

AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY AGAINST THE SURGE OF NEO-RACISM'S HIDDEN THREAT IN TWO SELECTED NOVELS

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Abstract:

This study attempts to explore an issue that has become the source of embarrassment for one of the greatest empires in history, an empire that prides itself on the one hand for being the leading democracy of the world while at the same time harboring glaring social injustice and racial discrimination. The problem of discrimination or racism will be traced in two novels that follow a certain fictional and historical timeline: *CaptainBlackman* by John A. Williams (1972), and *A Death in Texas: a Story of Race, Murder, and Struggle of a Small Town's Redemption* by Dina Temple-Raston (2002). In these novels, the African-American characters explore the world of racism, judge their experiences, and make a choice to stand out in a world dominated by a white population.

Keywords: Identity, African-American, Racism, Neo-Racism

Introduction

This paper attempts to define Neo-Racism and how it is manifested in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is portrayed through a hate crime committed by three white supremacists in Jasper, Texas, 1998. Also in the Vietnam War, 1975 Neo-Racism emerges as the Black Power Movement takes place. The characters depicted in the novels are faced with many obstacles against a pernicious and covert form of Racism known as Neo-Racism, even after African-Americans have earned their Civil Rights. Many obstacles are found as the African-American tries to establish his identity and equality in various aspects of the American community.

Neo-Racism: The Hidden Threat

At the dawn of a new millennium comes the promise of freedom, equality, and dignity for all citizens living in a hybrid, multi-cultural society like the United States of America. In this democratic country where justice and equality are its slogans, groundbreaking news shakes the very status of the country on June 7, 1998. The story was made nationwide, and

the scandal of former president Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky seemed a tiny speck compared to the hate crime committed in Jasper, Texas. Headlines about the murder spread throughout the country and even made it internationally. For days, newspapers and media reported the hate crime live from the town Jasper, the heart of the crime scene investigation where the crime occurred:

— A black man was dragged to his death on Sunday from the back of a pickup truck in a rural section of Texas known for racist and Klan activity, and today three white men were charged with the murder...The broken body of James Byrd Jr., 49, was discovered on Sunday morning by residents of an area just outside the East Texas town of Jasper, population 8,000. As he walked home from his parents' house on Saturday night, Mr. Byrd was apparently picked up by the men sometime after midnight and taken to woods, where he was beaten, then chained to the truck and dragged for two miles...Guy James Gray, the Jasper County District Attorney, called the killing "probably the most brutal I've ever seen" in 20 years as a prosecutor. Mr. Byrd's torso was found at the edge of a paved road, his head and an arm in a ditch about a mile away, according to an affidavit...The police charged Shawn A. Berry, 23, Lawrence R. Brewer, 31, and John W. King, 23, with murder. The District Attorney said Mr. Brewer and Mr. King had racist tattoos and were Ku Klux Klan supporters, leading investigators to believe the killing was racially motivated.

(Cropper A16)

This article taken from the *New York Times* reveals the brutality of the fact that hate crimes still linger in the last years of the twentieth century. For decades, the African-Americans struggled to have decent living conditions in a stable home of their own, and to maintain their own identity. However, amidst the black and white community, a hidden bond is kept secret, a bond that shows who the dominating race is.

Racism has altered, twisted, and evolved into a more hidden and devious form, a form already termed as Neo-Racism. It is defined as a new form of xenophobia and discrimination practiced on the minority races in America: Arabs, Asians, and African-Americans. Neo-Racism is also known as Contemporary Racism, Hidden Racism, or New Cultural Racism. The concept behind Neo-Racism is related to stereotyping certain races. Gary Grobman explains that "Television, books, comic strips, and movies are all abundant sources of stereotyped characters. For much of its history, the movie industry portrayed African-Americans as being unintelligent, lazy, or violence-prone. As a result of viewing these stereotyped pictures of African-Americans, for example, prejudice against African-Americans has been encouraged." (Grobman 171) The effects of such behavior towards the

African-Americans may lead to hatred between both races, and could even develop into violence.

