She wanted Sethe Company for hours...” (Beloved, page 305).

Beloved developed an extreme obsession with Sethe and since she wanted her only to herself, her possessiveness made her imitate her, dress like her and behave like her to the point it was hard for Denver to distinguish between the two, it was Beloved's way of claiming ownership over Sethe.

“Dressed in Sethe's dresses, she stroked her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh, and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head... it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who.” (Beloved, page 306).

The sense of fulfillment did not last long as Beloved transformed from the loving girl who's curious about her mother's stories to an obsessed and destructive being. Sethe completely lost touch with reality and ignored all her surroundings, as she was only interested in satisfying Beloved and fulfilling all her needs. It was a hopeless attempt to seek forgiveness from the daughter she once harmed.

“Then the mood changed and the arguments began. Slowly at first. A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe. A reduction of pleasure at some special effort the older woman made. Wasn't it too cold to stay outside? Beloved gave a look that said, so what? Was it past bedtime, the light no good for sewing? Beloved didn't move;

said, "Do it," and Sethe complied. She took the best of everything--first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children, waving away flies in grape arbors, crawling on her knees to a lean-to. None of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? And Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to---that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough. That her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever. Beloved wasn't interested. She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. Did she know it hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby? That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy? That before leaving Sweet Home Beloved slept every night on her chest or curled on her back? Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her." (Beloved, page306/307)

There were times when sethe tried to gain control, but Beloved reacted negatively and aggressively to that, showing her disapproval.

“When once or twice Sethe tried to assert herself--be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best--Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane.” (Beloved, page307)

Denver was observing everything quietly she noticed her mother's unfamiliar appearance and behavior, her obsession with Beloved's best qualities but never her stomach that was getting bigger without questioning the reason behind it.

“Saw Sethe's eyes bright but dead, alert but vacant, paying attention to everything about Beloved--her lineless palms, her forehead, the smile under her jaw, crooked and much too long--everything except her basket-fat stomach”(Beloved, page308)

Denver's observation continued until the day her mother spit something she had not eaten which was an eye opener to the daughter she instantly knew that her mother was in danger and this danger was Beloved

“Then Sethe spit up something she had not eaten and it,rocked Denver like gunshot”(Beloved, page308)

Beloved's consumption of Seth's entire being and psyche grew bigger with time until sethe got hysterical, as it is explained in the following quotes:

“The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it.” (Beloved, page318)

“... even when beloved was quiet, dreamy, minding her own business, sethe got her going again. Whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come. It

was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out. (Beloved, page320)

The confirmation of Sethe's being out of her mind is explained in the following quote; Denver was seeking out help from the women of the community and based on their knowledge about Sethe, the woman Denver talked about did not seem like her, they knew Sethe as a wise and witty woman, but in the presence of Beloved, Sethe's turned to be the opposite of what she was known for.

"Janey seemed more interested in Sethe's condition, and from what Denver told her it seemed the woman had lost her mind. That wasn't the Sethe she remembered. This Sethe had lost her wits" (Beloved, page323)

3. Sethe's self-effacement and rejection of her own identity in the face of trauma

3.1. Sethe's identity effacement to cope with trauma

Our current selves are greatly influenced by our past experiences in particular. The significance we give to an event is just as important as the experience itself. The story we tell ourselves about that experience is what ultimately influences our present and future selves. So if we are not satisfied with our past we dispersity want to erase its results that we carried with us to our present. And that what is showed in Beloved, in the way sethe was intent on erasing her own story

Since the day she was born, Sethe was fated to be a slave. It was what her mother was and what her future children would be. Slavery was her sole identity she lived enslaved was seen and perceived as a slave and freedom was in question until the day she decided to escape. She successfully escaped slavery but failed to escape the trauma that came after so she thought that if she erased her history her trauma would leave with it as well and the first thing she did was agreeing with her mother in law on not speaking about it

“She and baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable”

(Beloved, page75)

Not speaking about the past means not acknowledging it, denying it and since one's identity is constructed based on one's past; Sethe was erasing her own identity in the process of erasing her history.

Also, one's sanity is a part of one's identity and Sethe wished she'd go crazy like her husband and everyone else. She was questioning why couldn't she lose her mind too and join Halle. The idea she drew in her mind made it look sweet, if she went crazy, she wouldn't care about anything, and she wouldn't remember a thing about herself or her past which seemed to be relieving. This indicated that Sethe was ready to trade her sanity and identity with craziness, she clearly wanted to erase her identity.

“Other people went crazy, why couldn't she? OtherPeople's brains stopped, turned around and went on to something new, which is what must have happened to Halle. And how sweet that would have been: the two of them back by the milk shed, squatting by the churn, smashing cold, lumpy butter into their faces with not a care in the world. Feeling it slippery, sticky--rubbing it in their hair, watching it squeeze through their fingers. What a relief to stop it right there. Close. Shut squeeze the butter.” (Beloved, page90)

3.2. Sethe's denial of her own agency and autonomy

Beloved by Toni Morrison doesn't only present the psychological trauma of slavery, but it also highlights its effects on the characters on so many levels. Some of them need a closer look in order to be seen and understood. When it comes to Sethe's personality, there exists a substantial amount of denial.

Sethe denied her own agency in the way she denied her femininity, she was hyper independent and believed she didn't need anyone; she could protect herself and her daughter by her own, she lived in isolation with Denver for almost two decades and they were just fine, so this planted the thought in her head that strength comes from not needing anybody. This kind of thinking made her reject Paul D's relationship offer, because she thought with or without a man she'd still be able to handle any task.

"Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need. I told you, I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for seven years. Walking all around this place. Upstate, downstate, east, west; I been in territory ain't got no name, never staying nowhere long. But when I got here and sat out there on the porch, waiting for you, well, I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life."

