



RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN BLACK LITERATURE: A STUDY OF THE WORKS OF DOUGLAS

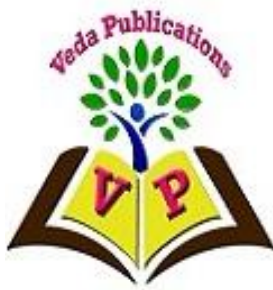
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ABSTRACT

Race consciousness, pride and understanding of a black African heritage and specifically of what it meant to be black in America posits a pivot attention in contemporary Black Literature. The present paper deals Douglas, how he successfully communicates this heritage in his work while keeping sight of the specific struggles and challenges of the race in America. Rejecting the savagery, sexual freedom, irresponsibility of black stereo types, Douglas focused on the psychological depth and self awareness with examples. He like many of his contemporaries also saw spiritual continuity between Africans and African Americans, expressed through dance and music: "Music and Dance, that spirit beneath the substance soul, The Black consciousness movement was a gross roots anti apartheid activist movement, represent a social movement for political consciousness." This article gives a keen idea of the Africans in America with reference to a particular time period, and the examples from literature to prove the thought.



Keywords: *Black Literature, African Americans, Racial Consciousness, Cultural Heritage, African Diaspora*

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**INTRODUCTION**

One of the primary projects of the Harlem renaissance was rare consciousness, of pride and understanding of a black African heritage and specifically of what it meant to be black in America. Race consciousness interestingly paralleled a large current with in American art and literature of American consciousness, an attempt to define what was separate, unique and worth of praise in American culture. In this way, the new Negro Movement, coincide with and at remained distinct from the concerns of European, Americans in the 20's and 30's. The goal of Black artists was, among other things, to "transform the stereotypical image of Negro Americans at the turn of the century away from their popular image as Ex-slaves, defined as members of a rare inherently inferior . . . into an image of a rare of culture bearers" (1).

Douglas, a representative voice in Black Literature successfully communicates the Black heritage in his works while keeping sight of the specific struggles and challenges of the race in America. As aspect of this heritage of obvious importance to Douglas was African art: Classical tradition, Ancestral arts, African figures that get placed into his work were of Egyptian and Dan ivory coast. He continued to explore African culture as well as that of the African Diaspora. His knowledge of African art and culture through enhance by trips to the natural history museum, the Brooklyn museum and access to one of the best collections of African art in America. For Douglas, however, unlike many European and European American artists, African art was more than a means to infuse a dying industrialized culture with life. It was proof that "the Negro is not a cultural folding foundling without his own Inheritance". Douglas modeled his silhouetted forms in parts from Egyptians wall paintings and bas reliefs as well as African masks. Another important influence on Douglas' silhouettes was masks from the Dan tried located in the Ivory Coast. The slanted slit eyes and lips are reminiscent of the masks Douglas would have seen at the natural history museum. Douglas literalized these abstractions in easily identifiable forms, fulfilling his desire to "to present, interpret and discover the world of the imaginative, the spiritual, and the nonmaterial in such a manner

that it becomes real, desirable, attractive, and accessible".

Rejecting the savagery, sexual freedom, irresponsibility of black stereotypes, Douglas focused on the psychological depth and self awareness of the speaker of Langston Hughes, "The Negro speaks of Rivers".

I've known rivers_____

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human.

Blood in human veins

My soul has grown deep like the rivers

I bathed I the Euphrates when dawns were young,

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it,

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,

And I've seen this muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient dusty rivers, my soul has grown deep like the rivers (2).

Douglas like many of his contemporaries also saw spiritual continuity between Africans and African Americans, expressed through dance and music: "Music and Dance, that spirit beneath the substance soul were a connective tissue between the African and the Afro-American". The connection between the African and the African American culture forms is expressed in other murals as well such as the aspects of Negro life series, painted under the public works of arts project, the predecessor to the section of fine arts and the more well-known works on progress administration. These elements the music and dance create a kind of synthesizing experience, when music is expressed visually and they also emphasize the interconnectedness of the rhythmic expressions. W.E.B. Dubois American educator explores this concept first in the souls of black folk, describing the double consciousness of African Americans. Hughes, one of the black refers to a comment by Countee Cullen to illustrate his point "one of the most promising of the youth negro poets said to me ones, 'I want to be a poet not a negro poet', meaning I



believes, 'I want to write like a white poet', meaning sub-consciously, "I would like to be a white poet", meaning behind that "I would like to be a white" (3) this is the mountain standing in the way of any true negro art in America- this urge within the rays toward whiteness - to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. Hughes and Douglas encouraged blacks to be conscious of racial heritage as well as nationality. Other black artists not generally associated with the Harlem renaissance were similarly working on race consciousness in their work, but none sought to express the continuity between Africa and Diaspora as Douglas did. Also there were many movements in 1960's and 70's, here we will mainly discuss the "The Black consciousness movements."

