

Tribhuvan University

Black Aesthetics in August Wilson *The Piano Lesson*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of
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for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

Rosy Subedi

T.U. Regd. No: 6-2-205-66-2008/2069

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled,

“Black Aesthetics in August Wilson *The Piano Lesson*”

To my original work carried out as a Master’s student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus excepted to the extent that assistance from others in the thesis’s design and conception or in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged.

All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no material with to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis paper.

Rosy Subedi

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Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Letter of Approval

This Thesis Entitled “Black Aesthetics in August Wilson *The Piano Lesson*”
Submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Ms. Rosy
Subedi, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

.....

Rishiram Ghimire

Supervisor

.....

External Examiner

.....

Mr. Pradip Sharma

Head

Department of English

Date:

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Abstract

The thesis is about the importance of Black art in its own way not in comparison to other cultures in the world. The research proves that if any one attempts to beautify or judge any culture or any other aspects in terms of other famous cultures, they are wrong because no culture can be compared. Black aesthetics started in the 1960s, gives justice to the original art that the Black people have their own poetics, art literature and that cannot be fully explained within the larger frameworks of European American literature. Their cultures, religion, history, relationship, and many more should not be understood from the perspective of other cultures. It is wrong to discriminate people in terms of color of people. Racism is the abuse of power holders which should be abolished. Black people who have stayed together for a long time, they are accustomed to showing white superior until they get real knowledge.

The Piano Lesson is mainly about Boy Willie and Berniece who have conflict about the historic piano. The piano is not only the musical instrument but it bears the ancestral history of the black people. The old people had decorated and designed in such a way that no other cultures have such uniqueness. In the beginning, Willie does not understand its importance. Thus, Willie wants to sell it against Berniece's desire. There are many people's souls attached with the piano. Berniece thinks that selling the piano would be the same as selling their souls. She is determined to save it at any cost. At last, Willie agrees with his sister and he goes to Mississippi warning his sister not to give up playing the piano. The piano, therefore, is a symbol for black people that they have distinct culture from the white people.

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Introduction: August Wilson and his Black Consciousness

The research deals with the black aesthetics as a theoretical tool that focuses on the work of art of black literature, which spurs the black writers, and black people who are marginalized throughout the history. *The Piano Lesson* (1987) deals with the problem of what African Americans can do best with their cultural heritage. It seems to ask the question of how best to put history to use. The Piano which is 137-year-old, is decorated and designed in the way of African sculpture. The main characters of the play are Boy Willie and his sister, Berniece. Boy Willie came from South to visit Berniece who is living in north with her uncle Doaker for three years. Willie has been serving a sentence on the Parchman Prison Farm. Willie wants to sell the family piano that has been in family for generations but his sister Berniece rejects the offer because the antique piano is covered with incredible carving, detailing the family's rise from slavery. August Wilson once said in his interview, "My generation of blacks knew very little about the part of our parents. They shielded us from the indignities they suffered" (Interview on New York times by Heard Elizabeth). He saw this as a problem. Wilson felt that it is very important for African American to be aware of their past, even if many parts of it were filled with struggle. *The Piano Lesson* expresses the idea that African Americans must embrace their history and their roots. This particular play highlights the dynamics of black aesthetics and emphasizes the social values of black people.

Black aesthetics focuses on the power, beauty, and system of the black people who are important in their own way. They have their cultures, religion, history, relationship, and so on that should not be understood from the perspective of other cultures such as white people. In the beginning, most of the characters' ideas are guided by the white systems, as they are likely to compare themselves to others.

Eventually, they realize that they should promote their own cultures instead of following others.

African American studies began only in the late 1960s, as many writers realized that the black people's history, culture, language, systems were different from the whites. Against the inclusion or negligence of black people, critics have started to think that black people should be studied differently from the white people. Before the period, black people would be studied only under the history of white people. Tyson says "The virtual exclusion of African American history and culture from American education, which began to be addressed only in the late 1960s, reflects the virtual exclusion of African American history and culture from official versions of American history before that time" (360). Tyson argues that only over the past few decades have American history books begun to include information about black Americans that had been repressed in order to maintain the cultural hegemony, or dominance, of white America. Likewise, Wilfred Samuels says "Black Aesthetic is a movement representing the production of African-American artistic expression" (46). He reveals that this movement represents the attempt to formulate theories to govern the production of African-American artistic expression in relation to the evolving nature of black life in the United States in the aftermath of the organized movement for civil rights in the 1960s. Thus, black people started thinking about their importance after the civil rights movement regarding themselves as a part of literature. They started believing that their literary creation is no less that of whites and hence, it should be promoted and represented in the mainstream literary canon.

The play presents the cultural and historical importance of the piano to the Charles family and ideology of black aesthetics related to it. While Boy Willie is extremely eager to sell the piano to buy his own land in the South, Berniece opposes

his idea expressing the high cultural values associated with the piano. Berniece in the play tells her brother that there is no way she is selling the piano. She says, “Money can’t buy what the piano cost. You can’t sell your soul for money. It won’t go with the buyer. It’ll shrivel and shrink” (1.2.50). Berniece feels that it is almost sacrilegious to sell the piano, since so much of their family history is wrapped in it.

