

## (DE)CENTRING OF WHITE RACIAL IDEOLOGY THROUGH EDUCATION IN ERNEST J. GAINES' *A LESSON BEFORE DYING*

Bassamanan TOURE

*Department of English, University Peleforo Gon Coulibaly (Korhogo, Cote d'Ivoire)*

**ABSTRACT :** This paper, grounded on the Derridean approach, deals with race relationship in a hostile environment for black characters. These characters are granted an education in a plantation school. In this framework, education can be grasped through a binary paradigm. On the one hand, thriving to implement their hegemony, white people resort to education to reinforce their privileged status. It shifts to be an ideological tool for structural violence against black learners. The discriminative measures of the board of education deteriorates the quality and quantity of teaching. White supremacists also resort to racial discourse to set, re-establish racial differentiation, and perpetuate the imposed complex of inferiority on blacks. On the other hand, education is re-adapted, reinvented to decenter racial hegemony; it subverts white racial superiority as it helps agents of social change to acquire progressive values. Education fosters enlightenment and self-assertion. Grant challenges cultural inferiority through linguistic production that casts doubt on black people presumed ignorance and inferiority. The linguistic performance decenters knowledge and destabilizes white hegemony. Moreover, education informs and affects leadership and commitment Education is meant here to undermine white superiority and assert black subjectivity.

**KEYWORDS :** *blacks, commitment, deconstruction, de-centering, education, white racial hegemony*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In a multi-ethnic society, interracial relationships are often characterized by tensions given that some groups attempt to dominate the others. The persistence of racism in Gaines' fictional universe reflects the hostility, problems between blacks and whites. In a supremacist impulse, some white characters attempt to perpetuate their hegemony over others. The current racial hierarchy deprives blacks from their basic human rights. Racial inequality creates a permanent sense of subjugation and indignation. In addition to judiciary institutions that dehumanize blacks, white supremacists, through terrorist actions, oppress them. In doing so, the rationale behind the violent attitudes of these supremacists ranges from intimidation to the process of white hegemony enforcement. Blacks turn to be victims of domination and oppression because they are considered as scapegoats targeted by racists. One may wonder what can account for the resentment and hostility towards this minority group? C. Warren (2018, p.199) pictures blacks' world as a "metaphysics holocaust" a phrase that designates the exclusion of blacks from the realm of human beings. The judiciary institution and racist actions are patterns of the "metaphysics". As he rightly puts forth: "Metaphysics can never provide freedom or humanity for blacks, since it is the objectification, domination, and extermination of blacks that keep the metaphysics world intact. Metaphysics uses blacks to maintain a sense of security and to sustain the fantasy of triumph" (2018, p.199). In other words, in the white ontological structure, blacks are considered as scapegoats and victims of racial violence and intolerance.

In this study, we focus on the objectification and domination blacks are subjected to in Gaines' fictional universe. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, one of the most outstanding ideological tools to implement, and reinforce racial supremacy is education. School teachers and the superintendent seem to work in and for a system that promotes white hegemony. A reading of Gaines' novel unveils the ambivalence of education which confers to it a worth studying prestige. Grounded on the following hypothesis, this paper assumes that white racial hegemony can be constructed and deconstructed by and through education. Thus said, what ideology does the text seem to promote? How does the text center the prevailing racial hegemony in race relationships? How does conflicting evidence in the narrative show the limitations of racial hegemony? My reasoning is woven around a binary paradigm. On the one side, it emphasizes the centering of white racial hegemony through educational institutions. Racial discrimination helps darken black students' future and reinforce white supremacy. On the

other side, this work intends to prove that education, used in a reversal way, represents an efficient means of de-centering of white racial ideology. Education fosters empowerment which is conducive to racial myths deconstruction. It enables African Americans to reinvent their identity themselves. The purpose of this paper is to comprehend how African American literature shifts to be a mirror that undresses the dynamics of race relationships. At the crossroad of social changes, from a Derridian approach, I highlight how from an imposed identity, blacks re-define their identity resorting to the power of education.

### **1-(Re-) Enforcing White Racial Hegemony Through Education**

Education stands as a process of teaching, training, and learning in schools, to impart knowledge and develop skills. This definition unveils the paradox that lies in the title of this section, which is framed as follows: (Re-) enforcing white racial hegemony through education. Instead of focusing on pedagogical activities that foster betterment, some agents of the elementary education system consciously or unconsciously act as racial order enforcers. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines depicts pedagogical interactions that occur in the primary school. The teachers portrayed in this context and the superintendent corrupt and subvert the rationale of educational objectives. I intend to show how structural violence, racial discourse, differential racialization and segregation in the black school enforce white racial superiority.