The Black consciousness movement was a gross roots anti apartheid activist movement that emerged in South Africa in the mid- 1960's out of the political vacuum created by the decimation of the African national congress and pan Africans congress leadership, by jailing and banning, after the Sharpeville massacre in 1950's. The black consciousness movements represent a social movement for political consciousness. From its onset, the B.C.M. aggressively launched an attack of traditional white values, especially the "condescending values" of whites of the pros and cons of black consciousness, and emphasized the rejection of white monopoly on truth as a central tenet of their movement. Also there was early world view of native Africans. The B.C.M. started to develop during the late 1960's and was lead by Steve Biko, a black medical student and Barney Pityana. As black people Biko and the other black consciousness theorists began to concern themselves not only with political liberation but with the meaning of blackness itself. The term Black consciousness stems from American educator W. E. B. Dubos's evaluation of the double consciousness of American black's being taught what they feel inside to be lies about the weakness and cowardice of their race. Biko reflects the concern for the existential struggle of the black person as human being, dignified and proud of his blackness, in spite of the oppression of the colonialism. Also Biko saw the struggle to restore African consciousness as having two stages,

"psychological liberation and physical liberation". While at times Biko embraced the non-violent tactics of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., this was not because Biko fully embraced their spiritually-based philosophies of non-violence. Rather, Biko knew that for his struggle to give rise to physical liberation, it was necessary that it exists within the political and military realities of the apartheid regime, in which armed power of the white government outmatched that of the black majority. Therefore Biko's non-violence may be seen more as a tactic than a personal conviction. Although the ANC and the others opposed to apartheid had initially focused on the non-violent campaigns, the brutality of the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960 caused many blacks to embrace the idea of violent resistance to apartheid. They were supported by 'non-racial groups', a non-student organization, named the black people's convention. This new B.C.M. not only called for resistance to the policy of apartheid, freedom of speech, and more rights for the South African Blacks who were oppressed by the white apartheid regime but also black pride and a readiness to make blackness, rather than simple liberal democracy, the rally point of unapologetically black organizations. The gains this movement made were wide spread across South Africa. Many black people felt new sense of pride about being black as the movement helped to expose and critique the inferiority complex felt by many blacks at the time. The B.C.M. heavily supported the protests against the policies of the apartheid regime which led to the so wet riots in June 1976. The protests began when it was decreed that black students be forced to learn Afrikaans and that many secondary schools classes were to be taught in that language. This was another encroachment against the black population, which generally spoke indigenous languages like Zulu and Xhosa at home, and saw English as offering more prospects for mobility and economic self sufficiency than did Afrikaans. In comparison with the black power movement in the United States, the B.C.M. felt little need to reconstruct any sort of golden cultural heritage. However it was in poetry that the B.C.M. first found its voice. This poem by an unknown author has a rather confrontational look:-



"Blackman, Blackman;
Arise, arise from the slumber,
Prepare yourself for war!
We are about to start." (4)

As said above literature there were many novels, dramas etc., which created and developed the feeling of racial consciousness in the minds of black people. For example, the works like Ellison's "Invisible Man", Bessie Head's "A Question of Power".

In "Invisible Man" by Ellison the major theme is the crisis of identity of the protagonist in the novel the unnamed protagonist, sets out on a journey of self discovery that takes him from the rural South to Harlem. Learning who he means realizing that he is invisible to the white world but by the end of his journey the protagonist has the moral fabler to live with such conditions. Also there was a relationship between identity and personal responsibility (5).

Even in "A Question of Power" by Bessie head which tells us the journey of a women who is not accepted by the society because of her color by which she goes into a psychological depression and creates many characters to form society for her. As we go through the novel we can understand that the protagonist has all the problems because of the racial discrimination faced by her in the society (5).

Also Wakers: Color Purple

Buchie Emechaddas: The Joys of Motherhood

Paul Marshals: Brown Girl, Brown Stone

Lorraine Hansbers: A risen in the sun etc. (6)

Even in all these writings the authors tried portray the picture of the protagonist, the blacks in such a way that they will be in the quest for identity in the states like U.S. and others where white are rooted. In every novel racial Problems are portrayed by the authors.

CONCLUSION

As the world begins the human race was started from one man and women. As the years went on the human race was generated and increased and spread all over the world. As they spread people are forgetting their brotherhood and they are identifying each other with their color and race. As long as this discrimination goes on it leads to the destruction of mankind in many ways. It may create a radical

society. Due to these racial differentiation human beings lost the "divine love" in their hearts.

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