Many critics have commented on the play in various ways. Charles Isherwood argues that the play portrays the family history and it is able to connect many generations. In the slavery time, Charles families were owned by a white fellow named Robert Sutter. Boy Willie and Berniece’s grandfather and great grandmother were traded by Sutter during the slavery time for the sake of the piano. As the time passed, Boy Willie’s father was so obsessed for the ownership of piano that he died over it while stealing it from Shutter’s house. After his father’s death the piano came in the ownership of his mother, Mom Ola, who preserved it with great value and care for 17 long years. According to Isherwood:

Among the most resonant symbols in Wilson’s work, the piano is covered in intricate carvings depicting the family history. They were made by the great-grandfather of Boy Willie and Berniece, a slave in the home of the family that once owned it. Suffering is literally engraved into the piano. As Berniece recalls with sorrow, their mother polished it for 17 years with her blood and tears after their father died in the process of acquiring it. (2)

Hence, the piano is not only presented as a common musical instrument but rather a symbol of the heritage that has witnessed the slavery period and suffering of many generations of Charles family. The piano symbolizes the history and the memory of being slave in the hands of white people.

Similarly, Tom Williams argues that Boy Willie wants to come out of the past troublesome life. Williams poses:

Boy Willie wants to break from the past by forging a new life through the freedom of land ownership. He wishes to get rid of the family piano that is so problematically entangled with his family's history of enslavement. He wants to buy land, farm it and earn his own living. He want to own the tract of land on which his ancestors were bound as human property. (3)

Boy Willie strongly believes that the best use of the piano would be to sell it and invest in the land so that he could earn something for living. He states that "If my daddy had seen where he could have traded that piano in for some land of his own, it wouldn't be sitting up here now" (1.2.51). He believes that if his father was alive, even he would have traded the piano for the sake of the land.

Moreover, Cigdom Usekes postulates that wealth has given power to white people. She says "Wilson's emphasis on how property or capital bestows power on whites in American society so that they can make decisions which determine the course of other people's lives and, in so doing, often disrupt and destroy those lives for their own economic survival" (88). Usekes states that with the power of wealth and property, Whites have manipulated the social system that would suppress the blacks and have succeeded in using it to their benefit. Thus, Usekes believes that there is discrepancy between White and black people due to economic condition.

In the play, the piano has great significance in the family history. It is the mixture of blood and tears. Apparently it is an object but it is very old and many generations are associated with it. Felica Hardison Londre argues:

With the first three generations represented in the carving on the piano

,that piano stands as an objective correlative of a family history marked by blood and tears. Maretha practices on the piano everyday yet knows nothing of its story. The images carved on it must be supplemented by the words of the storyteller in order for those carved portraits to become meaningful. The family history recorded on the piano is incomplete. Objectively, one must admit that as a permanent record of family history the piano's importance is minimal. (115)

The above argument from Londre tries to justify that the piano had a great important historical evidence for the Charles family. However, in later times it got a minimal importance as Marietha, daughter of Bernice who plays the piano daily, knows nothing about the history of it. The piano that carried such a strong historical significance and evidences associated with the Charles family, the knowledge and history associated with it should be transferred from generation to generation.

In the play, Wilson takes a historical and cultural approach of African American by talking about the spirits and ghosts. Wilson is reflecting a key element of the African American cosmology. African American culture has been associated with ghost and ghost stories. In the play, Boy Willie believes that Sutter had been killed by the Ghost of Yellow Dog. He says, "The Ghost of Yellow Dog got Sutter" (1.1.15). Similarly, Berniece, Doaker and Maretha are continuously haunted by the ghost of Sutter. Wilson vividly weaves the myth and folkore of the South including the belief in spirit and ghosts. The profusion of ghost reveals folk and African mystical traditions. Similarly, Wilson presents the other important African practice in the play, i.e. storytelling. As African people were deprived of formal education and literary skills they relied upon storytelling to remember their heritage. In the play, Doaker narrates the story in which he reveals the importance of the piano, and he is

shown to be the family member who still honors his ancestors' culture and spirits by telling the story. Likewise, Boy Willie in the end begins to teach Maretha her family stories. He believes that if she knows and celebrates her family history, it will give her confidence to face with the outer world. He says, "If she knew about her history, she wouldn't have no problem in life. She could walk around here with her head held high. She would know where she is in the world" (2.5.91).

Wilson, in the drama, essentially projects the value of black history by the means of piano. Like most of the Wilson's plays *The Piano Lesson* also explores the legacy of slavery and the roots of American racism. In the play, Doaker says, "Boy Willie, the piano was the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it...he had us. Say we was still in slavery" (1.2.45). Wilson tries to argue that as the piano had the family's history carved in it, as long as it was in Sutters' possession, Doaker felt like they were all still slaves.