#### **1-1- The Prevalence of Structural Violence and Segregation in the Plantation School**

While trying to make a distinction between “personal violence and structural violence”, G. Johan (1969, p.171) writes “when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence”. The victim of personal violence perceives the oppression he/she is subjected to; however, he/she who is subjected to structural violence may be persuaded not to perceive this form of violence at all. In the framework of this work, I approach with analytic caution any action of violence at school. To apply Galtung’s theory to the plight of black students in Gaines’s novel, the critic may point out when a teacher beats one of his students, that is a case of personal violence but when some professional workers (teachers and superintendent) in an educational milieu prevent their students from learning efficiently, that is obviously a case of structural violence. Thus said, Gaines recognizes that, practically speaking, black students are exposed to structural violence. Education, here, is meant to keep them into ignorance, the narrator recalls: “Dr. Joseph visited the colored school once a year, the white one probably twice each semester” (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.53). This is indicative of the educational politics which attempts to hurl black students into the abyss of ignorance. Better still, the episode where the teacher pleads for basic teaching materials with the superintendent is more illustrative. The text reads: “I don’t have the books I need. In some classes, I have two children studying out of one book. And even with that, some of the pages in the book are missing. I need more paper to write on. I need more chalk for board, I need more pencils. I even need a better heater.” (G.J Ernest, 1993, p57). Two main problems merge in this context. They range from the lack of basic teaching materials to institutional measures fostering structural violence in education. What deconstructive reading flows from this situation?

G. Adja and G. Kaan define deconstruction as the reading of text in terms of their marks, traces, or undecidable features. (2008, p.223) It accounts for how text explicit formulations undermine its implicit aspects; it brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. In the illustrative passage, the phrase “I need” is repeated. That repetition is meant to insist on the lack of basic teaching materials in the black plantation school. For the deconstruction reader, this lack is included in the text; from this repetition, the text unveils what is excluded: the implicitness. Grant expresses his needs according to the standard of white schools which are equipped with all the required teaching materials and facilities. With that difference, white learners are more likely to reach teaching outcomes in contrast to black students. Beyond the teaching materials, to reach pedagogical outcomes both teacher and learners must be assessed. But Gaines underlines that colored and white schools are not supervised in the same rate by the superintendent. The latter visits black schools once a year and white one twice each semester. Unconsciously, Gaines undermines the hierarchical order of binarism: the privileged pole seems to be colored school and the underprivileged are white schools. Compared to black students who must work on farm to help their relatives to get food, white learners live in adequate socio-economic conditions, so they require little supervision. In this context, Dr. Joseph’s visits are supplementary; however, plantation schools are granted a little assistance. This lack of inappropriate assistance undresses the superintendent’s attempt to undermine Grant’s ambition and mission to outgrow the structural violence within education. By providing frequent inspection visits and teaching materials to white schools to the detriment of black ones, the superintendent endeavors to reinforce white hegemony through education.

From Grant Wiggins to Antoine Matheu de Poulaya, black schoolteachers seem to ally with the objective of the educational board to promote white hegemony. These characters’ accommodative attitudes prove that they have been subjugated and seduced by the white class given that “all systems of oppression not thoroughly coerced through brute force and overt repression involve the dominant group’s ability to win consent of the oppressed” (P.D. Karen, 2010, p.556). In the narrative, the omniscient narrator, Grant, strictly respects the

norms and prescriptions imposed by the educational board. He is expected to stress writing rather than speaking. Thus, that black teacher focuses on arithmetic, reading and writing in his daily pedagogical interaction with the students.

Examining the plantation educational system, the narrative highlights the segregation that prevails. Both the form and the content illustrate this assumption. Gaines smoothly unveils the idea that the syllabus designed for black schools as taught by Grant, is a non-logocentric endeavor grounded on the assumption of the preeminence of “speech over writing”. Here, students’ utterances contain mistakes: “yazir” (1993, p.55), “aw-aw right” (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.40) and this standing illustrative sentence from Louis Washington Junior who said to his teacher: “Mr. Wiggins, now you was looking out that window too, now. I seen you” (, 1993, p.60). The reader notices grammar mistakes and mispronunciation problems in the students’ verbal production. The mistakes fiercely epitomize the crisis of education in the black community.