"I don't know. I don't know."

"Leave it to me. See how it goes. No promises, if you don't want to make any."

"Just see how it goes. All right?"

"All right."

"You willing to leave it to me?"

"Well--some of it." (Beloved, page 60)

For Sethe, who lived years by her own, it was hard to lean on anybody else and let some of her cautious fall. This was a result of her successful attempt in surviving on her own, she performed hard tasks on her own without help and without her husband, so she took pride in that.

"I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but still it was me doing it; me saying, Go on, and Now. Me having to look out. Me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was that wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon--there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. You know what I mean?" (Beloved, page 207)

Also, this denial can be explained with murdering her own daughter because naturally, a mother loves and protects her children, she doesn't do what hurt them. But what Sethe did was totally against human nature, even when she did her best to justify her actions, it's still a disturbing fact that goes against any instincts.

"I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be" (Beloved, page 256)

"It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (Beloved 211)

"if I hadn't killed her, she would have died and that is something I could not bear happen to her" (Beloved 256)."

Regarding Beloved, it can be argued that she, as well, played a role in Sethe's denial. Specifically, Sethe allowed her daughter to consume her and drain her life without any apparent attempt to establish boundaries or assert control. She did what Beloved wanted and cleaned what Beloved ruined. She was subjected to multiple forms of manipulation by her and didn't even try to stop it. As it is clear in the following quotes.

“The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it.” (Beloved, page318)

“Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. Did she know it hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby? That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy? That before leaving Sweet Home Beloved slept every night on her chest or curled on her back? Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her.” (Beloved, page306/307)

3.3. the importance of reclaiming identity and history

Toni Morrison was very focused on the theme of identity in Beloved, she was reassuring that having an identity is important because it provides a sense of belonging, which is important to one's wellbeing and even if one drifts away from one's identity, there's

always a way back to reclaim it. In the novel, Sethe eventually realized the importance of her history and identity and embraced them.

At the beginning, Sethe consciously made the decision of leaving Beloved's hand and running away to the women who came to rescue her, it can be explained as even though Sethe didn't want to leave Beloved, something urged her to realize that it must be done.

"Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind"³³⁴(Beloved, page 55)

After the disappearance of Beloved, Sethe fell sick and didn't leave her bed. Paul D spotted her in Baby Suggs' bed, looking very ill.

"I'm tired, Paul D. So tired. I have to rest a while."

Now he knows what he is reminded of and he shouts at her, "Don't you die on me! This is Baby Suggs' bed! Is that what you planning?" He is so angry he could kill her. He checks himself, remembering Denver's warning, and whispers,

"What you planning, Sethe?"

"Oh, I don't have no plans. No plans at all."³⁴⁶(Beloved, page 346)

This scene can be described that after the disappearance of her *best thing*, Sethe was left with nothing to live for, so she gave up on life and wanted to die, she was on the same bed her mother-in-law died in. However, there's a deeper interpretation of the scene; Sethe said that she was tired and needed to rest and she was lying in that bed, which can symbolize rebirth. Sethe was in the process of letting go of her old self, let it die in that bed, so a new version of her would be born.

Although she didn't completely let go of Beloved, because she still spoke about it to Paul D.

"She left me."

"Aw, girl. Don't cry."

"She was my best thing." (Beloved, page347)

Paul D had a major role in helping Sethe find herself since mainly she based her identity on her children_ specifically Beloved. She felt fulfilled when she belonged to someone and didn't know how to be emotionally independent until Paul D taught her that she didn't need other people to feel better, that her best thing wasn't something external, in fact, she was her best thing and. Sethe seemed to be accepting to the thought.

"He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You yourbest thing, Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers.

"Me? Me?"(Beloved, page348)

Then the memories of Beloved began to fade away as each character progressed in their lives sethe included she took longer to forget her to fully recover from the experience and to heal herself but eventually everything about beloved was forgotten like an unpleasant dream during a resettles sleep. And since Beloved was a manifestation of Sethe's past, her disappearance and Sethe forgetting her she also means that Sethe's disturbing memories fading and her making peace with her own past and letting it all go.

"They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget, until they realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise. They never knew where or why she crouched, or whose

was the underwater face she needed like that. Where the memory of the smile under her chin might have been and was not, a latch latched and lichen attached its apple-green bloom to the metal. What made her think her fingernails could open locks the rain rained on?" (Beloved, page 350)

In short, Sethe proved that she was still imprisoned in the past by giving into to Beloved's demands and allowing herself to be consumed by the girl. Only by confronting the past head-on and asserting herself in its presence will Sethe be able to release herself from its grip and be ready for a free, quiet life.

Conclusion

In simple terms, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a work of brilliance. She wrote the events in genuine words in order to make the reader aware of the suffering of Black Americans via the characters' tragic lives. The novel's female protagonists were psychologically affected by the horrors of slavery. Sethe's mental problems can be traced back to her background; for she suffered from psychological issues as a result of her time as a slave. She slew her eldest daughter and harmed the youngest psyche by allowing her to imagine the misery of slavery. And eventually, this psychological trauma caused her to seek her identity, and this desire for identity would allow acknowledging her human position.

Chapter five: Confronting Racism and Embracing Identity

Introduction

Historically speaking, African Americans have been rejected and oppressed because of their race; they were perceived as nonhuman, exposed to many forms of servitude, and deprived of the most basic rights by the dominant culture of their societies. The effects of racism have remained to the present day; it created a deep impact on the self-image and identity of black individuals. When faced with racial discrimination and prejudice, it can be difficult for them to feel proud of their cultural heritage and identity, and this leads to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence.

