

NEW VISIONS OF RACE: Foregrounding African American Dramaturgy

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ABSTRACT : This paper aims at examining the evolution of race relationship in the United States of America, as is perceived in the plays under consideration. The paper is aimed at showing the relationship between ethnicity and nation building, mindful of the fact that race, ethnicity and identity are concepts that have been disconcerting the American society for a long time. Using African American criticism, and psychoanalytic criticism, the paper portrays that ethnic groups are not stereotypes, but are dynamic and progressive, and that there is no quintessential ethnic group. African Americans have realized that white racists intentionally practice segregation so as to relegate them to the periphery. By so doing, they (whites) will always control the American economy. Through this realization, most African Americans do not allow race to become an issue to them, but have decided to concentrate on how to rebuild their self-worth and self-esteem, to become economically feasible in the United States of America. Consequently, the playwrights of the plays under study have proven that African American cultural heritage is part and parcel of the American culture, and its value cannot be underestimated. The paper therefore reveals how through constant conflicts and the consequences of such conflicts on the socio-economic and political atmosphere of the country, both whites and blacks are coming to realize that it is not the colour of a person that counts, but the integral values the person possesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at examining the progress African Americans have made in their struggle towards cultural authentication, and how this progress has benefitted them in the society. It evaluates the level at which the way other ethnic groups perceive the African American ethnic group has evolved with time. I am going to use Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, Hansberry's *A Raisin' in the Sun*, Adolf Wilson's *Radio Golf* and Suzan Lori-Park's *Topdog/Underdog* on the one hand, and other works written by African Americans, which show how this African American emancipation has helped to change the perception of others towards their identity to analyze this paper.

In the first chapter of *Reading African American Experiences in the Obama Era: Theory, Advocacy, Activism* edited by Ebony E. Thomas and Brooks-Tatum, it is written: "Black Americans need a new story. The old one no longer fits a Barack Obama world" (1). They relate that it was the cover headline of *The American Scholar's* summer 2008 edition, before the election of Barack Obama as the president of the United States of America in 2008. We can see that it is not out of place for these scholars to bring back this into their work in 2012 when this work was published. It is worth recalling that Barack Obama was re-elected into his second term in office in 2012, as the President of the United States of America.

His re-election boosted the morale of African Americans who have spent their entire life lamenting on the fact that whites can never allow them to rule the United States. They always believed hegemony has been conserved by whites for their peers (white) and for their peers alone. So the reality of seeing one of theirs (an African American) ruling in the white house with a pure black woman and children as his wife and children, has a positive psychological effect on them. Thomas and Brooks-Tatum have thus found it necessary to publish this work to awaken those members of the African American community who are still worried about the activities of white racists to quit the worrying stage and think of how to make themselves intellectually and economically expedient in the society. Their peer Barack Obama has proven that if you are eligible, the society will recognize your value.

To Thomas and Brooks-Tatum, this opportunity arose, when the Bush regime could no longer satisfy the American public. When the Bush regime decided to focus more on arms and war instead of the socio-economic need of the American people, even the white community became frustrated with his rule, and didn't care any longer about the racial background of whoever will be their messiah. All the American people wanted at the time, was to get out of the perilous economic crisis in which they found themselves. (1-2)

Thomas and Brooks Tatum make us to understand that the rise of Barack Obama to power really has a positive psychological effect on African Americans. According to them, “most prominent thinkers and cultural critics were struggling with how to talk about race.” This shows that even though Obama’s election took most African American cultural critics by surprise (because though they had hopes, they could never swear that it will happen), they received the victory positively. We know that African Americans were enslaved for hundreds of years in the United States of America, and that even though Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery in 1865, African Americans continued to suffer marginalization, stigmatization and discrimination socio-culturally, economically and politically in the United States of America. Many African Americans live in abject poverty, not because they do not have the ability of becoming affluent in the society, but because racial discrimination has subjected them to these unbearable conditions.

However, before we get into celebrating African American cultural heritage and their achievements in the United States of America, it is good to examine those aspects of white racist’s perspective about them, which was always making them to be stigmatized in the society. This is because there are some generations of coloured people who still find it difficult to get out of the psychological trauma that their history of slavery has caused them. An example of such people is Rudy Silas in Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. He is one of those who has not only lost his ability to hear because of white police brutality against coloured people, but he has also lost a son. His troubles started when he entered first grade. After growing at home as a prince, when he entered primary school, white racist teachers started treating him as an underdog. He confesses how white teachers discriminate between pupils of different ethnic groups, thus causing coloured children to run away from school as can be seen in the words: [. . .] *so I grew up with all this rich stuff at home, three quick hits on the table and a double sweep) and then at school, first grade, they started telling me I was inferior [. . .] I realized I had an enemy and that enemy was those white nice teachers. [. . .] (2)*

So, Silas only realize he has enemies when he goes to school. This can be extremely pathetic for a child who is most cherished at home. As an innocent kid, the child will find it difficult to concentrate on his/her studies because he/she will live in constant fear. This explains why there are a lot of school dropouts in the African American community or among coloured children as a whole. It is important to note that Silas’ problems with white racists did not end in school. In 1942 when he was a teenager, white racist’s police had him beaten until he lost his sense of hearing as he continues to narrate:

Rudy Silas, Sr.: *In forty-two, when I was in my teens running around as a zoot-suiter, one night the cop really tore me up bad [. . .] They took me to a room and they locked the door behind me and [. . .] four cops there kicking me in the head. As a result of the kicks in the head they fractured my eardrum, and, uh, I couldn’t hear on both ears. [. . .] but I had an insane hatred for white policemen. (2-3)*

The excerpt explains why a lot of people are moving with guns in the United States of America, because they feel the need to protect themselves against white racist’s attacks. It is important to note that this police brutality did not end with Silas, but it continued with his son. Fifty years later, the police shot and killed his son Stephen as he asserts: “Stephen was in Stanford! Come home one weekend to sing with the band. One night cops pulled a gun at his head. It drove me crazy-it’s still going on, it’s still going on. How you think a father feels, stuff that happen to me fifty years ago happened to my son? Man!” (6)

This excerpt is full of pathos. It shows the type of psychotic conditions in which coloured people are subjected to, because of ethnic discrimination in their communities. The fact that Rudy Silas is still hitting and sweeping the table as he speaks to Smith many years after these incidents had taken place portrays the degree of pain that is still in his heart. It also pushes one to question the moral background of white racists. It is as if the moral principles of the Christian religion they preach which urges people to love their peers as themselves do not apply to coloured people, because they are not human enough.

Michael Porter in his work entitled *The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Women* asserts that white female teachers are the cause of coloured children abandoning school because of their racist attitude. He explains that these teachers seem to have forgotten that it is the money that the parents of these coloured pupils pay as school fees which constitute what they earn as salary. This can be seen in the following excerpt: “*Many school teachers and administrators view African Americans, Latino, and poor women as inferior [. . .]. These teachers, most of whom are white females, degrade the very people that provide them with their middle-class incomes. As a result, every interaction with these women and their children is similar to master-slave interaction.*” (110)

It is important to note here that the consequences of these children running away from schools are always very dangerous to the society. Most of them always turn out as thieves, gang members, and rebels in the society. This is because as illiterates, they find it difficult to have lucrative jobs. Thus, they are bound to become rebels in the society, since they are looking for survival. In Suzan Lori Park’s *Topdog/Underdog*, Booth and Lincoln play cards and steal to earn a living. In stealing, they cheat people of their income and render them helpless and miserable in the society, as can be seen in Lincoln’s soliloquy: “*We took that man and his wife for hundreds. No, thousands. [. . .] We took a father for the money he was gonna get his kids new bike with and he cried in the streets while we vanished. We took a mothers welfare check, she pulled a knife on us and we ran. [. . .] (55)*

It took the white regime almost one hundred years, from 1865 to 1964 to grant African Americans civil rights in the United States of America; and even after this, white racists continue to stigmatize them in the society. Thus making life a living hell for most African Americans, who till now have still not found answers as to why white racists cannot view them as ordinary human beings; or treat them in the same way in which they treat their white peers.

Still in the educational domain, separatism is being practiced, and the coloured schools lack the necessary equipment for the children to have quality education. In *The Audacity of Hope* Barack Obama narrates how as a senator he visited Thornton Township High School in Chicago and the children were complaining how because of lack of funds, they lack computers and they have to stop classes everyday some hours before the normal closing hours of a school as can be seen in the following excerpt: “*In 2005 I paid a visit to Thornton Township High School, [. . .] At the meeting they talked about [. . .] But their number one issue was this: Thornton let out every day at 1.30 in the afternoon. [. . .] How come we’re getting shortchanged? They asked me. Seems like nobody even expect us to go to college, they said.*”(160) [Sic]

This excerpt gives one an insight to the type of future that awaits the students of Thornton. They will find it very difficult to compete in the job market with those who are from renowned schools (mostly white segregated schools). The excerpt exposes the level of racial segregation that is still being practiced in the United States of America. In the 21st Century, they are still talking about white and black schools, which is very degrading for a country like the United States of America. This type of experience is narrated in Green’s *How to Improve Self-Esteem in the African American Child*. In the text, Ida Green narrates how she grew up in a community where blacks and whites were neither allowed to sit in the same section of a bus, nor eat in the same restaurant; and she describes: “*In Pensacola, Florida where I grew up, Blacks were not allowed to eat at the launch counter with whites. We attended separate schools, lived in separate neighborhoods, [. . .] The signs read “white” and “colored.” . . . This is why I find myself struggling at the time with low self-esteem, feelings of low self-worth, and a distorted self-image that tells me I am inferior to whites.* (73)

The above excerpt delves into the life style that the playwrights of the plays under study have experienced. This type of experience often pushes victims into psychotic states, leading to conflicts between the oppressed and the oppressor. This explains why there are constant conflicts between African Americans and Caucasians in the United States of America. These playwrights are therefore out not to create a fissure between whites and coloured people in the society, but to expose the evils of segregation, rebuild self-esteem amongst African Americans and cause people to understand the importance of living together. The excerpt from Obama’s *Audacity of Hope* brings in the notion of the self and the other, as one ethnic group considers itself as superior (white), and regards the other as savage, uncivilized, and unclean (black). George Murdock in *Saligman’s Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* has this to say with regards to ethnic identity: “*A people usually calls itself either by a flattering name or by a term signifying ‘men’ or ‘people.’ Aliens on the other hand are regarded as something less than men: they are styled ‘barbarians’ or are known by some derogatory term corresponding to such modern American ethnic tags as ‘bohunk,’ ‘chink,’ ‘dago,’ ‘frog,’ ‘greaser,’ ‘nigger,’ ‘sheany’ and ‘wop.’*” (220)

White perception of black and black identity invariably generates separatism and exploitation whose inevitable upshot is violence. The cultural heritage of African Americans is despised by white racists because they consider them to be half human beings. Thus, as animals, they do not have any identity, and have to be maltreated in the society. However, it is not usually easy to change such societies, without some chaotic situations taking place. The ethnic group that is oppressed will normally fight back to gain recognition in the society.