In the western metaphysics, writing has been for long undermined due to speech preeminence. Derrida refers to this preeminence of speech over writing as logocentrism. Dealing with the suppression of writing in Platonic ontological structure, Derrida notes “writing” is only apparently good for memory, seemingly able to help it from within, though its own motion, to know what is true. But in truth, writing is essentially bad, external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances “(Z. Peter, 2002, p.32). In Gaines’ work, the school master, Grant, is expected to focus on writing. He only does what school authorities order him to do. He teaches arithmetic, writing. Respecting the rules edited by the white educational authorities proves that this character like his students evolve in a logocentric society. However, the correctness deriving from prescriptive grammar rules contrasts with Grant’s students’ utterances. The grammar mistakes and mispronunciation are the signals of the poor education these students are provided with. In a logocentric-oriented view, the words of an individual which are infused with verbal mistakes are not likely to be taken for granted: “you was”, “I seen” embody textual evidence that crystalize the transgressive approach of Grant’s students. It sounds like a linguistic rebellion that undermines correctness and highlights subjectivity. If colored schools are not well equipped like whites’ ones, then for black students it is no use respecting linguistic prescriptions and the rules set by white society. Grant, in this context, acts as the agent of censorship that punishes any verbal mistake in class. Speech performance is therefore subjected to structuralism. The school master’s physical violence toward his learners when they transgress linguistic norms is an overt attempt to silence them and prompt them to resort to writing. To some extent, these grammatical mistakes may encapsulate the plight of African American education at large. Thus, perpetuating the tradition of poor and inefficient knowledge acquisition and training is a disguised attempt to hold blacks within their status of inferiority given that children represent the future of any community.

The reader perceives different meanings that flow from the trace in the episode wherein a crying student answered to Grant that he was “aw-right”. Before deciphering the different meanings deriving from this phrase, what does the term “trace” refer to in deconstruction? To this question, S.K. Mawazo (2002, p.61) notes that a “trace is illusory effect of meaning that is left in a signifier by other signifiers, while it is not so. In fact, the meaning of a word continually disappears, leaving us with only memory or trace of what that meaning once was”. In Gaines’ fictional universe, “aw-right” as the reader can guess that expression may refer to “alright”. But if African American schools lack basic teaching materials, everything is not alright. When in a plantation system, the school master teaches from first grade up to sixth grade in the same room, everything is not alright. At last, when black students frequently make grammar mistakes then everything is not alright. Then the first possible meaning of “aw-right” collapses; its meaning vanishes away. Moreover, “aw-right” may refer to “all rights”. In the plantation African American schools, black children do not enjoy the same rights as white students, so all rights are not guaranteed for the latter. Finally, another trace of “aw-right” can be “aright”. But if, these students fail to perform a good homophonic production, the pronunciation, here is not aright. The lack of correctness implies that things are not expressed properly. Instead of using pedagogical techniques such as chorus and individual repetition to instill good pronunciation, Grant stresses on writing and arithmetic thus undermining speech. Education is meant, here, to reinforce the dictate of white society.

### 1-2- Racial Discourse and Differential Racialization in the Educational Milieu

White racial hegemony can be enforced, inculcated through racial discourse which fosters a status quo in hierarchical order of races. In *A Lesson Before Dying* the mulatto and the black teacher (Grant and Antoine Matthu de Poulaya) are victims of internalized racism. As a result, they seem to ally with white racial supremacy discourse. But what does this concept of internalized racism imply? In his attempt to conceptualize internalized racism, P.D. Karen (2010, p.553) writes that internalized racism can be defined as the individual inculcation of racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by white racist society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and /or oneself. The biracial teacher has so internalized racial oppression that he shifts to be a spokesperson of the racial hegemony-oriented discourse. He acts as an oppressor towards his learners. He is bitter and intolerant. Gaines, through this African American teacher’s depiction, demonstrates how racial hierarchy can be taught to black students. In this

context, the black school denotes an institutional milieu that promotes and distills ideologies of racial superiority. Grant still remembers his teacher:

Matheu Antoine, as teacher then, who stood by the force while we chopped the wood. He had told us then that most of us [Grant and his classmates] would die violently and those who did not would be brought down to the level of beasts. Told us that there was no other choice but to run and run. [...] he said it, and he didn't say it [...] "You will one day" he said. "you'll see that it 'll take more than five and half months to wipe away - peel-scrape away the blanket of ignorance that has been plastered and replastered over those brains in the past three hundred years. (G. J. Ernest, 1993, pp.62-64)

