

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL MILIEU IN SOCIAL REALM

William Adams, a former slave, once explained that a “witch doctor” who was considered as a liar and blasphemer by most white Americans, was believed by many in the Afrikan community, to have God’s mind in him. By this sentence, he acknowledged that there were plenty of white folks and educated ones who dismissed much of the black world view as superstitious, because the whites do not understand which is mysterious. For example, in Bible, God reveals some knowledge to all mankind, certain knowledge to a chosen few, and then there are something no one should know, and it is believed that the Lord revealed more to the colored folks in Africa, who would have then passed such knowledge along to their children in America. In these words and ideas, the ethnocentric views of whites- who determined without ever really researching African or Afrikan beliefs, that the Afrikan community’s ways could be dismissed as mere superstition- have been proven clearly. This chapter highlights the Afrikan aspects of community and village life through the examples which have been taken from the selected novels.

It has been acknowledged that the Afrikan community had a different set of beliefs, and grounded those differences in their shared African heritage. To elaborate it more, previous to the appearance of Europeans, the extreme West

Coast of Africa was completely isolated from the outside world; its inhabitants lived in scattered villages buried in the forest, and remained in dense ignorance of any other desirable objects than the necessities of their own savage life. The appearance of Europeans with new and attractive commodities produced a great effect. To get them in exchange with local products, thousands of Negroes were moved to unwanted exertions, while foreigners taught them new and better methods of living. One can undoubtedly say that the Negroes in the United States are not Africans, but they are the descendants of Africans. That is, since black men and women were transplanted to America, one must understand their world, a world which drew much of importance from Africa and adapted their cultural heritage as necessary to the reality of the United States.

Too many scholars have paid their attention on the culture that slaves created only after they landed on the American soil. At times, their work has been founded as pathfinders, but they have not fully revealed the complexity, richness, and history of Afrikan consciousness. For instance, when anthropologist Melville Herskovits published *The Myth of the Negro Past* in 1941, it was generally accepted that Afrikan men and women were too divided by language and customs, and too incoherently scattered throughout the New World to maintain any sort of cultural connection to Africa. Most scholars responded negatively to his conclusion that this view was a myth told about the Negro past. This again pointed

out to the fact that the story of slave and black culture must have its roots planted firmly in Africa just as slaves and their ancestors did.

Ever since the colonial period, Europeans have engaged in an intellectual struggle for control of the African mind. They have tried to abolish the African historical tradition by attempting to “cut the African away from his past, and deny that the past was relevant to his future” (Ajayi and Aloga in Mintz 127). As a result, Africans who reached America in bondage in the 16th century had to keep their true being private for the sake of survival. That is, in many ways, the core essence of Afrikan people in American society has been invisible to America. And Afrikans preserved their African heritage in their communities, families and personal relationships, while showing an American culture outside in order to adjust with their life in plantations. Some elements of this duality are used as insulation. A kind of masking was essential for Afrikan survival, due to “systematic racism”. That is, Afrikans masked their true feelings from whites and changed their attitudes back and forth. Haley in his novel *Roots* wrote about this duality,

Blacks shared some kind of communication known only among themselves. Sometimes when they were working out in the field, Kunta’s glance would catch a small, quick gesture or movement of the head. Or one of them would utter some strange, brief

exclamation; at unpredictable intervals another, and then another, would repeat it, always just beyond the hearing of the 'oberseer' as he rode about on his horse. And sometimes with him right there among them, they would begin singing something that told Kunta- even though he couldn't understand it – that some message was being passed. (226)

It is now clear that one should analyze Afrikan cultural heritage through Afro centric view than Eurocentric view. The reason behind this is that when one insists on viewing Afrikan behavior exclusively from the view point of Eurocentric psychology, one is seen as deviant. Noble notes that western social science is an instrument designed and used to reflect the culture of the oppressor, therefore allowing domination and oppression of Afrocentric people. The African mind-set and the American mind-set are, therefore, always mutually exclusive, contradictory and antagonist. That is, one must become familiar with the meaning imbued through African traditions in order to comprehend the complexity of the culture sustained by slaves and their descendants in America.