Socio-economically, African Americans suffer unemployment problems. They are either refused jobs, or forced to do mean jobs that whites have rejected. In Hansburry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter is unhappy because as a simple driver, he does not see how he will ever get out of the state of poverty in which he finds himself. To ameliorate the situation, he turns to his mother for help. When his mother refuses to give him money to invest in a liquor business, he grows wild and starts absenting himself from work. Walter is even frustrated with the fact that his wife does no longer respect him, given that he is unable to supply most of her basic needs. This can be seen in the following excerpt: “*(Rising and coming to her and standing over her.) You tired, aren’t you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live—this beat-up hole—everything. Ain’t you? (She does not look up, doesn’t answer) So tired—moaning and groaning all the time [. . .]*” (20)

The stance of Walter’s wife is enough to drive a man who is in love with his wife to madness. It pains him to see that he is about to lose the woman he loves because of poverty. Thus, when the father’s insurance money is remunerated, Walter sees it as the only means by which he can get out of the miserable condition in which he finds himself. Nevertheless, the mother’s unenthusiastic view of the liquor business and refusal to help Walter invest in it only helps to accentuate his frustration. In response to his mother’s comment that he has a good job to which he can stick to, Walter replied thus:

WALTER: *A job. (Looks at her) Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, "Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; [. . .] (Very quietly) Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand. [. . .] and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things . . . sitting there turning deals worth millions [. . .](60)*

Walter is just an example of coloured people who suffer this type of psychological trauma. They find it difficult to reconcile with the fact that they live in the same community as whites, but whites live in ecstasy while they live in abject poverty. In *Topdog/Underdog*, Suzan Lori Parks depicts an American society that is plagued with social injustice. Lincoln goes out to look for a job, and finds none but that which a white man has rejected. When he applies for the job, his white boss offers to give it to him only on condition that he does it at a salary which is lesser than what his white predecessor was earning (29). Lincoln's boss' insistence to pay him less than what he was paying his white predecessor symbolizes white racist's determination to see coloured people remain in the periphery. In describing white racial hierarchy, Asante in *Erasing Racism* asserts that, "White racial hierarchy is the enemy. It kills the soul, it maims the spirit, it stifles intellectual growth, it mocks ethics, it crushes truth, and it turns respect into hatred." (134) It is therefore not surprising that in Parks' *Fathers Comes Home From the Wars* (2015), which revisits slavery and plantation life, Hero is the one who cooks food for the Colonel, but while the Colonel eats and drinks, Hero is dying of hunger. This shows how nihilistic white racists are.

It is important to note that even those who have the qualification to head certain posts of responsibilities are rejected because of racial discrimination. Asante again in *Erasing Racism*, gives an example of a young African American medical doctor whose white colleagues refuse him referrals because they do not want him to grow in his profession. (198)

This confirms that white racists are determined to condemn coloured people to remain in abject poverty. It also portrays that they are using their economic and political power to dehumanize and demoralize people of colour. Sander Gilman suggests in *Difference and Pathology* (1985) that: "Because there is no real line between self and the other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that illusion of an absolute difference between self and other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. [. . .] But the line between 'good' and 'bad' responds to stresses occurring within the psyche "(18).

Following Sander Gilman's excerpt above, we realize that white racists are forcing coloured people to work up their minds, looking for answers that can never be gotten because the stereotypes created by whites around them is abstract and not concrete. This frustration only leads to psychosis, and this is what white supremacists seek; to destroy coloured people. This is clearly demonstrated by Walter, Lincoln and the medical doctor above, who spend their time meditating over the lot of the coloured man in America, who no matter how hard he works, is forced to remain in uncomfortable situations because of ethnic discrimination.

Also, legal proceedings are influenced by ethnic discrimination in the United States of America, as the plays under study portray. Rodney King's case in Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, is a good example of this. The coloured people of Los Angeles have to go into the streets and demonstrate against the unjust verdict that was first issued, in order for the government to intervene. It is after the government intervenes, that two of the policemen were found guilty and thrown into prison. When Smith interviews Maxine Waters the Congress woman of the city of Los Angeles, she says: "the fact of the matter is, whether we like it or not, riot is the voice of the unheard." (Twilight 162)

Maxine Waters's assertion explains why gang groups already exist in cities in the United States of America. This leads to constraints in movements, and hinder youths from enjoying recreational facilities as Mike Davis asserts in his interview with Smith in *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*:

MIKE DAVIS: *The fear in this city of talking to gang members, talking to kids. In the last instance, if you peel away words like, you know, "gang-banger" and "looter" and stuff, this is a city at war with its own children, and it refuses to talk to those children. And the city doesn't want to face these kids, or talk to its kids [. . .] I mean, cruising has been totally eliminated because it's [. . .] it leads to gang warfare or some other crazy notion. [. . .] So the very things that are defined, you know, our kind of populace, Southern California, kind of working-class Southern California, have been destroyed. (29-31)[Sic]*

This excerpt clearly describes the consequences of the lack of mutual understanding in a community. Since whites do not want coloured people to relax, they too have learned to protect themselves by forming gang groups, and the clash between these gang groups often lead to death and insecurity in the community. The problem that the American society is facing is that white racists seek to impose their culture on others; while they themselves are refusing to acknowledge the existence of distinct cultures. They fail to acknowledge that each ethnic group values its culture, and identifies itself through it. The playwrights under study have properly exploited this characteristic in their work, as seen in *Twilight* through the examples specified above. Lyotard the postmodernist clearly states in the "Postmodern Condition" that the refusal of one ethnic group to acknowledge

the culture of others, will lead to chaos in the society; and that is what is happening in California, as Mike Davis describes above.

This paper entitled “New Visions of Race: Foregrounding African American Dramaturgy” analysis how African Americans have taken themselves out of that stereotype identity that whites ascribed to them, to positions of leadership and command. That is, African Americans are no longer those Negroes who used to sit and lament about the negative treatments whites are giving them. Most of them are no longer those who assimilate or who usually want to imitate everything whites do, so as to be accepted by them in the society. Having learnt that white racists do this to destabilize them psychologically so that they (whites) will continue to remain in the center of the economy, many have given themselves to studies and hard work, in order to build their self-esteem and improve socio-economically in the United States of America.

Today, many of them are learned, and this has opened them doors for good jobs. Others are successful business men/women and company owners as we are going to see. Those who have succeeded in life are helping to sponsor the less privileged, so as to alleviate poverty in their community. This has helped to increase the number of African American elites in the American society, and is boosting the African American morale. Since whites cannot boast that all whites in the American community belong to the middle class, there is bound to be a change of perspective in the white ethnic group towards African American’s identity because just like the coloured, the white ethnic group also constitutes some percentage of poor people in the American community. Thus, as business men and women, African American entrepreneurs do not only employ coloured people, they also employ whites. This has led to a change in white perspective towards African American cultural identity. Therefore, we are going to evaluate those actions, decisions and moves which African Americans have taken, which have helped them to gain integrity and respect in many domains of life in the United States, and how this evolution has caused many Caucasians to change their perspective of the African American identity.

In order to establish a national consciousness that would render the insulting Negro feeling ineffective, Malcolm X, one of the African American civil rights activists who fought for the promotion of African American culture, urged his black peers to exalt their culture as a drive towards black solidarity. He believes that by an extrapolative celebration of their cultural autonomy, they will be indirectly projecting their identity, and will ultimately triumph over the stereotype identity that whites have ascribed to them. MolefiKente Asante in *Erasing Racism*, analysis Malcolm’s idea of cultural autonomy in the following words:

In reality, Malcolm was an astute observer of the historical conditions of African Americans. In the serious reconstruction of African culture, he saw that the struggle for power and the ability to create categories that are accepted by others frequently played a much more important role than economic necessity. Beyond this however, was his insistence on African cultural autonomy by which he meant all things considered cosmological, axiological, epistemological, and aesthetic. (152)

It is therefore obvious that African Americans are following Malcolm’s advice, as is seen demonstrated in the works of Hansberry, Smith, Wilson and Parks in this paper. They have realized that all the efforts they have been making to assimilate white culture so that whites will like/respect/accept them in the society have not produced any fruits. Thus as people with a distinct culture, it is better to project their own culture to the world, for it is through it that they will be identified. While they concentrated on trying to make whites accept them in the society, whites concentrated on accumulating wealth and making a name for themselves in the United States of America.

During the Harlem Renaissance, African American civil rights activists like Malcom X, Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes encouraged their peers to become creative and accumulate wealth like whites, so that they can help their peers who are lagging behind. They believe that it is only by acquiring wealth that whites will be forced to respect them in the society. This is therefore what African Americans are doing today. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama talks about an African American who offered him a jet when he needed one to go for his campaign to become a senator. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

My election wasn’t just aided by the evolution attitude of Illinois’ white voters. It reflected changes in Illinois’s African American community as well. One measure of these changes could be seen in the types of early support my campaign received. In the first \$500,000 that I raised during the primary, close to half came from black businesses and professionals. It was a black owned radio station WVON, that first began to mention my campaign on the Chicago airwaves, and a black-owned weekly newsmagazine, N’Digo, that first featured me on its cover. One of the first times I needed a corporate jet for the campaign, it was a black friend who lent me his. (240)

Here we can see that African Americans are no longer servants who shine shoes for whites and work in their plantations. They have emancipated. White segregation policies have taught them to work hard and develop some self-esteem for themselves. Who would have said that an African American (the descendant of slaves) would own a plane in America? Yet, it is a reality, as we can see in the above excerpt. To these African American elites, their race has been the underdog of the American community for too long. It is time they prove

to white racists that they are also human beings who are capable of succeeding in the United States of America, if they devote themselves to hard work.