This is a nihilist vision of the teacher out of great despair. Actually, he is convinced there was no way for black kids to succeed because of the whole system of white domination. This excerpt from a structuralist stand, displays a form of focalization that is relevant in this context. To B. Mieke (2014,p.148), focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees and that is being seen. In Gaines' work the stream of consciousness is held by Grant. He has memories of actions and can report his former's teacher's words: the creole teacher instills defeatist thoughts under tragic tone in his learners' mind. School, thus, shifts to be a center of psychological torture. Unconsciously, that master reinforces white hegemony through anti-personal thoughts, self-loathing ideas. The narrator uses an absence-presence metaphysics to depict the focalizer's stand toward the focalized subjects [his students] It goes as follow "he said it and he didn't say it". Derrida's tradition of presence / absence shares the assumption that the first pole of the binarism is privileged. And the second pole is underprivileged. Establishing a parallel, on the one hand, so to speak, the master's words [he said it] echoes the speech hence its presence. On the other hand, what he did not say refer to silence and absence. In deconstruction, meaning is often deferred into the non-expressed, the absent. In other words, in the narrative the non-said still succeeds in saying something. Absence, in this episode embodies traces; it posits itself as the "diversel" (G. Marc, 2013,p.41) layer whose exclusion doesn't stop the possibility for interpretation. For instance, a reader may distinguish three layers. First, Matheu Antoine de Poulaya did not overtly say that he is acting as a racial order enforcer who allies with white people to demand the strict respect of racial hierarchy preservation. As just as whites feel superior to mulattoes and African Americans, he passionately believes that mixed heritage characters are superior to blacks. Matheu Antoine openly hated his students because they were darker than he and who taught them only one lesson: leave the South. He merely reiterates the white rationale for denying human value to blacks. (C. Karen, 1998, p.126) Second, that school master did not prove to his learners that the education provided to them aims at perpetuating the cycle of domination and subordination by imparting on them the respect of social norms. Here, the educational institution sounds like an ideological tool used by white supremacists. At last, he did not tell his students overtly that in a racist environment, education fails to guarantee the realization of the American Dream. Better still, it mediates the tragic mood linked to the students' fate. Thus said, the school master acts as a reminder of the dangers awaiting them out of school. Education paves the way from plantation school to imprisonment or death. All in all, the absence-presence binarism helps to comprehend how education is used to promote racial hegemony.

Dr. Joseph, the white superintendent, is portrayed as an agent of white supremacy. If we share the assumption that a character can be understood through his actions, his own words and thoughts and what others say about him, the actions, and words of the superintendent, in the episode of his visits in Grant's class, prove that he deliberately enforces white hegemony. Gaines underlines how differential racialization permeates and affects black school. Differential racialization can be defined as a process by which racial groups are pictured and treated differently by the privileged members of the society (D. Richard and S. Jean, 2012, p.160). On the one hand, the superintendent's lack of interest in black children's education is echoed by his frequent mispronunciation of Grant Wiggins. Instead of Wiggins he would rather say "stifling" (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.53). Ironically, he associates the black teacher with an agent of racial order enforcer given that "to stifle" means prevent something from happening, the black teacher is meant, through teaching activities and violence, to inculcate and perpetuate the imposed status of inferiority upon the black community. On the other hand, while supervising Grant's class, the superintendent's discourse focuses on nutrition, hygiene, Bible verses recitation and farm working. These aspects can be apprehended through the last words he said before leaving the school:

When he [Dr. Joseph] had inspected enough mouths and hands, he gave the school a ten-minute lecture on nutrition. [...] And exercise was good. In other words, hard work. In other words, hard work was good for the young body. Picking cotton, gathering potatoes, pulling onions, working in the garden – all of that was good exercise for a growing boy and girl (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.56) .