However, African Americans have proceeded to confront racism and its numerous ways to destroy their sense of self and their identity—such as servitude, Jim Crow, and inequality. In reaction to that, the civil rights movement was a way for Blacks to protect their identity as a minority in America in addition to the rise of figures in Black arts and literature like Toni Morrison, whose works have discussed Black people's issues in confronting prejudice and self-effacement, how to raise self-love and dismiss the overwhelming culture's standards, and inevitably, the security of Black's culture.

The final chapter in this research will be a discussion of how prejudice influences African American's identity and self-image, moving to some examples of Morrison's characters' rejection of white culture and its values, and at last, the significance of self-love and acceptance.

1. The impact of racism on the construction of African American identity

1.1. Racism impact on African American's sense of self-worth and self-esteem

The United States has a long and painful history of systemic racism against African Americans, dating back to the period of slavery when black people were treated as property instead of human beings with rights. The lasting effects of this dehumanization are still deeply felt today, as African Americans have been forced to endure centuries of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma due to the racist attitudes and policies that have been ingrained in American culture. Although slavery was officially ended, the ugly reality of racism continued to linger through the implementation of Jim Crow laws, widespread segregation, and a societal culture of discrimination. Individually and collectively, these systemic injustices reinforced the harmful notion that African Americans were inherently inferior and thus not entitled to basic human respect and fair treatment.

Despite the strides made in combating racism, it still persists in several forms in contemporary society. The African American community, in particular, is subjected to prejudice and bias in housing, education, employment, and the criminal justice system. In spite of the numerous efforts to eradicate these issues, they remain prevalent and continue to negatively impact the lives of individuals subjected to them. The spirit of African Americans is truly damaged by the effects of discriminations. Even seemingly insignificant behaviors, such as the use of racial slurs and perpetuating stereotypes, can lead to a decline in their self-esteem and sense of personal value. These covert forms of prejudice can prove to be just as harmful as more blatant acts of discrimination, with lasting consequences. Frequently encountering racist messages directly or indirectly can become overwhelming and create a detrimental impact on the mental well-being of African Americans. It can cause them to experience a range of

negative emotions such as inferiority, shame, and self-doubt. Adopting these messages and starting to believe in their validity can worsen the situation and lead to the development of a negative self-image. As a result, African Americans might begin to believe that they are less intelligent, less attractive, or less deserving than their white counterparts, which can hinder their personal growth and limit their potential.

Also, experiencing any kind of racism and discrimination acts can have a significant impact on not only one's personal life but on many other levels, such as career aspirations, relationships, and mental health. African Americans particularly may struggle with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem due to the trauma and stress caused by racism. These negative effects can manifest in various areas of life, leading to a low quality of life.

Generally speaking, racism has a deep impact on the sense of self-worth and self-esteem of African Americans. It is a pervasive issue that has deep historical roots and contemporary manifestations.

1.2.The ways in which racism has historically denied African American access to their own cultural identity

One of the most detrimental consequences of racism is the loss of an individual's identity. Being an African American in the USA, facing the continuous racism present in the nation can pose significant challenges. Although Black Americans made attempts to assimilate into the dominant culture, they faced difficulties in both fitting in and gaining acceptance.

During slavery, the African population was displaced from their land due to the transatlantic slave trade. As slaveholders sought to erase their cultural backgrounds, as they boarded slave ships, the slave-owners stripped the blacks of their clothes and belongings. The

only possessions the enslaved individuals carried were the recollections in their minds, such as traditions, convictions, melodies, narratives and dialect. The slaves held captive on the ship were a diverse assortment, consisting of individuals from various cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Various ethnic groups have distinct languages. Plantation owners aimed to introduce ethnic variety among slaves as a strategy to create division and thwart any potential rebellions against them. Slave-owners attempted to eliminate the African identity of their slaves; for example, African names were prohibited for slaves and replaced with new names of American origin. Moreover, the various ideologies and ethnic traditions were discouraged among the slaves during the slave era. in order to rob black people of their cultural identity and integrate them into the American one.

After the slavery was abolished, racism continued to deny the cultural identity of African Americans. The formation of Jim Crow laws can be traced back to the year 1865, just after the 13th Amendment was passed, effectively ending slavery in America. The Jim Crow laws constituted a series of region-specific regulations that legitimized discrimination on the basis of race. The laws, which were in place for nearly a century, from the aftermath of the Civil War until 1968, were named after a character from a Black minstrel show. These laws were designed to exclude African Americans from the chance to vote, pursue employment, education or any other avenues of advancement and progress. Individuals who dared to challenge Jim Crow laws were frequently met with legal punishment, financial penalties, imprisonment, and physical aggression.

Additionally, Cultural appropriation is utilizing or taking something from another culture without giving appropriate acknowledgment or regard to that culture. This was one of the ways that prejudice has dragged African Americans out of their culture and personality. The Americans utilized to incorporate: traditions, clothing, cosmetics, thoughts,

craftsmanship, music, and dialect in their claim culture, which they took from the African Americans.

In spite of the African Americans' endeavors to ensure and embrace their own culture and character, but the prejudice was an impediment to reach this crave.

1.3.The ongoing struggle for African American to define themselves in the face of a society that often devalues and erases their experience

The African American experience is one that has been marked by struggle and resistance. From slavery to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter, African Americans have fought for their right to exist and be recognized as fully human in a society that has historically denied them this recognition.

Despite the ongoing difficulties they have encountered, African Americans still face obstacles in attempting to shape their identity and make sense of their lives. It can be challenging for them to establish their identity and make their mark in a society that often erases or devalues the contributions and accomplishments of black people. This hardship to establish a sense of self came from the abstraction of black history; the stories of black people are regularly omitted from educational textbooks or confined to a brief mention instead of affording them the comprehensive study and respect that is necessary. This act of erasure had affected how individuals within this community perceive themselves and their position in relation to the world around them. If the historical story of a group is not given importance or is reduced, their individual experiences and contributions can seem undervalued and unimportant.