Conversely, Frank Rich, discusses the piano's symbolism in detail and addresses the piano as a beautiful but a painful heritage. He states:

"Sculptured into its rich wood are totemic human figures whose knifedrawn features suggest both the pride of African culture and the grotesque scars of slavery". "The siblings at center stage" inherit both "the pride and scarce", and the piano is their key to their reconciliation with their family history and their identity as African-Americans. (C 13)

Rich relates the sculptures carved into the piano with the pride of the African culture on one hand and also relates it with the large scars that slavery has provided to the African people on the other. He justifies that the dominance of black people from white people are strongly visible as he compares the carvings on the piano with the

scars that white people have given to the blacks.

Therefore, *The Piano Lesson* deals with the various aspects of black people who are dominated by white people. African American have their own culture, tradition , poetics and literature that is so rich in itself that it doesn't need to be studied from the perspective of white people. blacks have their own uniqueness and that cannot be explained or contained within the larger framework of American white culture. The distinct identity of all objects in the world is decreasing due to the categorization of arts in large entity of study who/which has power. The researcher attempts to prove that the black culture should be preserved in different ways, not in the parallel line of white people.

Racism and Black Aesthetics

This section deals with the issues of racism and black aesthetics in general. Racism and black aesthetics were born in some of the most abject conditions of the American cosmologies. Racism has been a part of American society since 17th century where many of the Africans were brought to America as slaves. Since then there is a discrimination between whites and blacks where white are considered as superior and black are considered as inferior. This historical belief of racism is further explored in the black aesthetics theory. Black aesthetics, a movement which started in mid-18th century can be called a product of racism to some extent. It is a movement fundamentally concerned with the construction of a “black” identity. Black Aesthetics demands to end all the racial disparities made between blacks and whites and it promotes racial pride and ethnic coherence. It also encourages personal pride and political awareness among African Americans.

Black people are dominated and exploited by whites throughout the history. They are marginalized and considered to be less important than whites mainly on the

basis of race, color and religion. Black people are facing the issue of racism since generations. Racism refers to unequal power relations that grow from the socio-political domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices, for e.g. segregation, domination and prosecution. Racial discrimination is often based on the discrimination of color where the word discrimination denotes the denial of equality based on personal characteristics such as race and color. Discrimination is based on prejudice and stereotype, where the stereotype refers to forming instant fixed ideas of a group, usually based on false or incomplete information, and prejudice refers to the ideas that are formed without any knowledge about others. Various researchers have defined racism in various ways. Webster Dictionary defines racism as “the assumption that psych cultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to domination over others.” Further, Gretchen Gerzina defines racism as:

An active or passive response to the specious belief that genetically transmitted traits are linked to social characteristics... Racism at individual level involves a misguided personal belief that an entire racial group is deficient or superior because of a set of moral, intellectual or a cultural trait that are thought to be indicated by the group’s biological origin. (126)

Gerzina justifies that racism itself is a social construction. A child is not born a racist; rather it is a slowly learned social phenomenon through family, education, religion, law and media. It is difficult to grow up in a society without adopting the world views and biases of society. He becomes a “made” racist and subsequently perpetuate in the

same society. In the same way, Alderfer defines racism as:

There are a set of interdependent meanings for racism which includes: 1) current behavioral patterns with intellectual justifications about why one racial group is superior to another, 2) members of one racial group with more power than another group using that power to demean, subvert or destroy members of another group (217).

They state that the racism includes a wide range of behaviors and can also involve individuals or a collective system that unknowingly may encourage the suppression of another group. Likewise, Paul Gilroy, a black literary theorist, consistently argues that racial identities are historically constructed that are formed by slavery and colonization. He states that racism is not a natural phenomenon. Racial difference and racial identities is the product of the racial oppression. He says: 'Race' [is not] the eternal cause of racism [but is] its complex, unstable product. I should probably emphasize at this point that neither race nor racism are the exclusive historical property of the minorities who are their primary victims (32).

There are multiple forms of racism with which African American have to go through. Internalized racism which refers to the incorporation of racist policies and practices in the social and political institutions for e.g. federal, state and local governments, education etc. The other form of racism is internalized racism which results from the psychological programming by which a racist society indoctrinates people of color to believe in white superiority. Victims of internalized racism generally feel inferior to whites, less attractive, less capable and often wish they were white or looked whiter.

Similarly, African American often experience double consciousness or double vision, the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures: the African culture,

which grew from African roots and the American culture imposed by white Americans. W.E.B. Du Bois states:

It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One never feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it being torn asunder (26).

Du Bois describes the double consciousness as a concept of more than one social identity, which makes it difficult to develop a sense of self. Du Bois believed that African Americans lived in a society that was oppressive and devalued them as equals. At the same time, the African-American culture encouraged equality and dignity. This type of double consciousness forced the race to view themselves from the perspective of both cultures, making it difficult for them to unify their African-American subculture with their overall American identity.

In the drama, racism is presented at different scale in different timelines as the level of discrimination has changed over time. In earlier generations, blacks were kept as slaves, mistreated, physically harmed and treated as animals. After the emancipation of slaves in 1863, most of ex-slaves rented the land of whites and started working as tenants. Although this changed the level of racial behavior from the white people to certain extent, but could not be completely diminished.