When looking upon the two worlds of black and white, one wonders how much prejudice and hidden hatred is out there. What makes the African-American people worry more about Neo-Racism is the fact that the tension between the races is mostly hidden beneath the surface. This quiet injustice led the black population in Jasper to rise in anger as they revealed the truth about the situation when James Byrd Jr. was brutally murdered out of sheer hate. To shed light on the situation of the African-American in the twentieth and twenty first centuries in America, a time when equality, justice, and human rights are said to have been achieved, a recent study contradicts the claims with actual facts. In November 2007, well-known American research centers released two reports that proved that African-Americans still suffer from inequality. The reports by the PewResearchCenter and Brookings Institution illustrate mounting gaps between Anglo and African-Americans; apparently there is a big difference between the black man's income and the white man's. Moreover, there is no economic security for the children of the black community. The Pew report concluded that "African Americans see a widening gulf between the values of middle class and poor blacks, and nearly four-in-ten say that because of the diversity within their community, blacks can no longer be thought of as a single race." Since 1983, Black respondents also were not wholly optimistic about black progress because of the unfairness of the criminal justice system. They believed that "anti-black discrimination is commonplace in everyday life". However, Afro- and Anglo-Americans came to a mutual agreement that in the last decade "values held by blacks and whites' have converged...most think that blacks and whites get along at least 'pretty well'; and 'more than eight in ten adults in each group also say they know a person of a different race whom they consider a friend'" (Katz)

Thus, the issue of Racism is a constant source of controversy in the American society. Racial equality is a new concept, and so many African-Americans are haunted by the discrimination that happened in the past. This affects their own judgment; therefore, many African-Americans secretly rationalize hate because of the obscenities that happened generations ago: oppression and slavery. We may think that racism is over and justice is served; however, Jeff Hickman states in "Racism in America: What Has to Happen for White and Black to Unite?" that most Americans claim that they are "not racist individuals", and Hickman believes that those claimers are "either fooling themselves, or just being politically correct" (Hickman). Deep down in the human psyche, Racism is explained away through various reasons. These reasons are connected to "the reverse discrimination of Affirmative

Action, ignorance of other races, and the belief in the need for retribution for past injustices. Maybe we should all take some time to look at these issues and into our own hearts, to see if together we can learn to be better as a species.” (Hickman) The contemporary African-American comes to light as derived from Hickman’s definition. To first define themselves, they become torn in between two worlds, the white man’s world and the black man’s. It has been a cliché that black people are stereotyped as gangsters or dangerous people. What is more important is that these stereotypes affect the contemporary African-American, who seems to digest the facts bitterly, no matter how hard he tries to be a normal citizen. The result of such stereotyping comes from the rise of active black gangsters and violence. Statistically, research was conducted on nineteenth-century Philadelphia by Roger Lane; the result was that homicide patterns differed between African-Americans and Anglo-Americans. It seems that after the Civil War, black homicide rates increased whereas white homicide rates declined. Lane focuses on New York City and finds that it has been divided between blacks and whites because of discrimination, and as a result a “structurally different city” is presented. The account of these structural characteristics in the dissimilarity of crime patterns creates “different criminal worlds” (Monkkonen 134). Apparently, felony and crime were more profitable for whites, but even in the world of crime, segregation prevented the more beneficial opportunities for African-Americans and encouraged more violent and harmful crimes.

With the beginning of the twenty-first century, it appears that hate crimes have not decreased in numbers. In 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation made a recent statistical study on various hate crimes. The results are hard to fathom as the rise in hate crimes based on prejudices of race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or national origin, and disability affected 9,652 victims. The following table is simply a mere example on one aspect of the hate crimes committed against race:

<i>Bias motivation</i>	<i>Incidents</i>	<i>Offenses</i>	<i>Victims¹</i>	<i>Known offenders²</i>
Total	7,722	9,080	9,652	7,330
Single-Bias Incidents	7,720	9,076	9,642	7,324
Race:	4,000	4,737	5,020	3,957
Anti-White	890	1,008	1,054	1,074
Anti-Black	2,640	3,136	3,332	2,437
Anti-American Indian/Alaskan Native	60	72	75	72
Anti-Asian/Pacific Islander	181	230	239	181
Anti-Multiple Races, Group	229	291	320	193

¹The term *victim* may refer to a person, business, institution, or society as a whole.