Another challenge that African American face which is the great amount of stereotypes and misleading information that are spread from the beginning of slavery era to

contemporary days through popular culture. These stereotypes portray black people as one-dimensional who lack the complexity and diversity of their experiences. The harmful impact of stereotypes is further intensified when African Americans internalize these beliefs. Being constantly exposed to negative or limiting portrayals of themselves can make it challenging for them to envision themselves in a more positive or diverse way. As a result, it can contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle of limited beliefs and low expectations.

One important component of this issue is how these people's experiences are impacted not just by their ethnicity, but also by the intersectionality of their identities. A variety of factors influence black people's experiences and perceptions, including their gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It is crucial to consider these aspects in order to have a more complete picture of the African American experience. The concept of intersectionality might make it more difficult for people of African origin to express themselves confidently and establish a position in society. It is possible that they encounter prejudice not only due to their ethnicity, but also because of their gender, sexual orientation, or financial situation. This extra issue can create more challenges for them.

Although African Americans have faced several challenges throughout history, they have consistently demonstrated resilience and determination in the face of oppression. A remarkable example of their resistance and empowerment is the Underground Railroad, which provided a means of escape for enslaved people seeking freedom. Additionally, groups such as the Black Panther Party aimed to combat systemic racism and inequality through community activism and education. In the realm of arts and culture, influential figures such as Toni Morrison and Kendrick Lamar have contributed to the reclamation of Black narratives and identities. Through these and other means, black people have carved out spaces in which to define and celebrate themselves on their own terms. The act of resisting and feeling

empowered holds immense importance in the continuous battle for African Americans to establish their identity. Through the assertion of their unique voices and experiences, they not only contest the prevailing narrative but also pave the way for fresh opportunities for themselves and the coming generations.

The ongoing struggle for African Americans to define themselves is one that has been marked by both challenges and triumphs. From erasure and stereotypes to intersectionality and resistance, black people have faced numerous obstacles in asserting their identity and claiming their place in the world. Despite these challenges, however, African Americans continue to resist and empower themselves, creating new narratives and possibilities for themselves and future generations. The struggle is ongoing, but so too is the hope and determination of African Americans to define themselves on their own terms.

2. The rejection of dominant culture and embrace of black identity by Morrison protagonist

2.1. Morrison characters rejection of dominant white culture and its standards of beauty and worth

The notion of visual appeal is a product of social conditioning where the prevailing culture reinforces its own standards, perpetuating limited beauty ideals that prioritize whiteness and affluence. Hence, individuals of African descent are often perceived as the least attractive and most economically disadvantaged. Black women face a challenge where they aspire to achieve both beauty and a new social status which aligns with that race or class.

Morrison effectively conveyed the notion of rejecting the beauty standards set by white dominant culture through her portrayals of Claudia MacTeer and Baby Suggs in *The*

Bluest Eye and Beloved respectively. Black pride and the need to boost self-esteem among the black community were strongly emphasized in these characters.

Claudia MacTeer, is a character in the book "The Bluest Eye", is the initial narrator of the story, uniquely distinct from her companions Pecola and Frieda. She expresses her refusal to conform to the societal norms of valuing white beauty through multiple scenes. In the first chapter, Claudia had a strong aversion towards Pecola's fondness for drinking milk from a Shirley Temple cup. Although her older sister and Pecola found the whiteness of milk and a white doll captivating, Claudia expressed her preference for Jane Withers, indicating her disinterest in the former. *"I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley"*. Page17. She stated: *"Younger than both Frieda and Pecola, I had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her.page17*. Claudia acknowledges her younger age compared to her sister and Pecola, and thus finds it difficult to believe in the notion of white beauty being superior. During the Christmas holiday, the girl's parents presented her with a gift *"The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll."* Page18. This, unfortunately, did not receive her affection, as she was inclined to dismantle it_ according to her statement "I could not love it??"Page 19, and dismember it *"But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable"* page 19. Claudia declines the presents and instead values the valuable time spent with her parents that she treasures. *"I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone."* *The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward"* page20.

In the other hand, the character Baby Suggs in beloved clarified the rejection of white culture and its values, when she invited black people to love and accept themselves as black

people when she stated that *"in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard And O my people they do not love your hands.....Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them,pat them together,.....they don't love your mouth. You got to love it....So love your neck;put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, darkliver--love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet.....love your heart...."* (Beloved, page 113).

To sum up, advocating for particular beauty norms can have negative consequences, as it may result in individuals rejecting their unique identities and personal attributes. This is especially true for black women, who have already suffered from such beliefs.

2.2. The Celebration Of African American Culture, History, And Identity In Morrison's Works

Toni Morrison is a widely recognized author who has made major contributions to the world of literature. Her works are remarked for the exploration of African American culture, history, and identity. Morrison discusses the lives of African Americans in her novels, shedding light on the struggles they have experienced throughout history.

Her book *Beloved*, for example, is notable for its study of African American culture. The story follows Sethe, a former slave who is haunted by her past. Through Sethe's experiences, Morrison explores the trauma that many African Americans faced during slavery and its aftermath. Additionally, the story highlights the significance of community and family in African American culture.

In addition to exploring African American culture, Morrison's works also emphasize the importance of history. Her novels often delve into the past, examining how historical events have shaped the experiences of African Americans today. By doing so, Morrison sheds light on the ongoing impact of slavery, racism, and other forms of oppression. One example of this can be seen in her novel *Beloved*, which is historically accurate and is based on a real slave experience and *The Bluest Eye* that dealt with the negative outcomes of racism and white beauty standards, which was also historically accurate.