Therefore, African Americans have realized that the phenomenon of assimilating white culture will not help them, but it is their bank account and whom they are in the society, that will make whites respect them in the streets of the United States of America. After the Harlem Renaissance, many enrolled in schools, and those who could not go back to school used their money earned as labourers in white factories to send their children to school. Today, their children can be found in all categories of professions in the United States of America. They are doctors, nurses, engineers, real estate brokers, company owners etc. as Obama continues to narrate in *The Audacity of Hope*:

Such capacity simply did not exist a generation ago. Although Chicago has always had one of the more vibrant black business communities in the country, in the sixties and seventies only a handful of self-made men—John Johnson, the founder of Ebony and Jet; George Johnson, the founder of Johnson Products; Ed Gardner, the founder of Soft Sheen; and Al Johnson, the first in the country to own a GM franchise—would have been considered wealthy by the standard of white America. Today not only is the city filled with black doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals, but blacks also occupy some of the highest management positions in corporate Chicago. [. . .] They can afford to live in neighborhoods of their choosing and send their children to the best private schools. They are actively recruited to join civil boards and generously support all manner of charities (240-241)

This excerpt contradicts what we read in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. In Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter dreams to open a big company that would enable him and his family live a life of affluence, but his dreams never materializes. This is because he is an illiterate who does not know what he is supposed to do in order to succeed. He has never read business management and as a result of the low self-esteem that white segregation policy has instilled in him, he lacks confidence in himself. This is what makes him to foolishly entrust all the money his father left for them in the hands of Willy Harris his African American friend whom he believes is more skilled than himself. In the end, Harris runs off with the money and his family is left with nothing (58).

However, *The Audacity of Hope* was published in 2006 in the twenty first century, long after the civil rights laws have been passed and many African Americans have already overcome the negativity of the stereotype identity whites ascribed to them. Many are already educated and have built a comfortable life for themselves. Their professionals have become realistic, because now they understand that not every white is a racist; and that in every community there are good and bad people, so they do not allow racism to disturb their progress in the United States of America as Obama narrates still in *The Audacity of Hope*:

Few African American entrepreneurs have either the inherited wealth or the angel investors to help launch their businesses or cushion them from a sudden economic downturn. Few doubt that if they were whites they would be further along in reaching their goals. And yet you won't hear these men and women use race as a crutch or point to discrimination as an excuse for failure. In fact, what characterizes this new generation of black professionals is their rejection to any limits to what they can achieve. (241)

Socio-economically, this is the new vision of most African Americans with regard to race relationship in the United States of America. They have realized that they do not always have to depend on whites for their progress. Since most whites are racists and do not want to see them progress economically, they have understood the importance of working together, in order to see their community, grow. That is why the African American community in Chicago has decided to endorse Obama's campaign with some contributing money, others announcing his candidacy on their private radio stations, and others putting his candidacy in the headlines of their magazines. They have read the American history and it has dawn on them that the first whites to land in the Americas did not have anything to start with. They too (African Americans) trust in providence to help them succeed.

That is why some even quit their good paid jobs to create their own companies as Obama continues to narrate in *The Audacity of Hope*. This is because they want to become their own masters and also help to employ their unemployed peers in the African American community. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

When a friend who had been the number one bond salesman at Merrill Lynch's Chicago office decided to start his own bank, his goal wasn't to grow it into the top black firm—he wanted it to become the top firm, period. When another friend decided to leave an executive position at General Motors to start his own parking service company in partnership with Hyatt, his mother thought he was crazy. "She couldn't imagine anything better than having a management job at GM," he told me, 'because those jobs were unattainable for her generation. But I knew I wanted to build something of my own.' [. . .] But in black America, the idea represents a radical break from the past, a severing of the psychological shackles of slavery and Jim Crow. (242)

From the excerpt we can see that Obama's friend's mother is so alarmed when her son tells her he wants to quit the position. She is afraid that if her son fails, he might not be able to find another good job like the one he is about to abandon. This is because she knows that even though some whites overlook the notion of race in the United States, there are still a lot of them who can't stand the sight of a black person. Nevertheless, her son knows what he is doing. Besides, he already has a good connection to begin with, which is Hyatt (another automobile company). It shows that her son is efficient in his job, and that is what gives the C.E.O of Hyatt confidence to partner with him.

One can however not overlook the fact that an African American has been a manager in a well-paid company like the GM (General Motors) which Obama mentions in the above excerpt. This shows a shift in white perception of black identity. When talking about jobs that were too small for them as Obama narrates in the excerpt, Obama is talking about African Americans who were already educated at the time, but could not find good jobs because of racial discrimination. They however accepted these petty-paid jobs because they hoped to use the salaries to educate their children, since they were hoping that the America of tomorrow will be better than the one in which they found themselves. To Obama, they deserve to be praised as he continues to pay them tribute: "*It is through this quintessentially American path of upward mobility that the black middle class has grown fourfold in a generation, and that the black poverty rate was cut in half. Through a similar process of hard work and commitment to family, Latinos have seen comparable gains [. . .]*" (242).

This explains why most African American writers no longer write to complain or talk about stereotypes, but they talk about the status that most of their elites have attained today in the United States of America. In August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, the protagonist Harmond is a real estate broker (developer), who is campaigning to be the mayor of his city (Pittsburg), and his wife Mame is a professional public relations representative with twenty years of experience (11).