²The term *known offender* does not imply that the identity of the suspect is known, but only that an attribute of the suspect has been identified, which distinguishes him/her from an unknown offender.

(Hate Crime Statistics, 2006)

The statistics show that 52.1 percent of the victims were targeted because of bias against race. In fact, 66.4 percent fatalities were victims of anti-black bias, and only 21.0 percent were victims of an anti-white bias. Based on these numbers, it is obvious that there is still prejudice against the black race. Therefore, Neo-Racism appears more threatening, for it deviates into the hidden subconscious of an individual, who claims to be unbiased and just, whereas his or her actions speak differently. A thin line divides the white and black communities. Once crossed, the black race faces unexpected consequences. Therefore, Neo-Racism is another way of keeping the Anglo-Americans in power, politically, ethnically, or socially over the Afro-Americans. With the use of hypocrisy and claims for equality, Neo-Racism becomes the unseen threat, which is actually a more vital threat than slavery, simply because when discrimination occurs, pinpointing the evidence becomes a difficult task. Therefore, the victims are left wondering how to face it. Many Afro-Americans accept the facts and move on, while others fight and struggle for results, but not all find successful results.

To further highlight the difference of the separate worlds created between the Anglo- and Afro-Americans, President Barack Obama states in his autobiography *Dreams from my Father* how the two worlds never collide and are shrewdly kept hidden and apart:

I had begun to see a new map of the world, one that was frightening in its simplicity, suffocating in its implications. We were always playing on the white man's court...by the white man's rules. If the principal, or the coach, or a teacher...wanted to spit in your face, he could, because he had power and you didn't. If he decided not to, if he treated you like a man or came to your defense, it was because he knew that the words you spoke, the clothes you wore, the books you read, your ambitions and desires, were already his. Whatever he decided to do, it was his decision to make, not yours.

(Obama 85)

Although Obama is considered a hybrid of both races: black and white, his mother is an Anglo-American, and his father is an African from Kenya. The result is that Obama grew up in a world where he struggled to find a place to fit in. Having a lighter complexion than black and darker than white, he himself was lost between the two races throughout his teens. This division between black and white races is clarified in a dramatic and eye-opening

method in Dina Temple-Raston's *A Death of Texas: A Story of Race, Murder, and a Small Town's Struggle for Redemption*. The hate crime of James Byrd Jr. in 1998 in Jasper, Texas symbolized the world of Neo-Racism. Temple-Raston digs under the surface to find the thin line that kept black and white people apart throughout the past century.

First of all, Jasper has a population of 8,600, located north of Vidor, which happens to be an hour drive between Jasper and Vidor. Before explaining the history of Jasper, it is important to explain the history of Vidor as well. Vidor is the capital of the Ku Klux Klan country, where until the 1990s, one could still see warning signs such as “Niggers Get Out of Town After Dark” (Temple-Raston 29). The influence of the Ku Klux Klan is still alive and spreading. Known as The Klan, it has become the name of several past and present hate group organizations in the United States. Those groups' avowed purpose is to protect the rights of and further the interests of the white people through the use of violence and intimidation. The Klan is divided into several minority groups; each group is headed by a name of a certain hierarchal organization. In the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Klan can be seen to arrive at rallies in Executive Campers; making camp between the crowd and ordering the members to make effective efforts on the audience. This clandestine terrorist organization still strives to maintain the rule of the white race in the United States of America. It has been variously described as “a vigilante organization, a national liberation front, a revitalization movement, a secret order, a fraternal lodge, a status society, a bastion of poor-boy politics and, in the twentieth century, a money-maker for its leaders.” (Chalmers, 1981: 424) Its method has been and always will be violence, thrashing, vicious threatening and mutilation, and even murder, all under the claim of upholding justice, traditional morality, and white supremacy. The most important factor in the Klan's main goals of the twentieth century is the search for people who have the same disposition to become members and follow the rules of their fraternity. This ancient, mystic, and so called order has its dress code: the white robes, as well as for rituals and initiations. Moreover, certain hierarchies and secrets are passed out during sacred ceremonials making those that pass a would-be member of the world of “patriotism and Klannishness.” However, as times have changed, their so called “Imperial Wizards” no longer use the white robes and guns as their public appearance. They are more likely to appear “in three-piece suits or leisure suits, cut to the prevailing fashion.” (Chalmers 426)