As one of the most outstanding figures of educational milieu, the superintendent actions and words sharply contrasts with his job exportations. The superintendent mouths and teethinspection is reminiscent of the attitude of white plantation owners who used to check slaves' mouths and hands before buying them. This allusion, in Derridian tradition, to slavery institution, reveals the illusion that slavery with its patterns of domination

ended. The reader can see the humiliated hygiene inspection performed by Dr. Joseph. After focusing hygiene, the superintendent underlines the benefits of hard work for children. He insisted “hard work was good for the young body” and added “alof that was good exercise for a giving boy and girl” (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.56). The tautology, here, is meant for repeating the same idea in different words, that figurative language constitutes a form of insistence on the necessity to train colored students for plantation work. The reader may find “disorder” and a tendency of the language to deconstruct its apparent sense” (A.I.K. Myson, 2019, p.50). The superintendent’s discourse stresses hygiene and hard work for young learners in the plantation school. As M. Augustand R. Elliot (1976, p.219) put it: “Southern Whites saw education as keeping blacks in the subordinate position of working with their hands rather than preparing them for professional career. They [blacks] had inferior, inadequate programs.” In doing so, he acts as an opponent to black quest for knowledge. In other words, he excludes instructions that aims at improving pedagogical outcomes. One is likely to conclude that this agent tries to maintain the growing children in plantation manual work like their parents. Grant uses education to undermine white hegemony.

## **2-Dispelling Racial Myths Through Education: Redefining Leadership and Commitment in the Black Community**

Education can have ambivalent features. This section emphasizes how education is designed, reinvented to serve the African American community’s needs. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, formal and non-formal education are used to decenter white racial hegemony. In a rather subtle way, the writer undresses changes that occur for the sake of the black community owing to education. Education is being used here for the benefits of black community so, the purpose is to demonstrate how a black community-oriented lesson, through debasing cultural inferiority, micro-resistance, and commitment subverts, dispels white racial hegemony.

### **2-1- The Black Community-Oriented Lesson and the Debasing of Cultural Inferiority**

“In racial matters as in any therapy, the admission of denial is the preamble for the beginning of recovery” (B.S. Eduardo, 2014, p.307), thus said, being detached, away from one’s kinsmen, constitutes an obstacle to community’s welfare. In the early episode of Gaines’ novel, the main character, Grant Wiggins, seems to have a superficial relationship with his community. He appears as an accommodationist who strictly respects southern social norms. In a conversation between black men in a bar, Grant learns about and from his community. That lesson later informs Grant’s attitude. The victory of the black fighter, Jackie Robinson, over the white fighter, Schmeling, was a source of pride. This following excerpt is illustrative: “for days after that fight, for weeks, we held our heads higher than any people on the earth had ever done for any reason” (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.89). In a reversal situation wherein the teacher is being taught, the community’s lesson triggers Grant’s sense of leadership. Being imbued with the sense of community enables Grant to grasp the need of his community. In a rather non-formal setting, learning from uneducated counterparts is the starting point for the teacher to fully grasp, comprehend the need of his community. It sharpens Grant’s personal development and commitment for his community. Knowing about and from his people paves the way to Grant’s leadership. As a mentor, Grant would later urge Jefferson, through a dialectic approach, to make decision which will change his whole community. The black community-oriented lesson is the root of Grant’s overt micro-resistant actions against white hegemony. Education transforms Grant’s identity and his attitude his reminiscent of Jim Kelly rebellious stance in *Of Love and Dust*. From his accommodationist stance, he shifts to be a fully-fledged hero-making figure. Grant was strengthened the cultural values.

In the episode of the black men’s conversation that Grant listened to in the bar, there is a reversal of the pole of learning at stake. The schoolteacher posits himself as an individual who discovers new things about African- American existence; and therefore, he endeavors to readapt his action toward Jefferson and his community. To succeed in helping Jefferson become a man, Grant needs, first and foremost, individual, and internal reevaluation and change. He departs from racial prejudices which darken his counterparts’ lives and discovers what matters to his community. He will not keep on acting like a racial hegemony enforcer who fails to take care of his students and Jefferson properly. Using deconstructive lens, the reader may comprehend the marginals that prevent the schoolteacher, Grant Wiggins, from acting for his people’s welfare at the beginning of the actions in the novel. First acting like a stranger, Grant did not know his own community’s expectations. In addition, he seems to undermine the living conditions of the plantation that constitute hindrances to efficient learning. The schoolteacher is intolerant and violent whenever one of his learners makes a mistake. In the end, Grant observes strictly what white people told him. He realizes that his way and posture are not appropriate. The non-formal education delivered implicitly in the bar shapes Grant’s view. The episode of the black fighter, Jackie Robinson, and the white boxer, Schmeling, is used as a metonymy which is worth analyzing. If metonymy is meant for a change of name or object. Jefferson represents the black fighter, and the white racist system is symbolized by the Schmeling. Grant is urged to make his community proud through the heroic replica or the reenactment of the fight mentioned above. Just as Robinson’s victory was a source of joy and dignity, so

Grant is expected to make Jefferson defeat white hegemony. Therefore, education, here, helps and provides Grant with adequate values to combat white superiority.