Another repeated theme in Morrison's works is identity and self-discovery. Her novels often feature characters who are struggling to come to terms with their past and find their place in the world. Through these characters, Morrison explores the complexities of African American identity and the challenges of being a part of a society that is often aggressive to people of color. An example of this can be seen in her novel *The Bluest Eye*. The book tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl who longs for blue eyes, believing that they will make her beautiful and accepted by society. Through Pecola's experiences, Morrison explores the damaging effects of racism and colorism on African American identity. The novel also highlights the importance of self-love and acceptance in the face of societal pressure.

Toni Morrison's writings have had a profound impact on African American literature. Her novels have received praises from critics for their appealing storytelling, carefully developed characters, and insightful explorations of African American culture and history. And In addition to her impact on literature, Toni Morrison has also made significant contributions to American culture more broadly. She has been recognized for her support for the marginalized communities and her efforts to promote diversity in all areas of society. Her

legacy continues to inspire new generations of writers to explore the experiences of African American identity and history in their own works.

In brief, Toni Morrison's works serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of celebrating African American culture, history, and identity. Through her novels, Morrison has shed light on the struggles and achievements of African Americans throughout history, highlighting the ongoing impact of racism, slavery, and other forms of oppression.

2.3. The Importance Of Valuing And Centering African American Experiences And Voices In Literature And Society

For a long time, African American experiences and voices have been silenced in both society and literature, which lead to a limited understanding of the African American experience and a lack of empathy towards their struggles.

Literature is a major part of any culture, for it portrays the diverse experiences and points of view of its people. Through literature, individuals voices are heard, and they are given an opportunity to express themselves. so when African American literature is prioritized and is made a crucial focus, it will provide more deep comprehension of their experiences and obstacles. Through this understanding, readers can enhance their empathy and take more significant strides towards social progress and change.

Beside literature, the representation of African Americans in texts and media has been too limited. When their experiences and perspectives are not revealed through such means, it tends to promote the belief that their voices and stories are not worth acknowledging or giving importance to. The absence of accurate and diverse representation can lead to more overlooking and erasure of their culture and history. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the importance of representation in both literature and media,

In order to value the African American experiences in society, it is important to Create a more comprehensive program of education by concentrating more spotlight and attention on African Americans' perspectives and experiences. We can create a more accurate picture of history and better understanding of the diverse cultural environment by bringing African American voices to the light. Individuals may get a more thorough understanding of the beneficial effect that African Americans have had on American society throughout history by following this method. Furthermore, this might build a greater feeling of appreciation for the challenges they endured and conquered on their way to advancement and achievement.

Prioritizing the experiences and voices of African Americans is essential to establishing social justice. This approach aids in the understanding of systemic racism and inequality while also taking constructive actions to address them. This means creating more opportunities for African Americans to share their thoughts and perspectives with a wider audience therefore Emphasizing African American perspectives and experiences promotes a more just and equitable society, allowing for greater recognition of the community's unique challenges.

In conclusion, Valuing and centering African American experiences and voices is not only important for African Americans but for society as a whole. It allows people to gain a deeper empathy and understanding for each other and work towards a more just and equitable future.

3. The importance of self-acceptance and the pursuit of an authentic identity

3.1. The necessity of self-acceptance and love in the face of racism and trauma

To achieve optimum health and happiness, it is essential to acknowledge and appreciate oneself through self-love and self-acceptance. These characteristics have a

significant impact on overall health, including physical, mental, and emotional well-being. If the individuals reject who they are, they disconnect themselves from the vital force that supports existence. There is a gradual disconnection from the life force that takes place over time. Consequently, this results in severe health concerns.

Individuals who belong to racial or ethnic groups that have been historically excluded and oppressed by those in positions of authority have a distinct and contrasting perspective on life compared to those who have never experienced marginalization. The racism and discrimination they encountered resulted in a more profound mental health strain compared to that of others. The racism contributes to trauma which has a significant impact on mental health. So, the trauma draws a clear line to mental disorders that should not be overlooked and it requires a significant attention. In light of historical racism, black individuals were plagued by feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, ultimately causing them to seek ways to conform rather than embrace their true selves.

Monique Rodrigues do Prado; a Brazilian lawyer of African descent; has explained the potential of love as a means of promoting Black liberation and envisioning a future devoid of the remnants of slavery, the enslavement of Africans, and colonialism. she stated that ***“Love as a political, active, daily, guiding and ethical action, capable of overcoming the imagery, aesthetics and language barriers that the patriarchal, colonial, imperial and capitalist model that has, unfortunately, affected our affective experiences,”*** the self-love process, is acquired the need to explore what parts of self that are not willing to accept. Loving one's self is all about accepting the self-100%. This is only possible when the individuals stop judging themselves. Self-love holds great significance in confronting trauma and discrimination, as it enables individuals to acknowledge their imperfections while living in a society that oppresses them based on race, ethnicity, and skin color. Individuals who possess a deep sense of self-love are inclined to experience contentment in all aspects of their existence. According

to Wendy G.'s in her article titled "The importance of Self-love" , individuals who engage in self-love have a higher level of contentment in their lives. Valuing oneself is a key factor in valuing all occurrences and aspects of life. Wendy G. The importance of self-love(2017).