The women of the Klan today are the wives and girl friends of the Klansmen, but every once in a while, a prominent Klanswoman appears. For example, David Duke's “innovative realm, which also recruits Roman Catholics, has merged with his Klanswomen

and even has a woman who is skilled in the martial arts as head of security.” (Chalmers 426) Nevertheless, from the 1980s, no longer does the Klan fight for dominance but for regaining what they think is lost of the white man’s prerogative, taking the lead in businesses and other fields. Consequently, African-Americans still face poverty and unemployment. However, when the nation started to drift towards foreign investments and multi-national companies, the Klan felt powerless against the growing numbers of non-white races. They are so influenced by their so-called just cause that they believed that “The initials FBI really stand for the ‘Federal Bureau of Integration,’ Klan speakers explain, and the Department of HEW means ‘nigger Health, nigger Education, and nigger Welfare.’” (Chalmers 432)

Nowadays, the term “Cross burnings” has changed into “sacred cross lightings.” (Temple-Raston 141), and Michael Lowe, a grand dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, created a new perspective of the Klan. He says that the Klan does not demand African-Americans to return to Africa, or stop immigration. They believe that the Klan must now protect the white race and heritage. Lowe single-handedly recruited 5,000 members in Texas alone using this ideology. In Vidor, right on Main Street, and out by Highway 12 the Klan made a white school bus where T-Shirts are being sold, as well as for bumper stickers and membership information given to passerby.

With this ideology living close by Jasper, the town faced its own history of segregation starting from the timber boom in the 1920s. Citizens of Jasper were lumbermen and their families revolved around the lumber mills. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the people of Jasper seemed to be affected by the simplicity of country life. For example, family times meant spending at a local inn for dinner once a week, or grabbing a couple of cokes and sitting with friends on the steps of Jasper’s courthouse. There were no disco clubs, pubs, or video arcades. Men would later join one of their private drinking circles to play cards or dominoes. But underneath the surface, the stories of discrimination are passed down from one generation to the next among the African-Americans. In the mid-1980s, most of the lumber work was done by hand. Both white and black men cut pulpwood and hewed railroad ties. Actually, black lumbermen were the ones who “hoisted, stacked, and manually loaded the wood. The Afro-American workers knew they were chosen for the task because stacking ties was dangerous work. Fingers and hands were often caught between the logs, crushed or ripped clean off” (Temple-Raston, 2002: 33). Later on, mechanization transformed the business. It saved a lot of the lumbermen’s hands and fingers and lowered very expensive worker compensation costs.

Over the years, The African-Americans in Jasper were not able to mingle in the white man's neighborhoods. For decades, segregation existed and left the black and white population separated. The black community lived on the edge of the woods, while as the whites drifted to other parts of towns, gathered together in groups. The situation later grew harder on both Afro- and Anglo-American citizens of Jasper, poverty and unemployment struck both races in Jasper and in 1998 unemployment reached 15 percent, nearly three times the national average. Consequently, the sight of broken men sitting limply on fold-out chairs on their yards and watching eighteen-wheeler trucks move from one side of the road and disappear into the woods was an everyday ritual.