Traditional Africans share the basic instinct of gregariousness with the rest of humankind, through their communal activities. Families and members of kin-groups from minimal to maximal lineages, generally live together and form typical African communities. John Mbiti, in *African Religions and Philosophy*,

underscores the important belief and sense of the community among traditional Africans. In traditional Africa, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. Whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man" (J S. Mbiti 106). That is, for traditional Africans, community is much more than simply a social grouping of people bound together by reasons of natural origin and strong common interests and values. It is both a society as well as a unity of the visible and invisible worlds; the world of the physically living on the one hand, and the world of ancestors. In a wider view, African traditional community comprehends the totality of the world of African experience.

Analysts point out that Africans share life intensely in common. There are communal farmlands, economic trees, streams and markets. There are also communal shrines, ritual objects and festivals for recreational activity, social, economic and religious purposes. Members of the same kindred or clan could distinguish themselves by their proficiency in a particular trade, skill or profession. In *Roots*, African communal life is vividly pictured in the Mandinka

tribe in Juffure, where the protagonist had lived prior to the enslavement. Being primarily a farming community, each family has been allotted land for cultivation. “Since the size of each woman’s plot was decided each year by Juffure’s Council of Elders, according to how many mouths each women had to feed with rice” (5). In a typical African community grandmothers have a particular position of taking care of all grandchildren, while the parents are busy with their works. “While Binta planted her onions, yams, gourds, cassava and bitter tomatoes, little Kunta spent his days romping under the watchful eyes of the several old grandmothers who took care of all the children of Juffure who belonged to the first kafo, which included those under five rains in age” (8). These grandmothers also enrich the communal strings with their rich oral traditions. “But all the children- even those as small as Kunta- would quickly scramble to sit still and quiet when the telling of a story was promised by one of the old grandmothers” (8). They told stories of animals like the story of the crocodile trapped in a net or of their ancestors like the story of Kairaba Kunta Kinte.

Many times, Kunta had heard about the grandfather holy man whose prayers had saved the village, and whom later Allah had taken back. But Kunta had never truly understood until now that this man was his father’s father, that Omoro had known him as he knew Omoro that Grandma Yaisa was Omoro’s mother as Binta was his own. (15)

Mandinka tribe in Africa has its own ways and characteristics for treating its members. Community is tightly structured. Though the family is the basic unit of community, members have a normal development progression in communal ties. That is, as a part of community, each member of the tribe matures through prescribed stages of increasing responsibility to young manhood. These stages have been described as “kafos” in the novel. The first *Kafo* is till the age of five. During this period, he grows up under the tutelage of his mother Binta, father Omoro, and the Village Elders. “Kunta’s home- training had been so strict that, it seemed to him, his every move drew Binta’s irritated finger- snapping- if indeed” (20). At five years of age, he graduates to the second *kafo*, donning clothes, attending school, and herding goats “When the school boys finished their lessons and ran off- with the tails of their cotton dundikos flapping behind them- to herd the village’s goats out into the brush lands for the day’s grazing” (24). At this period, they have also entrusted with the responsibility of serving as the village lookouts on the arrival of strangers.

At ten years of age, each child in the tribe enters the third *kafo*, when boys receive manhood training. For this, they were taken away “along with the men who would conduct their manhood training” and “during their manhood training a part of his *foto* would be cut off” (40). It has been said that “children left Juffure village”, said the Kintango suddenly in a loud voice. “If men are to return, your

fears must be erased, for a fearful person is a weak person, and a weak person is a danger to his family, to his village and to his tribe”(92). The training focused mainly on two parts: how to become a good hunter and how to become good warriors by using their wits. “But animals, the Kintango told them, were the best teachers of the art of hunting, which was one of the most important things for any Mandinka to learn” (94). And in another day the children were taught two important things for how to use their wit effectively- “to do as you are told, and to keep your mouth shut. These are among the makings of men”(95). And for the next half moon, Kunta and his mates learned how to make war. Never completely enrich your enemy. Counseled the kintango. ‘Leave him some escape, for he will fight even more desperately if trapped’. The boys learned also that battles should start in late afternoon, so that any enemy, seeing defeat, could save face by retreating in the darkness. (100)