In the play, the Charles families were once owned by Sutters. They worked at Sutter's land as slaves. After emancipation, they remained on the same land but became sharecroppers for the Sutters, renting the land from their former masters and working it for themselves. Finally, a part of the family migrated North to Pittsburgh,

leaving only Boy Willie behind. Boy Willie refuses to abandon the land and migrate North. Boy Willie believes that owning the land will reclaim their heritage of slavery which will alter their relationship to their family and their history. He tries to break the bond of master and slave, of owner and renter by owning the land and becoming the master of that very land where once Charles family has worked as slaves. Boy Willie strongly challenges the norms and values of whites. Though Boy Willie definitely recognizes the entire racial barrier that existed during that time he refuses to be a victim. He is determined to fight for equality, no matter what it costs him. In many ways his determination to buy Sutter's land is a quest to stand on equal footing with the white man. In one place, he says, "They treat you like you let them treat you. They mistreat me I mistreat them right back. Ain't no difference in me and the white man" (1.2.85). Similarly, Winning Boy, brother of Doaker and uncle of Boy Willie believes that there is no way you can counter whites. Whites are the law maker and they are the masters. He sees white people's control of the law as the main advantage they have over black people. He feels like it is really hard for African American to get ahead in a country where all the laws were designed by white people who know how to use them in their favor. He says, "Now that is the difference between the colored man and the white man. The colored man can't fix nothing with the law" (1.2.86).

Similarly, talking about black aesthetics, it is a study that explains how black is beautiful in its own way. Comparison between or among many entities and discovery of one fixed idea is wrong thing to judge one. It is only traditional or capitalistic view that white is beautiful and black is not. 'Black is beautiful'. This is a philosophical approach that identifies and explores the most significant issues of black life. In this context, Shirley Anne Tate argues that black beauty should not be compared to another thing, i.e. white. According to her:

Black beauty to me is – it's a tricky question. But think a really beautiful black woman or a 'mixed race' woman out of them all is the one that has the potential to be stunning. My ideas of black and beautiful I would say that they originate from my mother's side of the family also the media probably influenced it. Being at home in Jamaica, what I call home in Jamaica and also even here which has a high black population and even just within myself as well. Accepting myself as being beautiful I believe was a big step in knowing more about and having ideas on what black and beautiful are especially from childhood experiences as an example because I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. (12)

As she says, black and beauty are the experiences of human beings. They are relative phenomena. It may refer to the situation in which power holders make rules and they explain what is right or wrong. Beauty is completely subjective. The definition of beauty changes according to time and situation. Beauty cannot be explained or defined on the basis of color.

There is discrimination among people in terms of language. Language is itself a mean of communication. If it is understood, it should be acceptable but there is superior and inferior manner in language. If white people use it, it is called standard and if it is used by non-white then it's called non-standard. According to Frantz Fanon:

Language is not merely syntactical or morphological cohesion; it above all assumes cultural representation and civilization identity. A man who speaks a language not only disseminate what he means but also carries a world through his expression or implication; the mastery

over any language has to do with its immense power (17-18).

Fanon argues over the long rooted social belief of civilization due to language and denies the idea that language used by Whites' are more civilized than that of Blacks. There should not be any supremacy of a culture based on language.

Likewise, a Negro who faces the problem of language- the language he should follow and the language he chooses- is at a state where his expression and implication both become confused because he suffers from 'an inferiority complex'. Frantz Fanon writes:

Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality - finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. A colonized mind is in fear. So that he is even ready to renounce his own cultural standard. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

A negro in order to make White's happy often forgets his originality and his roots. He tries to imitate whites' tone and their speaking style as he believes whites' speaking manner is much standard than of blacks. A negro believes he can become superior if he adopts the behavior and patterns like that of whites.

If a black man uses good English or French, the people of the same race commend him. One black praises the other because "He talks like a white man" (21). Fanon writes: "Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue -a wretchedly lazy organ- he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours- desperately determined to learn diction" (21). The loss of the originality and attempts to speak the so-called superior

language (English, French, etc) is evidence of a 'dislocation'. The more Negro is educated, the more he suffers from the intensified inferiority complex and tries to struggle with it unceasingly. Professor D. Westermann writes:

The wearing of European clothes whether rags or the most up to date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements. (25)

The Negro adopts the language, which is peculiar to him for he tries to prove himself a more civilized because he is in contact with the white man. He adopts the whites' culture and values and takes Whites as their civilization teachers . The blacks feels equal to whites when they adopt white customs and manners blindly .

African American culture is rooted in the historical experience of the African American people. The culture is both distinct and enormously influential to American culture as a whole. Although, racism and slavery, greatly restricted the ability of blacks to practice their cultural traditions, still many values and beliefs have survived which are unique and dynamic in its own way. So, African American needs to celebrate their culture, their identity which is so rich and so distinct. The significance of the piano in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* is implanted in the heritage of slavery. Wilson regarded slavery as a basic historical period in the African American society. He tries to aware black that the period of slavery shouldn't be overlooked or disregarded. He stresses that African American need to define their culture for themselves. Black people have their own cultures, systems, arts, literature, music and so on. They are so precious that cannot be compared to other arts in the world.