Moreover, Jasper was an isolated town from all events that took place around the nation. African-Americans did not receive their equal rights in 1954 when the government announced that African-Americans had equal rights as the Anglo-Americans, starting from public places to equal education at schools. "In the white South there was gloom and in Jasper there was disbelief...It took fourteen years to integrate. There was some wiggle room in the Court's decision, and Jasper's white community didn't want to rush things, frankly, they were worried about whether everyone would get along just because the Supreme Court said they must." (Temple-Raston 38) The way the Anglo-Americans saw the Afro-Americans, even in the 1990s Jasper, is hard to fathom. They would respectfully call them "black" in public, but behind closed doors, the word "nigger" lingers as a noun to describe the black community. The word "nigger" came out naturally among the Anglo-Americans when they gathered and talked about society. Furthermore, racial relations were complicated in Jasper by the late 1990s. In rural places like Jasper, many African-Americans interacted professionally closely with the Anglo-Americans for generations. The Afro-Americans still introduced themselves to the Anglo-Americans by exchanging the names of the "antebellum white families that 'brought their people over'" (Temple-Raston 39). This awkwardness came to the extent that even in the twenty-first century rich town whites would drop by without any notice with a "pounding". The term "pounding" is historical from the time of slavery; they would give a pound of sugar, a pound of butter, a pound of flour, and a pound of beans to their slaves on slave row. Nowadays, these rich white ladies would give a "pounding" to their maids and housekeepers. Even in death discrimination found its way. In Jasper's cemetery:

The headstones in the front of the yard had one thing in common: they all marked white graves. The largest was the eighty-square-foot expanse of pink granill, the town patriarch, had erected in memory of his wife, Violett... The black graves, marked

with colorless stones and plastic flowers, were behind a fence in the back of the cemetery
– segregated for eternity.

(Temple-Raston 39)

The African-American community received a wakeup call when James Byrd Jr. was murdered and silence was finally broken as one by one, the black community started to admit the continuous segregation. They began to realize the lost opportunities; only one black person worked in Jasper's bank, and only one black person was able to open a store on Courthouse Square, and only two black people sat on in Jasper's city council. Moreover, R. C. Horn, a black mayor who beat three white candidates in 1997 for the position and was the first black mayor, could not do anything for the black community without the approval of the white people in power. Therefore, Horn was seen less than an ally and a false hope for any kind of appeasement.

With poverty and no chance of change, the African-Americans of Jasper, especially the men, spent their days drinking beer, sitting on the road sides, waiting for a miracle to happen as they watched television outside their trailers. Soon, marijuana and cheap forms of cocaine started to appear among them. Violence and aggression dominated most of their lives. It is hard not to notice that most of the city's businesses were owned by white people. "There were no black bank managers, car dealers, or salesman. Black men only got the jobs white men didn't want, the saying went." (Temple-Raston 59) Jasper Memorial Hospital adds to the unjust world of segregation in Jasper as it refuses to accept any black patient, even though it is the only hospital available in town. Since it is a private hospital, they have the prerogative to choose who gets admitted into it, leaving the African-Americans to take a long bus trip to the nearest government hospital in Galveston for treatment. Charlene Adams, an African-American living in Jasper, tells her side of the story after the murder of James Byrd Jr.:

when her two-year-old granddaughter drank a can of lighter fluid...She had trouble rounding up a neighbor to drive her to a doctor. When they finally did take the little girl to Jasper Memorial, there was little doctors could do. They medevac-ed the child to Galveston. 'They had to take her to the black hospital,' Charlene Adams said. The child was on life support for five days before she died.

(Temple-Raston 60)

The irony in Jasper Memorial Hospital is that it hires African-Americans as staff members and pays them good wages. Apparently, hypocrisy plays a vital role behind closed doors.

The struggles of the African-Americans' in the twentieth century, and their enduring process in facing the unjust world ultimately affected their identity. At first the African-American would find comfort in his or her home when his or her home is a dignified nuclear one. But as he or she grows older and begins to realize the world around him, they begin to see the true colors of discrimination from the white supremacist, and the truth of such a hierarchy of race becomes clearer to them. In fact, many injustices formulate in the human psyche and he or she tends to react in different ways. What is important is how to sustain the self in the presence of others. A question asked frequently by Obama himself as he endured a lifelong struggle in finding his place in a segregated world. The African-American citizens of Jasper are merely a reflection of a bigger picture of discrimination lingering in the Deep South. Over the years, the riots, revolts, and violence spread throughout the country, demanding human equality and rights. At the turn of the twentieth century, the threat of segregation seems to persist, if not in the streets, but in the minds of racists. With this in mind, the African-American rebels and urges active organizations to oppose the indifference of the white man:

Truth is, it was kind of a white people's place," Reverend Lyons said. "It didn't say it on the door, but we knew. Some thought that whites got up in the morning and decided about how they could hurt us. But that isn't true. They don't think about us. Period. They've found a way to make it so we're as good as not being there. Signs on the door aren't necessary.

(Temple-Raston 119)

Thus, creating an individual identity comes to a crisis for the African-Americans. Being torn between two worlds, the order of keeping one's freedom bounded by the other race's demands for a limited freedom is an aspect Jim Harper argues about in *Identity Crisis: How Identification is Overused and Misunderstood*. The term identification has wider implications than meets the eye. It is essential in order to comprehend and recognize other people. Through analyzing a person's identity, one could come up with an idea about the community and its behavior to which that person belongs to. Harper explains that identifiers play a vital role in shaping the identification of a person:

The building blocks of identification are "identifiers." Identifiers are facts that distinguish people and entities from one another. What we often call a "characteristic" or

an “attribute” becomes an identifier when it is used for sorting and organizing people and institutions in our thoughts and records...So identifiers are facts used to sort and categorize people and entities from one another. Although there are many different kinds identifiers have traditionally been grouped into three categories: something you are, something you know, and something you have. An additional category—something you are assigned—is sufficiently distinct from the others to be treated separately.

(Harper 12-13)

Starting from the fact of what a person owns to what he knows shapes his personality. Thus, the contemporary African-American finds it important in being different from the white man for the sake of becoming a contemporary African-American who is independent, socially dynamic, and qualified. These characteristics are what the African-American prefer to be judged with instead of the color of skin. When one looks more closely into Temple-Raston’s *A Death in Texas*, one observes the way the black community are isolated from the white community. Everything in Jasper is unjust and indifferent towards the African-American, from job opportunities to medical care. The common African-American finds salvation in drinking, wandering aimlessly during the days, and watch television for 24 hours a day. All this injustice was suppressed until the murder of James Byrd Jr. Media and Press Conferences turned the town inside out as the hate crime became national news. African-Americans were speaking their side of the story for the first time, and the Anglo-Americans’ comfort zone was violated, making them ponder what they have really done. In the early days after the murder, yellow ribbons spread out all through town in order to convey a message of unity between the two races. It was worn by everybody and was placed on every door, lapel, and car antenna. The white people were more eager to show their support than the blacks. Soon after the yellow ribbons, a mutual hug was given between them whenever they saw each other. “Whites held doors open for blacks. Hastily called town meetings had white citizens apologizing for racial injustices inflicted years before.” (Temple-Raston 116) Whites would let black motorists pass them first when a green light came on. All those unexpected confessions and ways to recuperate made the black community eye the white people with suspicion. Black community leaders begged them not to react in violence and rage on Byrd’s murder. Prayer and patience seemed to be the rational thing to do. At the outskirts of town, many Black activists repudiated such a hate crime; among them were Jesse Jackson, a Civil Rights activist, Walter Diggles, the executive director of the Deep East Texas Council of Governments, Quanell X, a Muslim leader from Houston. However, the New Black Panthers of Dallas made a greater impact on Jasper. The group’s leader, Khalid Abdul Mohammad,

demanded that he and the New Black Panthers be present at James Byrd's funeral. The reason for their presence in Jasper was to "protect the black community" from similar crimes. This group was established in 1991, following the ideology of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X.