During the fourth *Kafo*, they are treated as men by the community. At this stage, they become part and parcel of community. That is, community is them and they are community. The past seemed with the present, the present with the future, the dead with the living and those yet to be born; he himself with his family, his mates, his village, his tribe, his Africa; the world of man with the world of animals and growing things- they all, griots, or blacksmiths, for an

angered marabout lived with Allah. Kunta felt very small, yet very large. Perhaps, he thought, this is what it means to become a man.

(105)

They have to come out of their mother's huts, to live their own huts, to do trade and have to begin to participate in the discussions of Council of Elders on village business. In short, community empowers each member with vigorous, structured trainings and moralities.

Community, in Africa, has empowered its members mentally, physically, socially and emotionally. When the empowering of communal activities comes in America, its face has been changed tremendously. Since the slaves had come from different parts of Africa, in the very beginning of captivation, the slaves were broken- hearted to establish a community of their own. But gradually, they realized that sociability with other slaves was the only thing that kept them alive. The idea of not seeing their home again was in a way made up for friendships and their future family tie- ups. Frequently, slaves formed strong communities. They often considered all blacks on the plantation as members of their family. Children grew up with an extended group of people who would care for them, and in particular, allowed for fatherless children to experience the care and example of a male role model. Chicken George has this kind of relationship with Uncle Mingo, his mentor in cock fighting. Community is thus important in both African and

Afrikan cultures. It is associated with solidarity, unity and friendship. The power and influence of community might not be so huge today but in the time of slavery the alliance of blacks meant hope, hope for better tomorrows

The communities portrayed in all the selected novels try to empower the weak ones in the absence of other family members. In *Beloved* and *Jubilee*, women association empowered the communal harmonies through their prayer, medical knowledge and rich storytelling tradition, whereas psychological empowerment has occurred in *The Sell Out*. But, on the contrary, in *Black Boy*, the black community discouraged him instead of giving encouragement for making a better identity. It is because a rebellious act of one black not only put his or her life in danger, but also his or her family and the entire black community. Hence, little is mentioned about community and communal strengthening in *Black Boy*.

Jubilee begins with the death of Vyry's mother Hetta. The tragedy of gendered abuse is made explicit in the initial passages, as Walker describes the plantation owner John Dutton's incessant lust, and rape of Hetta. Although Walker does not delve into Hetta's inner thoughts, her circumstances are related through women from the community tending her. The women in the slave community on the Dutton plantation share a sense of biased oppression, in relation to race, sexual violence and exploitation. For instance, Granny Ticey, a midwife,

tries to ease Hetta's pain by giving her landanun. "Meanwhile Granny Ticey made tansy tea and bathed Hetta in Hazel root, and used red shank" (6). By doing so, she is introduced as a knowledgeable and competent ancestor figure or elderly member of the community supporting the women during childbirth.

Drawing on anthropological and folkloristic studies in her discussion of women communities, Jean M Humuz suggests that "women's observed capacity to adapt to difficult new circumstances, such as cultural uprooting and ageing, is greatly enhanced by their eclectic repertoire of spoken arts evolved in the context of domestic and neighborhood life" (218). This "eclectic repertoire" is particularly applicable to intergenerational storytelling, where the foremothers serve as the daughter's access to history. Losing her mother, Vyry acquires important surrogate mothers role like Aunt Sally and Mammy Sukey who serve as guides and provides emotional sustenance through the stories. Vyry loved the stories that Aunt Sally would tell about "who she was and where she came from, and what life was like, and how to live in the Big House and get along with Big Missy" (43). One of the notion of black woman as surrogate mother is that it allows Afrikan woman to treat biologically unrelated children as if they were members of their own families and thus affirming a clear interest of communal harmony in slave communities.