As an estate developer and a business man who owns a lot of companies, Harmond has the ability to employ both blacks and whites. This makes him influential in his community, because he will not only employ people from his ethnic background (blacks), but he will employ people from other racial backgrounds. This has given him self-esteem, which makes him assertive in the community in which he finds himself. That is why he believes it is time the names of African Americans get projected in the American society. He wants the city's health center to be renamed after the first African American nurse of the city, Sarah Degree. (11—12) This is a metropolitan city, which is made up of people from many races. If Harmond is boldly talking about how he knows that the board members will vote for the change of the name of the city hospital, it is because as a successful business man, he is influential in the community. Because of his status, he has the power to convince both whites and coloured to vote for the change of the hospital's name, which is his heart's desire. This also demonstrates how African Americans have emancipated in the United States of America.

Also, African American writers (authors) are no longer ashamed of who they are or what is happening to their less privileged peers. They know that white stigmatization, discrimination and nihilistic attitude towards them are responsible for what is happening to them. So now, they do write about it in their works, to educate those in their community who still think that to steal is the best way to make ends meet. It is meant to help them get out of those types of activities, so that they can get into activities that can bring them honour in the society. However, they do not only end there, they go on to write about those who have quit such mean activities and have become very responsible people in the society, to serve as an example to the negative ones.

In August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, he talks about a character called Sterling, who has been an arm robber, but now he is a real estate broker. He is a successful business man who sits on board meetings with both whites and blacks. Wilson wants to show that most of those African Americans who steal and have even become drug addicts, are not bad in the inside. Most of them steal because they do not have anything to do, as they are unemployed and hungry. In the case of Sterling, after robbing a bank and acquiring the wealth he needed to begin his own business, he immediately abandons theft and become a responsible citizen as can be seen in the following dialogue:

STERLING: *People think I'm dumb 'cause I robbed that bank. I just wanted to know what it was like to have some money. Seem like everybody else had some. I said let me get me some. So I robbed that bank. I had some money. It didn't make me smarter. It didn't make me better than anybody else. You can't do nothing with money but spend it. After that you back where you started from. Then what you gonna do? I found out I was looking for something that you couldn't spend. That seem like the better of the two. To me. Everybody got their own way of looking at it but if you ask me . . . I'd take something you couldn't spend over money any day. (15)*

In the above excerpt, we can see that Sterling's original intension was not to become an arm robber. He says he wanted to taste how it feels like to have money, because everybody around him seems to have it except him. He also goes on to explain that if you have a little sum of money, you will spend it all, and start looking for another. So, he didn't want just a little sum of money. He wanted something that will last forever. That is why

he decides to rob a bank, so that he will have an amount of money that will enable him start his own business. To him, this is the type of money that will last forever.

It is important to take note of what Sterling says in the excerpt concerning his education. He says that when he went to look for admission in Cannolly Trade, the white administrators there, told him there were no places left, but instead offered to give him a job in the cafeteria. This is again another way in which African Americans are perceived by whites. To whites, African American youths are better placed to do house chores, while their own children go to school. The reason of course is obvious. They do this so that African American youths will grow up to be unskilled, so that they will not be able to compete with their children in future, in the job market. (Wilson: 15-16)

Unfortunately for these white racists, Sterling is an ambitious young man who believes in climbing to the top of the social ladder. He has confidence in himself and he believes that he has what it takes to succeed in the American community. Since he comes from a poor home and does not have any relative who can help, he therefore decides to rob the bank, so as to acquire his dreams of becoming a successful business man in the United States of America. His method to attain success is not the best, but he is satisfied that he has acquired what he has always dreamt to become in life. As a result, the plan of the administrators of Cannolly Trade to frustrate Sterling's destiny has been brought to nothing.

This explains why the notion of African American solidarity is very important to them, because if they do not help themselves, whites will do everything to make sure they remain in the periphery. If not of Mr. Jackson, one does not know what would have become of Sterling. Still in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, Roosevelt is training African American kids to become outstanding golf players. The essence is to help them acquire skills that will help them in the future, so that even if they find it difficult to acquire jobs after leaving school, these skills will help them to earn a living. We all know how lucrative it is to be good at any sporting activity. We have sports men and women like Serena Williams and Lionel Messi, who are billionaires today because of their outstanding talent in sports. If the kids that Roosevelt is training turns out to be successful golf players, they will never lack what to eat in future, and to also take care of their families as Roosevelt himself states: "*That's what I want these kids to have. That'll give them a chance at life. I wish somebody had come along and taught me how to play golf when I was ten. That'll set you on a path to life where everything is open to you. You don't have to croll and hide under a rock just 'cause you black.*" [Sic] (14)