Malcolm X is an icon activist who spoke for both blacks and Islam. He had a rough childhood; his father was killed by white racists and his mother suffered from a nervous breakdown. Growing up in such circumstances led him eventually to petty crimes. In prison, he joined the Nation of Islam. After he left prison, he changed his name to Malcolm X in "conformity with the discipline of the Nation of Islam[,]...which had transformed him and given him a new understanding of his condition and that of all Africans in American society" (Asante 105). The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by W. D. Fard in Detroit, Michigan, and developed by Elijah Muhammad. It is a local African-American socio-religious movement that began as a socio-religious objection movement; its beliefs are largely based on the Qur'an. "The Nation of Islam arose in the United States in response to the crude, racist bigotry; socioeconomic injustices; lynching; and mob violence against African Americans in the first decades of the 20th century." (Asante 354)

The New Black Panthers moved forward in Dallas following the ideology of black power and independence. When they heard about the murder of James Byrd Jr., action seemed to be the right thing to do at the time. The NBP decided to show up with guns at Byrd's funeral, and reflect the image of justice. Police, Sheriffs, and the FBI could not do anything to stop them from carrying guns, since the state of Texas does not prohibit gun carrying.

On the day of the funeral as the New Black Panthers marched, there were more media, Police officers, Texas Rangers, and FBI agents than NBP members. NBP members paced along Burch Street behind the jail and took left on Martin Luther King Boulevard, and then stopped in the parking lot of Greater New Bethel Baptist Church. Later on, a press conference was held before the jail as Khalid Mohammad shouted "Black Power!" through the microphone.

Two days later, after Byrd's funeral, Michael Lowe and his Klan decided to visit Jasper and take advantage of the town's sudden publicity. The idea of having a Klan rally in Jasper was enough to trigger a response from black militant groups, who found it unfair that the New Black Panthers paraded in Jasper with unloaded guns. These black militants wanted to rebound and challenge the Klan. Ominous public statements confusing white supremacist organizations were made by Quanel X of Houston. He is the leader of the Mental Freedom

Obtains Independence, and he was the former national youth minister for the Nation of Islam. However, he was considered to be “too extreme” by some.

What is interesting about all the publicity and media is that when James Byrd Jr. was buried and while the gathered public figures discussed the idea of reconciliation and harmony between the races, “they neglected to note one thing as the last shovel of dirt was patted down around James Byrd’s above-the-ground vault: he was buried on the black side of the Jasper City Ceremony, still segregated in 1998.” (Temple-Raston 134)

To elucidate further, Neo-Racism has spread into the military in which John Williams clarifies the distinct point between battle and Racism in the army in *Captain Blackman*. The Vietnam War broke out in the mid-1950s as the United States took over from the French, who had colonized Indochina during the nineteenth century. Massive military power moved in the late 1960s, the United States of America eventually withdrew hastily from Vietnam between 1973 and 1975. Williams places his main character Blackman in various situations where racial discrimination is being upheld in various sectors of the U.S. Army. It is also important to note that *Captain Blackman* appears at the end of the Black Arts Movement in which Williams is considered one of the notable literary figures of this movement. He is one of the few novelists who are identified with a movement that was committed to reflecting an aesthetic work that tackles the interests of the African-American:

The black arts movement (BAM) was an intense, vocal, provocative, and serious intellectual movement devoted to exploring all and every aspect of African life—without reference to the culture imposed by Europe. Often referred to as the artistic sister of the black power movement, the black arts movement is highly regarded among African American intellectuals. The movement changed the function and meaning of literature, as well as the place of culture in mainstream America, by insisting on the right of the artists to redefine the roles and characterizations given them by white Americans.

(Asante 114)

The character Blackman sheds greater light upon the whole situation in Vietnam where he is bound to lead his battalion into a death zone where surely none of his troops could survive. He risks his life to save his men. The conspiracy behind him being sent to that particular area of the battlefield with no backup is because Major Whittman holds a grudge against him for being better than he is in the military and for teaching black history to the black soldiers. Blackman as a black soldier and a Captain takes a vow to uphold the morale of the black men in the army, for Racism grew worse every time. Between the groups and

battalions, many white men and official soldiers in high ranks took advantage of the situation and conducted oppression. In fact, Black soldiers were treated differently and were kept in “segregated units within the army. Most black soldiers acted as combat support groups or as labor battalions.” It is estimated that “three fourths of the Blacks served” in the army. The slogan “freedom to serve the country”(Melvin) was actually meant for the Anglo-American soldiers, and so blacks were not able to participate on equal terms with them in the army.