The act of accepting oneself along with all the personality traits, be they favorable or unfavorable, is called self-acceptance. This incorporates both the physiological and psychological characteristics. To put it in different terms, self-acceptance entails acknowledging that an individual's worth extends beyond their individual traits and behaviors. At times, this is referred to as complete self-acknowledgment. Embracing oneself leads to increased self-assurance and decreases susceptibility to disapproval. To fully embrace and acknowledge every part of oneself without any reservations or conditions is the essence of this concept. In order to attain self-approval, one must be willing to acknowledge and embrace all facets of themselves, even those that are perceived as unfavorable or unappealing. Recognizing and rejoicing in positive attributes and accomplishments is equally significant. When a person reviews their goals and the progress they've made towards them, it serves as a reminder of their personal strengths. The reason behind the struggle for self-acceptance among numerous black individuals is apparent. They had a tendency to conceal, disregard, and discard aspects of themselves that they deemed unsatisfactory. They prefer to make alterations instead of embracing them.

Being able to acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses and finding a way to resolve any internal conflicts is vital for one's personal well-being and joy. Furthermore, without addressing the inner world, significant achievements in the external world are unattainable. Eventually, loving and accepting self is important in facing racism and trauma.

3.2. The Importance Of Defining Oneself On One's Own Terms, Rather Than Accepting Dominant Cultural Norms

Defining oneself on one's own terms is important for personal growth and development. It means creating a unique identity that is not influenced by dominant cultural norms or social expectations. This allows individuals to live a life that is authentic to their true selves, rather than conforming to external pressures.

Dominant cultural norms refer to the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are widely accepted and practiced in a society. These norms can influence the way individuals think, act, and perceive themselves and others. For example, in some cultures, beauty is measured by specific features like hair type, skin color and body shape, while in others; it is measured by the spirit of the person. These social norms have a great impact that can lead to a situation when individuals prioritize fitting in and pleasing others over their own needs and desires. It can also create a sense of isolation and disconnection from one's true self.

The importance of defining oneself on one's own terms lies in the authenticity and comfort of it; it allows individuals to live a life that is true to them. This can lead to greater self-awareness, self-acceptance, and higher self-esteem. People who define themselves on their own terms are more resilient, adaptable, and successful in achieving their goals. They also have stronger relationships and a greater sense of purpose in life, because they're not stopped by the stress that comes from not fitting in.

In short, defining oneself on one's own terms is not an easy process. It requires strength, self-reflection, and the ability to challenge societal expectations. Some of the challenges that come with this process include social rejection, criticism, and feelings of isolation. However, it is important to remember that it comes with greater results that bring more prosperity and mental wellbeing.

3.3. The Role of Literature and Art in Promoting Self-Acceptance And The Pursuit Of An Authentic Identity

Art can inspire us to embrace our authentic selves by presenting diverse perspectives and challenging societal norms. Artists have the potential to connect with us on a deep emotional level and motivate us to explore our own identities, whether via visual art, writing, music, or performance. Some forms of art that have been used to promote self-acceptance and identity exploration include music, poetry, novels, and performances. These art forms challenge traditional notions of beauty and gender roles, urging viewers to accept their individual identities.

Literature is a form of art; it is a powerful tool that helps to understand different worlds and perspectives and to live numerous experiences through just reading about them, it also allows exploring the identities and voices of various individuals. Books can serve as mirrors, reflecting people's experiences back and helping them feel seen and understood.

Some African American books have discussed self-reflection and identity and made a significant impact such as "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker, "Their Eyes Were Watching God" by Zora Neale Hurston, and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou. These works have all helped readers explore themes of identity, self-acceptance, and authenticity.

Embracing one's authentic self can be a difficult task because it comes with social pressure and rejection, but fortunately, literature and art exist to provide the needed motivation and push to overcome these challenges. Arts take the approach of seeking out diverse perspectives, connecting with supportive communities, and leading to self-acceptance.

By prioritizing our own well-being and surrounding ourselves with positive influences, we can more easily navigate the journey of self-discovery.

In conclusion, literature and art are important in encouraging self-acceptance and the pursuit of an authentic identity. Individuals can better understand themselves and people around them by learning different points of views and questioning cultural norms.

Conclusion

In a society that is inclined to classify and compartmentalize individuals, it is important to embark on a voyage of self-awareness and redefine one's personal identity beyond the imposed limitations of societal norms.

To tap into the potency of genuine connections, personal development, and authenticity, it is important to embrace one's psychological identity. The aim is to create a world that values diversity and allows people to establish their own identities with confidence, embracing their uniqueness and staying true to who they are.

The principle of embracing one's identity is of utmost importance for African Americans in America, as it serves as tangible proof of their existence in a country that has historically tried to erase their African roots.

General conclusion:

With the beginning of human exploration of other regions, the Europeans embarked on exploratory missions to new territories, when they encountered the inhabitants of Africa and noted significant differences between the Africans and themselves. From the sixteenth century, Europeans developed ambitions to colonize and utilize the American continent, leading to the establishment of the slave trade for labor purposes. Subsequently, following their emancipation from the Church, Europeans started to adopt unconventional notions regarding human beings. One of the notions includes the belief that their skin color, which was unfamiliar to them, makes them superior to the African race.

A great deal of effort has been put forth by Black individuals to attain fairness, which is merely a single entitlement, in the face of prejudice aimed at their race. The focus of their specific battle is centralized in Europe and America. To stand in opposition to individuals who identify as part of the white ethnicity. They utilized various methods to articulate their concerns and demand fair treatment as human being.

Black individuals utilized literature as a means to depict their experiences of segregation and racism and to maintain their distinct cultural identity. According to them African literary works serve as a platform to discover one's roots and assimilate into African customs and practices, while also delving into individual identity and cultural association.

The emergence of various Black writers, both men and women who have taken a keen interest in writing about the frequent intersection of this topic with their own experiences as black women like the Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker, is attributed to literature being the tribune for Black history representation and the demand for acceptance and acknowledgment of their roots and individuality.