Talking about black aesthetics, August Wilson says that music and dance are major parts of African-American people. Such cultures were originally created in African cultures. If they are compared to others, their values are degraded and are devaluated. So, in order to preserve their cultural heritage and legacy, blacks instead of following and imitating European and American culture should promote their own African culture.

Black as a Whole

“Black” is a term often used in socially based systems of racial classification or of ethnicity, to describe persons who are perceived to be dark-skinned compared to other majority of population. The term typically refers to descendants of enslaved black people who were brought from their African homelands by force, to work in America. Black history or African American history was started back in 14th century where millions of African people were forcibly brought and held captive in the United States. African Americans have been given various names by American throughout the history like black, Negro and colored. Most African Americans are descended from Africa and brought directly from Africa to America to become slaves originally captured in wars or raids and transported in the Atlantic slave trade. African American people are descended from various ethnic groups mostly from Western and Central Africa.

The treatment of slaves in America was generally brutal and degrading. Whipping and sexual abuse, including, rape were common. Education to slaves was prohibited. Slaves were punished by whipping, shackling, beating and imprisonment. They were hurt by knife, guns and field tools. Frederick Law Olmsted, a journalist, wrote:

A vast mass of the slaves pass their lives, from the moment they are able to go afield in the picking season till they drop worn out in the grave, in incessant labor, in all sorts of weather, at all seasons of the year, without any other change or relaxation than is furnished by sickness, without the smallest hope of any improvement either in their condition, in their food, or in their clothing, which are of the plainest and coarsest kind, and indebted solely to the forbearance or good temper of the overseer for exception from terrible physical suffering.[3]

Slaves were treated so badly that they had to work in extreme weather without any rest for long durations. The workers were extremely deprived of the food shortage, malnutrition and were abandoned from medical supplies.

The identity of the African American was denied, they were forbidden to practice their culture, language and religion. Instead, white called Africa the world full of African savages, living together in an uncivilized group. The negative picture of Africa was presented everywhere especially in the white press, so blacks had to accept their position in the world of whites and reject their origins, and often developed a feeling of shame and self-hatred. They had to live in a country where they were always surrounded by white architects; white artists and white poets. Black was considered as villains and evils. The slave masters didn't regard their slaves as human. They were mistreated. They were considered as objects.

Though unwilling and generally unrewarded, black slaves played a major role in laying the economic foundation of America especially in the South. African slaves were the backbone of American agrarian industry which not only boosted American's power of exporting to other nations but also heightened America's agricultural

economy. Blacks also played a leading role in the development of Southern speech, folklore, music, dancing etc. During the 17th and 18th centuries, African and African American slaves worked mainly on the tobacco, rice and indigo plantations of the Southern seaboard. Eventually, slavery became rooted in the South's huge cotton and sugar plantations. Although, Northern businessmen made great fortunes from the slave trade and from investments in Southern plantations, slavery was never widespread in the North.

For more than two millennia, slavery was accepted as a natural part of life. Slavery in America was essentially ended by the civil war which began in 1861 and lasted for four long years. The emancipation proclamation of 1863, issued by President Abraham Lincoln, during the civil war, effectively abolished slavery in America. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free" (Emancipation proclamation of 1863 by US president Abraham Lincoln).

Tragically, the ending of slavery in 1865 did not improve the lot of most African Americans and whites developed new forms of discrimination, such as segregation, over the following 100 years. After the Civil War, during the period known as Reconstruction, the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments established a legal foundation for the political equality of African Americans. Despite the abolition of slavery and legal gains for African Americans, racial segregation known as Jim Crow arose in the South. Jim Crow segregation meant that Southern blacks would continue to live in conditions of poverty and inequality, with white supremacists denying them their hard-won political rights and freedoms.

The twentieth century civil rights movement emerged as a response to the unfulfilled promises of emancipation. It was held between 1954-1968 led by figure

such as Martin Luther King Jr. It was a non-violent protest which eventually achieved success in establishing legal equalities. It guaranteed all kind of civil and economic and political rights to black.

August Wilson is largely known for exploring African-American perspectives and their struggle in his plays. In *The Piano Lesson*, too, Wilson explores blacks' experiences and their relationship with whites. The play opens as Boy Willie comes to his uncle Doaker's house after three years from Mississippi. He strongly desires to see his sister as Berniece, who lives with Doaker. Willie has come to sell watermelons with his friend Lymon. The conversation goes like this:

BOY WILLIE: Me and Lymon selling watermelons. We got a truck out there. Got a whole truckload of watermelons. We brought them up here to sell. Where's Berniece? [Calls.] : Hey, Berniece!

DOAKER: Berniece up there sleep.

BOY WILLIE: Well, let her get up. [Calls.] Hey, Berniece!

DOAKER: She got to go to work in the morning.

BOY WILLIE: Well she can get up and say hi. It's been three years since I seen her.

[Calls.] Hey, Berniece! It's me . . . Boy Willie. (1.1.2)

Their world is important in their own ways. The relationship of the people is so close that they do not think outside their world. However, one problem can be noticed here between Willie and Doaker, that Doaker does not understand how much Willie loves his sister. It happens between the white people and black people. Most of the time, black people are objectified as given in the drama.