Education fosters enlightenment. One's personality can be the legacy of way of learning and critical thinking. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, through a linguistic play, Grant challenges the cultural inferiority imposed on African American characters. The schoolteacher intends to destroy the badge and the mask of ignorance plastered on him and his counterparts through verbal production. In fact, the teacher uses language as a means of subversion of white hegemony. In a context wherein blacks are associated with ignorance and whites with knowledge, developing and demonstrating linguistic accuracy, and proficiency aims at providing a good model for his students and dispelling stereotypes regarding black inescapable fate of ignorance. In the episode wherein Grant is talking to the Sheriff, the correct syntax used by Grant is problematic for white people. While answering to the sheriff's question when the latter wanted to know why Jefferson's godmother would not come herself for visits at jail. Grant answers:

“She doesn't feel that she has the strength to come up there all the time”

“She doesn't, huh?” Sam Guidry asked me. He emphasized doesn't.

I was supposed to have said “don't”

“yes, sir” I said “she doesn't feel that she can” I used the word “doesn't” again but I did it intentionally this time (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.48)

Grant's use of formal language represents a disguised form of linguistic rebellious attitude. Ironically, it is the education that white system provided Grant with at university that bestows enunciative power on him. The repetition of the utterance “she doesn't feel” in this extract shows that Grant is determined through verbal production to reestablish equality. With this pleonasm, it is no use displaying falseness on purpose just to contempt the officer. That passage also articulates a binary opposition between “doesn't” and “don't”. The first expression, the privileged one, refers to structuralist correctness, and knowledge. Its use is paramount to people who value the strict obedience to social norms and hierarchy. The second term “don't” echoes inaccuracy, falseness, and ignorance. As the underprivileged and, it is used by non-conformists who constantly break the laws. When the sheriff expresses his surprise and indignation as Grant uses an accurate language structure to talk to him, he assumes that Blacks are not supposed to speak correctly. While repeating the accurate language with insistence, Grant intends to show that education confers on him power and knowledge. The reproduction of the correct syntax form is a metaphor of the black school master's ability to subvert white hegemony. Grant's linguistic transgression decenters knowledge. Owing to the acquired education in college, he contradicts the shared assumption about African Americans' ignorance. Grant's attitude echoes commitment and resistance.

## 2-2- Fostering Commitment and Micro-resistance in the Narrative

Some critics rightly consider education as one of the most efficient empowering forces in contemporary society. Education creates knowledge and awareness by erasing the spectrum of ignorance. It builds self-confidence and breaks down barriers. In the fictional world of Gaines, education helps shape leadership and commitment in favor of some communal benefits. In a rather unconventional pedagogical setting, Grant defines and inculcates in Jefferson the notion of leadership. In this process, the reader can perceive the double process of commitment. If one shares the assumption that the hero is someone who does things for others, then it can be asserted that the teacher, Grant, stands as a hero-making character. While urging Jefferson to embody a hero for his community owing to his persuasive verbal arguments that education bestowed on him, Grant acts like a hero-figure because he gradually changes Jefferson. As a mentor, he makes Jefferson a man. To summarize, the black teacher changes the “hog” into a man. On the one hand, Grant is chosen to teach Jefferson to become a man. That is his responsibility. Grant's commitment is echoed in his deep commitment to Jefferson's empowerment. Showing responsibility at an individual level is a premise of social change. On the other hand, through Grant, the African American community bestows on Jefferson a messianic mission. Jefferson's counterparts have been longing for a male child that will change their condition. Both the teacher and the convict turn to be agents of social change. The literate and the barely literate must work together to change everything in the black community. The episode wherein Grant and Vivian discuss at the Rainbow Club portrays African American's plight which informs the current community's expectation vis-à-vis Grant and Jefferson. The text reads:

We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the south and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves. So, each time a male is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious circle - which he never does [...] what she [Miss Emma] want is for him, Jefferson and me to change everything that has been going on for three hundred years. [...] Because if he [Jefferson] does not, she knows that she will never get another opportunity to see a black man stand for her. (1993-p167).