Captain Blackman thus takes the effort in explaining the history of black soldiers to give the African-American soldiers a reason for being in the army:

Only yesterday he'd told them again at the end of his black military history seminar that he didn't want any heroes in his company. Things were close to the end, and even if they weren't, they had nothing to prove. He'd told them time and again, these legs with their mushrooming Afros and off-duty dashikis, that they were not the first black soldiers to do what they were doing. He'd gone back to the American Revolution to Prince Estabrook, Peter Salem, Crispus Attucks, and all of the unnamed rest, from there to the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Plains Wars, the Spanish-American War – all the wars. He'd conducted the seminar during their off-duty time, without the blessing of the brass, with the obvious, smoldering resentment of the Major, who, for some reason, had let him carry on.

(Williams 2)

In order to achieve black self-determination, the black power movement was formed. In this political, social, cultural, and economic movement between mid 1960s and early 1970s the movement brought forth a generation of black activists who were committed to the struggle for a black agency. The activists were able to transform American society and also infuse peoples of African descent all over the globe with the desire to accentuate and positively identify with black pride and black consciousness. “This was a time that recalled the black nationalist legacy of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), as well as elements of the Harlem Renaissance era of the 1920s, which can be deemed the precursor of the black power movement of the 1960s” (Asante 144).

The Black Power Movement along with the Black Arts Movement are depicted in the character of Captain Blackman who strives to keep the strength of black culture, behavior, and dignity in the minds and souls of his black soldiers throughout the Vietnam War. Yet, no matter how hard he fought for the ideology of black power to take place in the military, his white antagonist, Major Whittman, would always be one step before him:

Whittman...was more intent on seeing the broken man in the bed. This was white power; this is what he'd done, finally, to the nigger who'd whipped his ass in

Korea. And he'd done it to the system, too, that protected Blackman from his wrath...he was ready to unleash when he discovered the black military history seminar. Complaining to Greer did no good; Greer was afraid of this nigger thing. Everyone was afraid of it. But I did this, Whittman thought, as he drew near the bed and met Blackman's eyes. I sent him in when Intelligence, as usual, didn't know...from Shinola about what was out there. Now we know, with one casualty, this one. No dead.

(Williams 236)

The African-American no longer lingers behind the white man; he or she wants to cope rather than to copy him. With pride in finding out his or her roots as an African and learning from their past makes them capable of defining their present vis-à-vis the white society. The novels dealt with above show this new awareness of a different identity evolving. Therefore, many African-Americans chose to separate themselves from this notion, and create their own identity that is separate from the white man and related to their African heritage. Eventually, the black man was called the African-American, simply because he took pride in his African roots and made it part of his identity in the American society. Through the Civil Rights Act as well as for the abolishment of Jim Crow Laws, the African-Americans have been able to work, study in the same schools as white people did, and enter public stores and buildings. Yet, after all that, discrimination lingered. To achieve equality between the races again brought so many struggles for the African-Americans among white racists. However, many rights were earned by the African-American.

The concept of Racism has evolved into a pernicious and covert form termed Neo-Racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

Blacks and whites from neighboring cities still won't stop in Vidor for gas at night. "People aint right here," said one. "They may have taken down the sign they had that said 'Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Vidor,' but that doesn't mean their attitudes have changed. They've just become harder to track.

(Temple-Raston 143)

Stereotypes play a vital role in the judgment of the white community. The outbreak of gang activities and violence among the African-Americans in the twentieth century in the United States of America led people to think of them as a community that belongs to the poverty level. President Obama realizes the role of the black man in his memoirs *Dreams*

from my Father. A black man needs more than what the community gives; he needs stability in a world he can create on his own:

And if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community, I realized, a community that cut deeper than the common despair that black friends and I shared when reading the latest crime statistics, or the high fives I might exchange on a basketball court. A place where I could put down stakes and test my commitments.

(Obama 115)

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