The characters are not only physically dominated but also psychologically. They think that they are relatively poor and to have some amount of money is beyond

their rich. However, the way they talk is quite interesting because though they seem to be quarrelling they are showing deep love to each other. The text reads.

BERNIECE. Where you get the truck from, Lymon?

LYMON. I bought it.

BERNIECE. Where he get that truck from, Boy Willie?

BOY WILLIE. He told you he bought it. Bought it for a hundred and twenty dollars. I can't say where he got that hundred and twenty dollars from . . . but he bought that old piece of truck from Henry Porter. [To LYMON.] Where you get that hundred and twenty dollars from, nigger?

LYMON. I got it like you get yours. I know how to take care of money. (1.1.6)

They are talking in such a way that to have money more than hundred dollars is unlikely for the black people. However, their conversation is quite interesting. Their world is distinct from the other communities such as whites.

Interestingly enough, the author here refers to the specific old commonplace that associates African Americans with watermelons and – generally speaking – with stealing. It may have begun as a Southern stereotype and then evolved into an anti-black stereotype during the antebellum period. Black people were often portrayed as lazy, easily frightened, good-for-nothing buffoons. Most probably, these stereotypes go back at least 200 years to slave times; we have pictures that refer to the 1890s and continue all the way down to the present day. From the past history, it is thought that black people are poor are penniless. Although some blacks are rich, they are alleged to have stolen or done some illegal things. From the conversation between Lymon, Willie and Bernice reveals such thing:

BOY WILLIE: We ain't stole no truck, woman. I told you Lymon bought it.

DOAKER: Boy Willie and Lymon got more sense than to ride all the way up here in a stolen truck with a load of watermelons. Now they might have stole them watermelons, but I don't believe they stole that truck.

BOY WILLIE: You don't even know the man good and you calling him a thief. And we ain't stole them watermelons either. Them old man Pitterford's watermelons. He give me and Lymon all we could load for ten dollars. (1.1.7)

Bernice is not ready to believe that Lymon bought the truck because she thinks that black people cannot be rich enough to buy a truck. On top of that, she guesses that they also stole watermelons from somewhere and they are trading them now. Her upbringing has taken place in a situation that she has only seen the niggers are dependent and helpless like her brother and his friend Lymon.

Boy Willie and Lymon talk about the piano which is in Doaker's house. Willie talks about it excessively on the way with Lymon. He wants to sell the piano because of his need of money. He praises the piano due to its precious carving.

BOY WILLIE: Yeah . . . look here, Lymon. See how it's carved up real nice and polished and everything? You never find you another piano like that.

LYMON: Yeah, that look real nice.

BOY WILLIE: I told you. See how it's polished? My mama used to polish it everyday. See all them pictures carved on it? That's what I was talking about. You can get a nice price for that piano.

LYMON: That's all Boy Willie talked about the whole trip up here. I got tired of hearing him talk about the piano (1.1.9).

Willie shows his friend and says that it is artistically carved. He also confesses that it is the best piano. There are two views we can interpret from his expression. First, he is proud of the piano because it was made by black people and it represents their feeling. Another view we can deduce that they are in dire need of money because of which Willie wants to sell it. He plans to take the family heirloom, the antique piano, from his sister Berniece and sell it in order to buy a piece of land. Boy Willie has a dream of purchasing a land upon which his family has been once lived as slaves. Boy Willie says "Sutter's brother selling the land. He say he gonna sell it to me. That's why I come up here. I got one part of it. Sell them watermelons and get me another part. Get Berniece to sell that piano and I'll have the third part." (1.1.9). When Lymon and Boy Willie sell all their watermelons they are "happy and excited" and "they have money in all their pockets and are anxious to count it" (1.2.59). As to the white people who bought all the watermelons, they "go and get their neighbors. Look like they having a contest to see who can buy the most" (2.2.60). Money can make Lymon wear "a fifty-five-dollar suit" (2.2.60) which is "the kind of suit the bigshots wear" (2.2.60) as well as good shoes. According to Wining Boy, Lymon looks "the King of the Walk" (2.2.62) in such an outfit and is "ready for whatever's out there", Winning Boy says "You look like a million dollars. Don't he look good, Doaker? Come on, let's play some cards .You got a magic suit there. You can get a woman easy with that suit..."(2.2.64). While Wining Boy thinks that women would "fall out their window when they see Lymon" (2.2.65), Doaker is convinced women would rather get something tangible. Doaker says "[...] these women these days ain't gonna fall for that kind of stuff. You got to buy them a present. That's what they looking for these

days". (2.2.65). We understand Doaker here is hinting at the function of money as a medium of exchange in a society where black Americans are still trying to live up to the standards white people had fixed beforehand.