In the United States, Black women were the first to utilize Black feminist viewpoints to comprehend the intersection of white supremacy and patriarchy and to enlighten the experiences of enslaved Black women. Black women who are both intellectuals and activists have established groups that recognize the unique perspective of black feminists, who view the experiences of Black women as a catalyst for comprehending the relationship between sexism, class discrimination, and racism. Black Feminism argues that the unique experiences of Black women cannot be simplified to what it means to be black or female alone, but instead must be analyzed through the intersection of various forms of discrimination. This concept, known as intersectionality, recognizes that being Black and being a woman each have their own independent significance, but also acknowledges that these identities are intertwined and can strengthen each other.

Toni Morrison introduces her debut novel, "*The Bluest Eye*," with a discreet admission "quiet as it kept" that the story contains concealed sorrows of the protagonist, an innocent child born into the struggles of black lives, endures numerous hardships including racial discrimination, conformity to femininity, and sporadic exposure to danger. Upon its publication, the novel was highly acclaimed and commended, given that it was regarded as one of the author's most eminent pieces of literature. The reason for this is that the content highlighted a conversation regarding the severe racial repercussions that occurred in the United States, specifically in Lorraine, Ohio - the writer's hometown. The story revolves around an American girl's experiences during the aftermath of the economic crisis known as the Great Depression or the Great Collapse. The narration is set in the mid-1900s by the storyteller. The novel thoroughly addresses the themes of racism, intimidation, scorn, and derision, all of which Pecola endures in a calculated manner due to her conduct and dark complexion. Consequently, she develops an inferiority complex that intensifies her yearning

for blue eyes, which she thinks can assimilate her to individuals with white skin. The novel was written in first person narration.

Toni Morrison's novel "*Beloved*" tackles racism and is based on the experience of an African American slave named Margaret Garner. Despite earning critical acclaim and a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988, the novel faced criticism from certain school boards and writers due to its depiction of violence and sexual content. Nonetheless, it remains a part of the canon of 100 best literary works of all time. The novel "*Beloved*" recounts the harrowing story of Sethe, an African American woman, and her children who fled from racial oppression in the American South. However, their escape was cut short when a group of men arrived after 28 days to capture and return them under the 1850 Slavery Act. Under this law, slave owners had the authority to pursue runaway slaves beyond the borders of the country. In desperation, Sethe felt compelled to make a heart-wrenching decision and chose to kill her two-year-old daughter rather than allow them to be taken back to Sweet Home, the dreaded plantation they had fled from. *Beloved* demonstrates the significant damage slavery inflicts and its detrimental effects on one's psyche. The story's emotional and impactful parts are narrated through different perspectives, and the dialogues are presented in a sporadic and enigmatic manner that adds to the charm of the characters.

As social beings, humans possess an innate desire to be admired, esteemed, and embraced by those around them. At times, the desire for approval is so great that individuals are motivated to modify their actions. This is a common occurrence every day in various settings such as work, school, and the environment. Individuals who do not align with the dominant group often face the pressure to present an inauthentic self in order to assimilate. This can make it difficult for them to establish a sense of belonging. All people, irrespective of their identity, yearn for a primordial sensation of belonging. It surpasses boundaries of geography, age, and genetic makeup. If individuals acknowledge that they are not alone in

their pursuit of fitting in, it allows them to possess more compassion - compassion for both themselves and others. By nurturing empathy towards oneself, an individual can gently and compassionately eliminate any ingrained biases and expand their self-acceptance and affection.

Ultimately, this research revealed two significant findings regarding the manifestation of prejudice towards African-Americans in Morrison's novels "*The Bluest Eye*" and "*Beloved*". This paper affirms that racism leads to self-effacement in "*The Bluest Eye*". Our study focused on the effects of a racist environment on black individuals and women, resulting in a loss of self-worth and identity, and efforts to conform to the dominant culture's norms in order to gain acceptance. Furthermore, in the novel "*Beloved*", we analyzed how trauma affected female characters to the point where they attempted to erase their identity and reject their own sense of self while coping with the aftermath of their experiences. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the significance of addressing racism and embracing one's identity. In doing so, we tackled the effects of racism on identity formation and stressed the crucial role of self-acceptance and love in challenging racism and prejudice.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage Classics, 2007.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. Vintage, 1999.

Secondary sources

Books

Alan Watson, “*A Slave’s Marriage: Dowry or Deposit*”, Journal of Legal History, vol. 12, 1991

Allain, Jean (ed.). *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*.

Bailey, T.-K.M., Williams, W. S., & Favors, B. *Internalized racial oppression in the African American community*. (2014).

Banks I. *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women’s Consciousness*. New York and London: New York University Press; 2000.

Barrow, Robin and Geoffery Milburn. *A Critical Dictionary of Education Concepts*. 2 nd edition. New

Cambridge dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slavery>) & “The Legal Definition of Slavery into the Twenty-First Century”.

David & Derthick, 2014,

Dr H. J. Nieboer *Slavery as an Industrial System*. 1910

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

E. J. R. David (Ed.), *Internalized oppression: The psychology of marginalized groups*). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Erikson, E. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1968.

FATH DAVIS RUFFINS *Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts .*
1820-1990

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Penguin Books, 1963

Hooks, bell. 'Black Feminism: Historical Perspective' in *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of African American Literary Tradition*. Liggins Hills et al. (eds). Boston: Houghton Miffling Company 1998.

Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanist: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 2nd rev. ed. Troy: Bedford: 1994

Katherine Driscoll Coon, *A Rip in the Tent: Teaching African American Literature* " from M. Graham, Routledge *Teaching African American Literature* 1998

Michele Antoinette Paludi (Feminism and Women's Rights Worldwide)2010

Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, *Mwanamke Mwananchi (The Nationalist*

paul .c rosenblatt *The impact of racism on African families: Literature as Social Science* :2014

Susan Willis BOOK: *SPECIFYING BLACK WOMEN WRITING*. 1989

Valerie Sweeney Prince *Burnin' Down the House: Home in African American Literature* ,
Columbia University Press, 2005.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1983.

Woman) (Newark, New Jersey: Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, c. 1971),

yaba blay *One drop : Shifting the Lens on Race*

York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990

Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from Around the World*
Greenwood Press, 1996

Articles

Briann Avery University of Mississippi , *Stereotypes And The Self-Perceptions Of Black Women:*
How Places And Identity Strategies Matter

Dr. Channon Miller, Li Khalia, and V Dozier. “*The Black Present and Presence.*” University

Dr. Mark Anthony Neal. “*Way Out of No Way.*” John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University

Dr. Madhumita Purkayastha *Foregrounding ‘Her’stories : Black Women’s Literary Movement*

JOURNAL ARTICLE *A Black Feminist Statement The Combahee River Collective*

Lori L. Tharps , Section A, Page 25 of the New York edition with the headline: *The Case for Black With a Capital B* Nov. 19, 2014 of San Diego.

Petra A. Robinson *Critical media literacy and Black female identity construction: A conceptual framework for empowerment, equity, and social justice in education*

Politics of oppression. Political Psychology, 17, 127–148. doi:10.2307/3791946

Prilleltensky, I., & Gonick, L. (1996). *Politics change, oppression remains: On the psychology and politics of oppression*

Richard J. Daley Library, 801 S. Morgan St., Chicago, IL 60607 *National Black Feminist Organization collection*

The Feminist Press at the City University of New York *Women’s Studies Quarterly* Vol. 42, No. 3/4, *SOLIDARITY (FALL/WINTER 2014)*, (10 pages)

The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Oxford, 1988.

Documentaries

From the documentary film Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am

Web articles

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS, INC.

url: <https://www.nacwc.com/history>

Black feminist future url; <https://blackfeministfuture.org/about-us/>

Timeline of women unite url:
https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/timeline/womenunite/en/index.html?gclid=CjwKCAjw8-OhBhB5EiwADyoY1TNtIpO5BIejn4XzEeXrr63al4a9vh-Aiz7eYA-p-AHb4MpqgJkhnBoCkicQAvD_BwE#/1940

A Black Feminist Statement *by* The Combahee River Collective monthly review an independent socialist magazine url: <https://monthlyreview.org/2019/01/01/a-black-feminist-statement/>

The Revolutionary Practice of Black Feminisms url:
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/revolutionary-practice-black-feminisms>

10 BLACK FEMINISTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT Posted on February 15, 2019 By [digital online](#) url: <https://now.org/blog/10-black-feminists-you-need-to-know-about/>

The Black Feminist Movement: What Is Black Feminism? By [Olivia Guy-Evans](#) Updated on April 20, 2023 url: <https://simplysociology.com/black-feminism.html>

The africanamerican policy forum url: <https://www.aapf.org/sayhername>

Black past African American history national association colored women's clubs url:
<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-association-colored-women-s-clubs-inc-1896/>

Black women radicals url: <https://www.blackwomenradicals.com/>

Personal Identity 101: How Identity Is Socially Constructed by Irina Berdzenishvili url:
<https://www.byarcadia.org/post/personal-identity-101-how-is-identity-socially-constructed>

Black women in art and literature by: history.com editors updated: august 21, 2018 | original:
january 28, 2010, History, url: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-women-in-art-and-literature>

National park service, Jim Crow Laws,url:
https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/jim_crow_laws.htm

Psychology today url:<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity>

Tutorials point erikson's identity development theory url:
<https://www.tutorialspoint.com/erikson-s-identity-development-theory>

National Museum of African American History and Culture

الملخص

توني موريسون كاتبة أمريكية شهيرة من أصل أفريقي معروفة بتصويرها للمعاناة للأمريكيين السود المستمرة عبر التاريخ. تستكشف أعمالها مثل العيون الأكثر زرقة 1970 و المحبوبة 1987 ، موضوعات التمييز العنصري ، والنسوية ، والهوية ، وتأثير العنصرية على شعور الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي بذاتهم. تروي العيون الأكثر زرقة قصة عقدة النقص لدى فتاة أمريكية من أصل أفريقي وتدني احتراماتها بسبب لون بشرتها وعينيها. تكشف الرواية عن هيمنة البيض على مواقف النساء السود تجاه جمالهن وسوادهن، فضلاً عن العنف العنصري والمنزلي ضد الفتيات السود في كلا المجتمعين. رواية المحبوبة مأخوذة عن القصة الحقيقية للعبدة الهاربة مارغريت غارنر، و التي تدور أحداثها بعد الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية وأثناء عصر التشييد. تهدف الرواية إلى تصوير العلاقة بين الماضي المؤلم كعبدة والحاضر كحرة ، خاصة بالنسبة للشخصيات النسائية. يهدف البحث إلى فحص الهوية ومحو الذات في أعمال توني موريسون واستكشاف نتائج التمييز العنصري من منظور نسوي ونفسي. يكشف التحليل أن موريسون ، ككاتبة معاصرة ، نجحت في كشف قسوة التمييز العنصري ضد السود والعواقب النفسية التي تلت ذلك. تُظهر العيون الأكثر زرقة و المحبوبة أن العنصرية والعبودية والتمييز على أساس الجنس أثرت على كل شخصية جسدياً ونفسياً وروحياً.

.الكلمات المفتاحية : محو الذات، النسوية، التمييز العنصري، الاستعباد، الصدمة النفسية، ، كره الذات