

# A Relationship Of AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE With The Lives Of African People

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## ABSTRACT

Post Graduate students of English of various universities have texts on American, African, Canadian and Indian Literature. The texts are prescribed in order to have a clear and unambiguous knowledge and understanding of themes and thoughts developed by the writers. Writers have their own viewpoints considering the history, society and political set-up of the period. African American literature tends to focus on themes of particular interest to Black people, for example, the role of African Americans within the larger American society and issues such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery, freedom, and equality.

This focus began with the earliest African American writings, such as the slave narrative genre in the early 19th century, and continues through the work of many modern-day authors.

Another characteristic of African American literature is its strong tradition of incorporating oral poetry into itself. There are many examples of oral poetry in African American culture, including spirituals, African American gospel music, blues and rap. This oral poetry also shows up in the African American tradition of Christian sermons, which make use of deliberate repetition, cadence and alliteration. All of these examples of oral poetry have made their way into African American literature.

## INTRODUCTION

- In broad terms, African American literature can be defined as writings by people of African descent living in the United States of America. However, just as African American history and life is extremely varied, so too is African American literature.
- African American literature constitutes a vital branch of the literature of the African diaspora, and African American literature has both influenced by the great African diasporic heritage and in turn influenced African diasporic writings in many countries.
- The African American theorist, critic and writer, Henry Louis Gates Jr. claims the intersexuality is central to African American Literary Tradition. He emphasizes the similarities of African-American texts, especially genre forms and linguistic model which fall into these traditions, since writers have tendency to read and revise of the works of other writers. Signification manifests primarily through hidden textual meaning, African past and present.

## Objectives

1. To provide strategies for reading, analyzing, and appreciating works of early African-American literature for the insight they provide about relevant genres (autobiography, poetry, protest literature, and maybe a bit of fiction) as well as early American history and culture.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing, research, creativity, and discussion forums.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical reading, analytical thinking, and argumentative writing.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As an academic area, Afro-American studies first emerged during 1960s. Ethnicity and race appeared as an important new approach to literary study in the late 1960s and 1970s in America. Writers of different ethnic minorities –African- Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic American were considered with the problems of representing the experiences and the lives of the, ‘other’, and those who had been marginalized.

Writers of many literary genres reflected on the conditions of the life of ethnic American minorities in a society that was dominated by white supremacy. Those years witnessed the rise of previously silent marginal groups characterized by racial, ethnic, gender, class differences as well as by sexual preferences.

There are few noticeable periods of Afro-American literary tradition: the early period (18th c.-early 1920s); the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940) the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts (or Black Aesthetics) Movement of 1960s and 1970s. The postmodern moment in African-American literature started in 1970s and continues to the present day. One more conspicuous trend within the body of African-American literature is the African-American women's literary tradition, the flowering of which in the 1970s and 1980s scholar and critic Joanne Braxton characterized as the 'Afro American Renaissance'. African American literature is the verbal organization of experiences into oral forms, such as spirituals, work songs, blues, and sermons; and into written forms, such as autobiography, poetry, fiction, drama, essay, and letter

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A study of African –American literature and culture begins with the analysis of African –American oral tradition (which includes work songs, rhymes, jokes and riddles, spirituals, blues, legends, folk tales, in which they reflected on their own circumstances as an enslaved group, and the 'call and response' of spiritual leaders) The slave narratives (autobiographies, memoirs and reflections) which had a considerable influence on its formation and which comprise one of the most influential traditions in African-American literature and culture shaping the forms and themes of some of the most celebrated and controversial writing ,in both autobiography and fiction, in the history of USA.

The former work had especially powerful effects upon the black audiences when it was released in 1960s. The contributors in the collection seemed to embody the spirit of rebellion and revolution all over the country when black people rioted in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The anthology illustrates the idea of Black experience revitalized in the powers of Soul, which dissolves the boundaries between art and life.



## FINDINGS

The family in Childress' Florence, is attenuated, with Mrs Whitney as the head of the home in which she her daughter , Marge and the son of her second daughter , Florence live. Mrs Whitney , rather than see her grandson reared in urban ghetto, takes on the responsibility of rearing him while Florence goes North. While Mrs. Whitney wait to board the train for New York to encourage Florence to come home, she urges Marge to go straight home to care for the boy. She reminds Marge that Florence's son misses his mother a great deal, Mrs. Whitney is not above humbling herself to ask for son, Rudley, for money to keep the family together. Her commitment to her family is evident in her talks with Mrs. Carter, the white actress heading for New York. She tells her that she has always lived as best she knew how and raised her children properly. She even boasts that she has fine family. She is proud of the morals and values she has imparted to her children. She is especially pleased about the closeness she shares with Florence. The mother-daughter relationship in this play is built on mutual trust and support. Childress' family in Florence is poor but dignified, loving, supportive and strong.

Bill Jameson opens himself up to criticism when he says that black folks are not altogether. He claims that masses have no plan or strategy and will continue to get their heads whipped and bodies broken. Tommy becomes the spokesperson in her response to Bill. She tells Bill that may be what everybody needs is somebody like him, who knows how things should go. She goads him to get out there and start some action to lead revolution. Tommu's urgings illustrate the political climate and views held in common by many blacks of 1960s.

## CONCLUSION

The vision of African American studies has undergone a major transformation with the passage of time. The strategy and approach of writers focus on the questions concerning the survival of blacks in contemporary times and their future prospects. The writers highlight the dreadful white reality that holds a modern black captive and victim. Ed Bullins, a significant figure in African American Drama exerts a substantial impact on the subsequent development of African American dramatic tradition. Presently, Black writers turn away from addressing anticipated readership and appealing the plight of blackness in America.

The Black literature has changed from a social-protest oriented to one of the dialectical nature of blacks-Black Dialectics. This new thrust has two main aspects: dialectic of change and dialectic of experience. These are the two major fields in the mainstream of new Black creativity. The dialectic of change, once called protest writing when confronting whites directly and angrily, altered to what was called Black revolutionary writing. The dialectic of experience is the writings of being of being a black. These writings emerge from the painful and precarious situations of Blacks.

Postmodernism questions the idea of objectivity and objective truth especially historical truth. How do we know that what is fact and what is fiction? Postmodern writers working in the genre of novel revise significant points of history by critically rewriting traditional narrative forms, especially slave narratives and narratives of migration. They often use parody to show the unreliability of the official historical account of slavery. Such novels are referred to as works of historiographic metafiction (a genre of postmodern novel). Historiographic metafiction raises the question: "How do we know the past?" and acknowledges the need to question the received versions of history. It does not seek to tell the truth but considers the questions of whose truth gets told. It questions the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations.

Rushdy defines the neo-slave narrative as that body of contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative. For some authors, slavery serves as a textual layer to their fiction, whereas for others, slavery is the incentive for their literary creations.

African –American literary tradition has evolved into new form and scale. The writers strengthen the tradition with emerging and developing thoughts and expressions in forms of writings. It has appealed the readers all over the world. This is the major field of research in institutions of greater eminence

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