This is wonderful. Roosevelt says African Americans do not have to hide under a rock because they are black. We all know that though white racists hate blacks, they are always happy to project the ones who are good in sports because internationally, they bring fame to the nation of America. Thus, the children Roosevelt is teaching will be great if they succeed to become international gulf players. This aspect of African American solidarity is present in all aspects of life. In education, African American educationists have formed groups which move from school to school, or town to towns, to educate African American children about the importance of ignoring white intimidation and concentrating on their studies so as to build a better life for themselves in the future. Some of these solidarity groups focus on how to educate parents with regard to their rights to follow up their children's education by monitoring their progress and the school curriculum. These groups are in charge of educating parents not to abandon their children to the mercy of white racist teachers who end up frustrating their children and cause them to abandon school, and become delinquents in the streets. This we find in Zeus Leonardo's article entitled: "Black Scholarship in the Interest of Black Folks," as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Many in this new generation of parents are silenced by schools. [. . .] they don't advocate for their kids, and they don't show up for school. [. . .] We need your help because right now, there are so many young parents that don't know what to do. I hear the women that come to some of our meetings: MOYO is the name of our group, Mothers Offering Youth Opportunity. The first thing the school wants to talk about is "let's put your kid on an IEP." Let's put your kids on this, or is your kid meditated, and they don't know what to do, and because you want to trust the school [. . .]. So I think there has to be this honest and open community dialogue among us and this notion of caring for each other's children is more important now than it ever was. (253-254)

From this excerpt, we can see a change in African American trend of thought. They have evolved from the ethnic group that usually sits and lament (complain) about what whites are doing to them, to the ethnic group that wants to succeed, irrespective of the continuous inhuman treatment they receive from white racists in their communities. Having realized that the youths of today are so nonchalant about what is happening around them because they are born in an America in which a lot of African Americans have emancipated; and they have never experienced what their forefathers actually went through in America, these women have taken upon themselves to educate these young parents about the importance of their children's education. They want to either maintain the trend of African American emancipation, or even double the trend, so that there won't be any divergence between black and white economic statuses in the United States of America. They do not want to lose the status that African Americans have fought so hard to achieve in the United States of America.

Therefore, African Americans are redefining themselves in the United States of America. They want to completely erase the stereotype identity that whites ascribed to them. To deconstruct this stereotype identity ascribed to them by whites, African Americans use even songs to educate their peers. This is seen in the song the musician Tupac Shakur in his song is asking whether it is possible for him to change his form so that whites will accept him, or whether he is suffering because he has given whites the opportunity to continue to minimize him as Burke writes in her article entitled "Hip-Hop's President." What he is saying here is the very thing that all African American civil right activists have been trying to make their peers to understand. It is important for them to understand that God has already created them to be black people. This cannot be changed, no matter what. Therefore, since white racists are refusing to change their perception of them, the only thing they can do to boost their morale is to work hard and become socio-economically feasible in the society.

Thus, African Americans are determined to maintain hegemony in the United States of America. Burke still in her article entitled "Hip-Hop's President," writes to encourage African American youths to take their education seriously, so that Obama should not be the first and the last African American who emerges as the president of the United States. To her, the tag "minority group" should only be used to talk about African Americans when people want to talk about their number, and not to talk about the contributions they have made to the United States as a nation. (Thomas and Brooks Tatum: 183)

This evolution in African American perception is what is helping them to progress today, in the United States of America. They are doing everything to open their own companies, NGOs and institutions, so that they won't have to always rely on whites for employment facilities. That is why in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, Roosevelt is proud to be the vice-president of an outstanding bank in his city. He is so proud of it that he is sharing his new complimentary (contact) cards to his friends, as can be seen in the following dialogue:

ROOSEVELT: *That's the second card I gave out. I gave the first one to John Albrecht so he won't forget I'm a Vice President at Mellon Bank. He's still pissed it came from above him that he had to promote me. He had somebody else in mind. Wait 'til Bernie Smith sees that. This is the big time. Nothing but blue skies. (Sings): Blue skies smiling at me. Nothing but blue skies do I see. Never saw the sun shining so bright. Never saw things going so right. (31)*

This is a very great emancipation for African Americans. People of all works of life and communities, are elated when they get promoted. However, in Roosevelt's case, it is a double promotion. For his white employers to promote him means two major things. Firstly, it means his performance has been the best, and secondly, it means he is so skilled that his white employers have to overlook his racial background. We have read what he says concerning John Albrecht, who is his white boss. He says Albrecht is still overwhelmed because he had another person in mind, who of course is white. Therefore, we can see why Roosevelt is so happy about his promotion.

Nevertheless, this economic emancipation does not end with his promotion as the vice president of Mellon Bank. Another white man (Bernie Smith) has decided to partner with Roosevelt to buy a radio station called WBTZ Radio. It shows that African Americans are successfully deconstructing the stereotype identity ascribed to them by whites, and that is why their novelists and playwrights are writing about them in their works, so that those who do not yet know about it may read and wake up from their sleep. If Roosevelt was not educated, how could he have ever become the business partner of a white billionaire as is seen in the following excerpt? "Not only that, but I'd be in charge. Bernie wants to be a silent partner. I get to run day-to-day operations. I'm in charge of programming. I set the rates. I call all the shots! My ship has come in." (37)

The above excerpt shows us how African American emancipation has forced a lot of whites to change their perception of the African American identity. In the past whether Africans American were educated or not, whites will not employ them in their companies. Today, whites have realized that African Americans cannot be ignored in the society. Many of them are already ranked among the middle and upper class of their societies, and others are self-employed. If they do not employ or partner with African Americans, they too will not buy their products, and it will affect the growth of their businesses. In the case of Mellon Bank, the board members are aware of the fact that they need customers to come and save or borrow money from their bank, which will generate income. The more customers they have, the more interest they will receive. So they need a black man on the executive table, who will attract other blacks to invest in their bank. So Roosevelt is celebrating not only his success, but the success of African Americans as a whole as we see still in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*:

ROOSEVELT: *[. . .] We're talking about an eight million dollar radio station This is the game! I'm at the table! There was a time they didn't let any blacks at the table. You opened the door. You shined the shoes. You served the drinks. And they went in the room and made the deal. I'm in the room! Them motherfuckers who bought and traded them railroads [. . .] how do you think they did it? This is business. This is the way it's done in America. I get to walk away with a piece of an asset worth eight million dollars. (38)*

This shows that whites now acknowledge the integrity of African Americans. This calls for celebration, because African Americans have unshackled the underdog identity that has always been theirs in the past, and have successfully redefine themselves in the United States of America. This explains why Roosevelt keeps exclaiming: "I'm at the table! I'm in the room!" as is seen in the above excerpt. If it were possible, he would have raised up his ancestors to come and see that he today sits with whites on the same table. It proves that most African Americans have successfully asserted their true identity, and they now enjoy their full potentials as American citizens.

Therefore, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas is correct when she asserts in her article entitled "The Next Chapter of Our Story: Rethinking African American Metanarratives in Schooling and Society" that African Americans and even people of other ethnic groups should adopt a new view of their presence in the United States of America. She quotes Charles Johnson an African American writer who declares on the eve of President Obama's nomination that Africans need to redefine their identity in the United States of America. To them, blackness is a state of mind as can be seen in the following excerpt: "*On the eve of President Barack Obama's 2008 Democratic Presidential nomination, African American author and literary critic Charles Johnson asked in The American Scholar if 'the old Black American narrative has outlived its usefulness as a tool of interpretation' in the early twenty-first century*"(Johnson,2008, p.42).

This excerpt shows that the African American perception of the self has changed. Even though African Americans acknowledge the fact that many whites still exhibit racial attitude, they do not want their peers to rely on that or allow those racists inclinations to affect the way in which they perceive the self. They want their peers to pursue their new vision on how to survive as a people from a distinct ethnic group in the United States of America, by encouraging their children to go to school, and for adults to concentrate on how they can make themselves economically viable. That is why Johnson urges his peers to "reinterpret" the African American metanarrative which centers on victimization. To Johnson and most African American elites, whites take pleasure in seeing them cry. Therefore, their peers should stop crying or complaining, and emulate their peer Barack Obama, who through hard work has proven that anybody can succeed in the United States of America, if he/she is determined to do so.

I will therefore conclude this paper by saying that the original vision of the playwrights under study as I stated from the beginning, is not to create a gap between the different ethnic groups in the United States of America, but to create an awareness of the dangers embedded in the practice of racism, and to seek solutions on how to put an end to such practices. All the incidents of violence perpetuated by whites on African Americans and the violence perpetuated by African Americans on whites as a sign of retaliation to white nihilism discussed in this paper, are not meant to create mistrust and hatred in the hearts of people of these ethnic groups, but are meant to make them see how ethnic discrimination is tearing their society apart, and review their perception about this notion of race, so that they can together build a harmonious community for themselves.

As Freud teaches us through the unconscious in psychoanalysis, white racist's attitude is being ruled by the id. Since the id is that aspect of the unconscious which does not conform to societal norms, we have seen in this paper that most of the things that African Americans complain of in the texts under study against white racists, are things that do not conform to societal norms. For example, it is obscene to think that Hero in Parks' *Father Comes Home from the Wars* is the person who cooks the Colonel's food, but he is dying of hunger, while the Colonel eats and drinks.

Suzan Lori-Parks *Fathers Come Home from the Wars* which revisits plantation life depicts how as slaves, African Americans are forbidden to form families, which is the hope of every human being. As plantation workers, they toil every day from morning to night, but they are dying of hunger and poverty. They do not have anything that they can call their own, and they are forbidden from getting married and having children of their own, like they see other normal people in the society do. They are condemned to live a hopeless life.

This paper goes on to show us the measures which are taken by African Americans to deconstruct this abominable life style that white racists have ascribed to them, so as to redefine themselves in the United States of America and rebuild their self-esteem. It shows us through Adolf Wilson's *Radio Golf* how African Americans are now company owners who employ both whites and blacks and have the right to assert their identity in the community in which they live. This has a positive effect on the African American ethnic group, and it has gone a long way to change the perception of others towards them. We have also seen how African Americans have formed NGOs that move from city to city to encourage the children of their peers to go to school, and these groups also educate parents on how to follow up their children's education, so that white racist teachers will not succeed to make them abandon school.

Many of the new generation whites do not see anything wrong with the African American ethnic group. They see them as normal hard working American citizens, who are also striving to attain the American dream. This explains why African Americans can today be found participating in every aspect of life in the United States of America. They are no longer the disenfranchise citizens who used to complain about what whites are doing to them. Today, they vote others and are also voted into office, like Barack Obama who was voted as the American president in 2008, and was re-elected in 2012. President Biden has also appointed Kamala Harris an

African American as the Vice—President of the United States of America. Apart from being the president, this is the highest post that an African American has ever been appointed to. This is the new vision of race that African Americans have aspired for, and which they seek to maintain.

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