Another aspect of discrimination between white and black people is the use of language. From the language, anyone can easily identify who spoke it. Normally, white people's language is considered standard while black's is sub-standard. In the play, the conversation reveals that the speakers are blacks because they use vernacular diction.. Yet, the language is very fine and worth listening. By reading their conversation, nobody feels bored because of their smooth language. Let's consider how Boy Willie makes conversation:

BOY WILLIE: Got a hundred acres. Good land. He done sold it piece by piece, he kept the good part for himself. Now he got to give that up. His brother come down from Chicago for the funeral . . . he up there in Chicago got some kind of business with soda fountain equipment. He anxious to sell the land, Doaker. He don't want to be bothered with it. He called me to him and said cause of how long our families done known each other and how we been good friends and all, say he wanted to sell the land to me. Say he'd rather see me with it than Jim Stovall. (1.1.15)

The dialogue of Willie is grammatically wrong but we can enjoy reading it. There is no problem understanding it. Is it not the feeling of superiority of the language makers that language should be as they make or they regard what it should be? The conversation does not have any ambiguity. Moreover, we like to read more and more such kind of language. This is the typical feature of black community, which makes such language. The language, as we know, is merely a means of communication.

Doaker says that black people are pretty conscious about the significance of the originality of culture. He believes that their black culture should not be judged in terms of what white people think. Black people have their own norms and values.

Doaker and Willie talks:

DOAKER: He after Berniece to marry him. She keep telling him no but he won't give up. He keep pressing her on it.

BOY WILLIE: Avery think all white men is bigshots. He don't know there some white men ain't got as much as he got.

DOAKER: He supposed to come past here this morning. Berniece going down to the bank with him to see if he can get a loan to start his church. That's why I know Berniece ain't gonna sell that piano. He tried to get her to sell it to help him start his church. Sent the man around and everything. (1.1.11)

From their conversation, it is revealed that they think that they are dominated by the white people. They think that their culture and language have equal significance as whites. Bernice's husband Crawley believed that white consider themselves 'bigshots' which is used sarcastically meaning showing the power of gun. Avery believes that the piano is associated with the race and culture of the black people like them. As Avery is a preacher he wants to save black people's culture intact.

Likewise, Willie and Lymon reveal that how they were attacked by the white people in the wood. Wining Boy mentions that he heard Willie and Lymon were on Parchman Farm. Willie explains that some whites had tried to chase Willie, Lymon, and Berniece's husband Crawley from some wood they were pilfering. Crawley fought back and was killed while the other two went to prison. The men reminisce about Parchman and sing an old work song. Willie and Lymon disclose:

BOY WILLIE: Me and Lymon was down there hauling wood for Jim Miller and keeping us a little bit to sell. Some white fellows tried to run us off of it. That's when Crawley got killed. They put me and Lymon in the penitentiary.

LYMON : They ambushed us right there where that road dip down and around that bend in the creek. Crawley tried to fight them. Me and Boy Willie got away but the sheriff got us. Say we was stealing wood. They shot me in my stomach. (2.2.37).

We can evaluate the white people's domination and exploitation over black people. From the conversation, we can say that if black people are bad it is not because of their own bad deed but due to white people. If black people are criminals or revengers it's due to white peoples' manner.

Boy Willie is more conscious about his position in front of white people. He believes that black people are the causes of being dominated by the whites because they themselves think inferior to white people. He feels that the white people treat black people powerless because the blacks let them to be treated in such manner.

Bernice believes that she can live her meaningful life without her husband. It means traditionally men believe that women's life is attached with their husbands. However, Bernice wishes to prove it wrong. A very might wish to get married to her but she says that she can live happily without remarrying to someone as long as her family members help her. Her daughter is one of the reasons she can live happily and meaningfully. Thus, not only men, but also women are feeling independent to face the challenge with white people. Bernice expresses:

BERNIECE. You trying to tell me a woman can't be nothing without a man. But you alright, huh? You can just walk out of here without

me—without a woman—and still be a man. That’s alright. Ain’t nobody gonna ask you, “Avery, who you got to love you?” That’s alright for you. But everybody gonna be worried about Berniece. “How Berniece gonna take care of herself? How she gonna raise that child without a man? Wonder what she do with herself. (2.2.67).

She means to say that it is not necessary for a woman being associated with man to make her identity. She is enough to live her life alone. It is a change we find within women in black community. She challenges the traditional established system of dominating women in the community. Such power has come from the ideas that they have gathered it while resisting with white people. Her husband was killed in the wood by the whites. Adversity, therefore, makes people strong not weak.

Moreover, we can find some transitional thought between white and black and old and modern concept. Traditionally women were dominated in the black culture. It is partly because of white domination. White people treated very badly to the black people especially to the women. Black women were considered to be an object to provide pleasure to the white people. Slowly, the black people also learned same from the white people. The blacks thought that black women are only for using as an object to be used for sexual purpose and other slavery work. When Grace and Boy Willie talk we get same sense as white people dominated the blacks in the past:

GRACE. Wait now . . . you ain’t told me nothing about no couch. I thought you had a bed. Both of us can’t sleep on that little old couch.

BOY WILLIE. It don’t make no difference. We can sleep on the floor. Let Lymon sleep on the couch.

GRACE. You ain’t told me nothing about no couch.

BOY WILLIE. What difference it make? You just wanna be with me.

GRACE. I don't want to be with you on no couch. Ain't you got no bed?

BOY WILLIE. You don't need no bed, woman. My granddaddy used to take women on the backs of horses. What you need a bed for? You just want to be with me. (2.3.72).