From Aunt Lou to Miss Emma, these bold female characters, from the early stage of the story, set the quest for Grant and Jefferson that they must perform. These women almost compelled Grant to do prison's visits to help Jefferson die like a man. They want Grant and Jefferson to stand for them. Both the schoolteacher and the prisoner are pictured as prospective agents of social change. They are being recruited as they are subjects of condensation on the old women's behalf. Metonymy is akin to the unconscious process of displacement because both processes substitute a person or object for another person or object with which the first is, in some way associated (T. Lois, 2012, p.30). The quest of these characters is the legacy of a lifetime experience in a racist environment. In particular, they expect Grant and Jefferson to stand for them and for the community in general. They have remained unprotected without anybody to stand for them. In a social context, where black men are emasculated, they run away from their families. This state of abandonment informs the female characters' conception of what a man should be.

A man, as an active agent of social change, must make a decision that can restore their dignity. The male child symbolizes a messianic figure for the whole community. The reader can observe how and why the schoolteacher, as a mentor and a leader, is expected to transform Jefferson's mind. Acting as a bicultural character, Grant uses both the tools of academic and non-formal education to shape Jefferson's self-confidence. The school master urges him to stand as a hero. The convict must die with dignity and integrity to help his community get hope for a bright future. The ambivalent feature of education emerges in the context. At first, the superintendent resorts to Grant to instill the sense of obedience into his learners. They should behave according to racial regulations. But ironically, Grant is chosen to train to undermine white superiority. Both female characters realize that only education can undo the state of ignorance and the indignation that the people have been going through on the plantation. Education is a consciousness-changing process. It may take a character from his initial acceptance of the constraints of racial prejudice into a state of mind imposed by frustrations and self-actualization (K. Amani, 1992, p.41).

Counter storytelling is a process of writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority (D. Richard and S. Jean, 2012, p.159). Grant, as the spokesperson of the African American community, urges Jefferson to adopt a counter story telling approach toward white supremacists. The young black boy is urged to reconsider, to dispel the stereotypes built against blacks. Grant, at school, seems to be an agent of status quo. However, Jefferson can posit himself as a prospective agent of social change. Given that as a teacher, Grant acts according to the dictates of Dr. Joseph. He only teaches arithmetic, reading, and writing; but nothing about social-cultural values such as dignity, identity, the sense of belonging, loving, and caring for others. Departing from that accommodationist attitude, in prison, Grant focuses his lessons on what matters to his community. The teacher persuades Jefferson to deconstruct the myth of white racial supremacy by standing against this system of domination, by challenging their belief. He can prove them wrong by re-writing the history of his counterparts. As a fully-fledged teacher, Grant designs, prepares the content of the pedagogical interaction with Jefferson while withstanding the needs of the black community. In this context, education casts doubt on the myth of racial hegemony. Education darkens the racial ideology. Whereas it enlightens black's subjectivity, and identity. The following excerpt is illustrative of that. Talking to Jefferson, Grant underlines:

“A myth is an old lie that people believe in. White people believe that they're better than anyone else on earth - and that's a myth. The last thing they ever want is to see a black man stand and think and show that common humanity is in us all. It would destroy their myth. They would no longer have justification for having made us slaves keeping us in the condition we are in. As long as none of us stand, they're safe [...]. I want you to chip away at that myth by standing. I want you - yes, you - to call them liars. I want you to show them that you are as much a man - more a man than they can ever be.” (G. J. Ernest, 1993, p.192)

In this human self-assertiveness-oriented course delivered by Grant to the barely educated, Jefferson, the reader comprehends the impact of education and its empowering force. The prison and chains deprive Jefferson of the freedom of action and movement. But they can't prevent him from being responsible by taking a decision which can go right through prison's walls and influence positively his whole community.

White hegemony sounds like a social and ideological construct that aims at accounting for exploitation and domination. As the center of consciousness that incarnate the narrative instance of the whole black community, Grant unveils how racial superiority is grounded on ideas. In the excerpt, the repetition of the word “myth” is obvious. That repetition helps underline how Grant emphasizes the key concept invented by supremacists to account for white superiority. Here, the discourse of white hegemony is deconstructed. L. Michel (2002, p.61) shares the assumption that the text represents a construction, an edifice whose reading implies a close attention to the trace of fissures. The analysis of the fissures in the text proves that it is prone to be deconstructed. If the ideological foundations of white supremacist ideology rest on a myth of purity, superiority, humanity, this racial discourse establishes a political hierarchy that can be formulated as followed: humanity vs animality, superiority vs inferiority, domination vs subordination. Grant encourages Jefferson to threaten this structure. The

underprivileged pole should change. Challenging the ideological principles to justify white hegemony is an attempt to destroy the foundation of racial discourse. In dealing with white hegemonic discourse, E.K. N'Guessan (2020, p.52) writes: in *The Known World*, race and power seem inseparable. And the racial discourse, namely the political and ideological nature of the language in the novel, reveals a hierarchical order. The discursive articulation or construct of that dominance is synonymous with a system of power which aims at obliterating the blacks.

The repetition of the word "myth" (four times) in the extract is evocative of the biblical myth that recounts the origin of the black curse and the subsequent unlimited blessing of white people: Ham's curse. For Derrida, all meaning is textual and intertextual. Every text exists only in relation to other texts through repetition, affiliation, and allusion. (A. I. K. Myson, 2019, p.501) In this analysis, the myth depicted by Grant is a mere repetition of the religious myth that is often used to justify black damnation and subsequent subordination. One realizes why Grant urges Jefferson to stand against this belief which tends to belittle African Americans. Grant is eager to prove that humanity is in all of them (white and black people). Jefferson must destroy the ideological assets that account for white hegemony and blacks' subordination. Grant strongly puts; "I want you" (Three times). That repetition is a disguised way of insistence on the necessity for Jefferson and his whole community to stand to combat white superiority. The accepted and shared ideas that strengthen white hegemony must be revisited because they are the legacy of subjectivity. Grant thrives for a reconfiguration of racial hierarchy in which races are equal. Education posits Grant as a hero-making leader that can change his people's conditions.

## II. CONCLUSION

Education embodies a powerful ideological tool used by white supremacists to strengthen their hegemony. Black students are faced with structural violence. The implemented strategies in the plantation school prevent students from learning efficiently. The lack of basic teaching materials and the inappropriate assistance provided by the educational expert unveils supremacists' attempt to maintain African Americans into ignorance. Consequently, they promote white hegemony. Through discriminative measures, agents of educational system unconsciously collaborate to deteriorate and demean black education. The educational board stresses writing to the detriment of speech. In a logocentric-oriented perspective, the words of black students which are infected with grammar mistakes and mispronunciations foretell the poor education these young characters are provided with. The attempt to maintain and perpetuate the poor training institutes an overt initiative to keep black within their status of inferiority. Racial hegemony is instilled in black learners through discursive means. The creole master Mattheu Antoine, who acts like an accommodationist, shifts to be an active agent of racial discourse in the plantation school. He has so internalized racism that he promptly accepts and promotes racial stratification. He reinforces white supremacy by highlighting black inescapable fate. He predicts a tragic end for his learners and urges them to leave the South. The racial discourse aims at promoting racial hegemony and undermining the prospective change education may guarantee. Educational board representatives handle black schools differently. Differential racialization, in education, affects students. Grants Wiggins often acts as an agent of racial enforcer that inculcates and perpetuates the imposed inferiority complex upon his people. Moreover, the superintendent's actions aim at improving academic performances. Education is meant to demean blacks' cognitive abilities.

Education represents a double-edged sword that is used to subvert white racial hegemony. With the help of non-formal education provided by the community, education triggers Grant's micro resistance attitude toward racism and social injustice. Education transforms Grant's socio-political views so that he shifts to be a hero making figure. Education enables Grant to acquire values to challenge white superiority. Education fosters enlightenment and self-assertion. The educated black character, Grant, through the linguistic play, challenges the cultural inferiority imposed on his community. Having been associated with ignorance, falseness, and inferiority the use of accurate language norms by Grant subverts white hegemony. That linguistic transgression decenters knowledge and challenges one of the most outstanding ideological pillar of supremacists as he contradicts the shared assumption of blacks' ignorance. In the narrative, education informs and affects leadership and commitment for the community. The empowering force of education enables Grant to transform Jefferson from defeatism to terrorism. Education, as a consciousness changing process, represents the unique alternative to undermine white hegemony. Mature female characters are alert about the fact that only education can deconstruct the badge of ignorance. Through counter-storytelling, Grant encourages and convinces Jefferson to deconstruct white superiority. The convict is expected to dispel the stereotypes built against his counterparts. the racial myth which represents the ideological foundation of white hegemony is decentered through the impact of education. Education darkens the racial ideology and enhances black subjectivity. Like a hero, Jefferson proves that humanity is common to both whites and blacks.



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