Grace is conscious about her position that she wants to sleep in the bed but Boy Willie thinks from other ways. He wants her to sleep on the couch without bed. At the meantime, he remembers his grandfather that he used to take women and put them on the horsebacks. Thus, he is not able to come out of the traditional ideas of dominating women. In nutshell, his internal desire is to be like a white man exploiting and suppressing women. This is the impact of experience how white people used to treat the women.

Willie has to the realization that the essence of human being is not white or black but it is humanity. Black and white are only man made creation. There is no any internal thing related to black and white community. Boy Willie says "I got a heart that beats here and it beats just as loud as the next fellow's. Don't care if he black or white. Sometime it beats louder. When it beats louder, then everybody can hear it" (2.5.94). Thus, it seems that there is no any real sense to divide white and black. All people are equal.

At the end of the play, almost everyone agree that the piano is symbol of their identity and music. Music is the soul and the meaning of life. Lymon says that Berniece is right to not decide to sell it:

BOY WILLIE: Come on, nigger! What you standing there for?

LYMON: Maybe Berniece is right, Boy Willie. Maybe you shouldn't sell it.

EVERY: You all ought to sit down and talk it out. See if you can come to an agreement.

DOAKER: That's what I been trying to tell them. Seem like one of them ought to respect the other one's wishes (2.5.99).

In this way, almost everyone agrees to possess the piano and not sell it because it is their legacy. It should be preserved for future generations which will help them to know their culture and history.

The Piano Lesson is the symbolic play for the preservation of black Aesthetics. It embraces their socio-cultural value and inspires them to live their life with dignity. Time and again, blacks have been facing racial issues and have been marginalized and dominated, still they have been able to overcome the barriers and have been the role models of African American diaspora.

Conclusion: Uniqueness of the Black Culture

This research work focuses on black aesthetics and explores the deep rooted beliefs on social dominance and racial paradigms that black people have been facing throughout the history. It evaluates the changing forms of the racial discrimination through the African-American culture since ancient times and presents how blacks should be aware of their own beauty. The researcher came to the conclusion that black culture is neither superior, nor inferior in itself. It is socially and historically rich and does not need guidance from White people or White culture. The power, beauty, and system of black people are unique in their own way, and hence, their cultures, religion, history, relationship, and social existence should not be understood from the perspective of other cultures.

One of the aspects of black aesthetics is the study of racism that deals with discrimination between white and black people. Racism is the mistreatment of a group

of people on the basis of race, color, and religion; a blind and pointless hatred, envy, or prejudice obviously expressed in the form of graffiti; intimidation or abuse, discrimination on offering jobs. The research presents various aspects of racism in relation to black aesthetics, and evaluates theories related to various forms of racism and racial identities. It discusses different aspects of conflicting racial awareness and double consciousness that blacks have been facing during the process of dignifying their African-American identity.

From a social perspective, beauty is determined by the physical observation and judgment which is not right at all. Judgments, parts of aesthetics, are subjective feelings that are different to different people. They cannot be put in a scale to measure how one is superior or inferior. Because of the personal interest towards beauty, the definitions or outlooks are changed according to the time and situation. It remains hidden somewhere and works its way outwards from a racialized European center and even whilst remaining hidden it is never forgotten. There is discrimination among people in terms of language. Language itself is a means of communication. Language cannot be a lone indicator to judge the level of civilization of a society. Black Aesthetics argues over the long rooted social belief of civilization due to language and denies the idea that language used by whites' is more civilized than that of blacks. Language, if it is understood properly, should be acceptable without the comparison with others. There should not be any supremacy of a culture based on language.

Black aesthetics argues against the whites' modality to prove that "Negro is the 'link between monkey and man'. African American are still dehumanized; we are still associated with apes in this country" (scienceblog.com). It is wrong to treat black people like the objective being alienating black man and always keeping him a target for he confronts the same behavior almost everywhere: by physician, policemen,

employers or teachers. The theory relates broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self determination and nationhood. Black's life and history are full of creative possibilities and it should not be overlooked or disvalued but rather should be encouraged and must be celebrated.

The Piano Lesson deals with the black aesthetics connecting people through the piano. One hundred thirty seven years old piano functions as a symbol which is decorated and designed in the way of African sculpture. Boy Willie and his sister, Berniece, have conflicting ideas about the piano. Willie wants to sell it while Berniece does not want. The piano is not a common musical instrument but there are many people's souls attached with it. It is not only art work. It is family history. While Berniece and Boy Willie's great grandfather was in slavery, the family history was carved into the piano. Their great grandmother and grandfather were traded for it. Moreover, Berniece and Boy Willie's father even died over it, when he was set on fire in a boxcar after taking the piano from Sutter's house. Their conflict remains throughout the play. Berniece thinks that selling the piano would be the same as selling their souls. Boy Willie, on the other hand, feels that the best way to honor the memory of his ancestors is by putting the piano to use. Eventually, Berniece saves the day when she plays the piano. Willie goes to Mississippi warning his sister not to give up playing the piano. In this way, Willie understands the significance of the piano at the end, reminding their connection to it.

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