In *Jubilee*, the Afrikans nurture communities both in the Dutton plantation (antebellum) and post bellum periods. Throughout the novel, Walker portrays a community of women who worked together to care for one another and for their children. They nurture relationships, form ties and develop cultural codes imbued with both subtle and direct acts of insubordination to the slave holders. Timothy Mark Robinson observes the communal activities as, “elders in many slave communities passed on their wisdom and experience to the next generation, managed to care for the young children, and healed the sick in their communities by way of folk medicine” (46). Indeed, the elderly slave women of the Dutton plantation offer support to one another, share and transfer their skills to the next generations, and create networks of resilience based on mutuality and understanding of the gendered vulnerability of black female slaves. In this way, the slave women have taken up the role of African mothers and grandmothers in America. They protect and spread the typical African cultural heritage within a provided community.

Again, the rebuilding process in the postbellum community is exemplified by Vyry’s succession to her foremother’s roles and through an emphasis on black female community and folklore. Moving to Butler Country, Vyry is asked to help a young woman called Betty- Alice give birth. “I knows I can’t pay you what you is worth but I’m willing to pay you whatever you charge. You saved all our lives.

I was going outa my mind and Betty- Alice was going to break that baby's neck if you had na come along" (428). In this way, she assumes the role of a Granny or a midwife and figuratively succeeds Granny Ticey, who tended her dying mother. "The best grannies in the world is colored grannies. They doesn't never lose they babies and they hardly loses they mothers. They is worth more'n money and you is real lucky to have a colored granny. I must say. I took you for a white person myself" (432). And soon she became a professional midwife.

They certainly did need a granny and often in those early summer weeks Vyry was called to practice her new role of midwife. She kept a little package ready with her scissors handy and a small bag packed, for sometimes she was gone overnight or several days. She worked very hard at home to keep her family from suffering during these sudden absences. (442)

Assuming the community's elder's role, Vyry also verbalizes her own feelings. With her strong will power and charismatic personality and good serving attitudes, she became a midwife for both whites and blacks. Minrose C Gwin suggests that "Vyry's role as a Granny creates a space of relatedness that disrupts the rigid hierarchies of race, class and gender" (71). Such relatedness is demonstrated through mutuality and interdependence, since Vyry's family needs a safe place to stay and the white needs a Granny. As the whites overcome their

racism and prejudice, Vryy overcomes her own distrust of white people. The emphasis on mutuality exemplifies Walker's vision of postbellum community, where the community's agreement to cooperate and support one another exemplifies progressive social relations emphasizing the collective benefit, with diverse individuals working together to build a better society. In this way, Vryy rewrites Granny Tacey's tragic script as her post bellum successor and contributes to rebuilding relationships with whites and blacks in the community.

The significance of community is obviously seen in *Beloved*. Sethe who had successfully escaped from slavery with her four children, settled down at her mother-in-law's house in Cincinnati. Although the community in Cincinnati accepted her family with open-handedness, the same community has turned its back on her by not understanding her act of killing her daughter to save the baby from a life of enslavement. But unable to accept her own decision of killing the baby, Sethe decided to live without any friends or help from her neighborhood. Though she worked in a restaurant for an economic support for the family, she was alone with her thoughts. Her two sons, Howard and Buglar, ran away when they were thirteen, leaving their younger sister Denver along with Sethe. "Within two months, in the dead of winter, leaving their grandmother, Baby Suggs, Sethe, their mother, and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road"(3).

Belonging to a community is like filling fuel in oneself to face the world outside. Hence, the exclusion from Cincinnati community worsened not only Sethe's state of mind but also Baby Suggs and Denver. ". . . to belong to a community of other free Negroes- to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protected and be protected, feed and be fed- and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance- well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy" (209). After sixty years of losing children to the people who chewed up her life and spit it out like a fish bone and five years of freedom that is given to her by her last child, she "acquire[s] a daughter and grandchildren and see that daughter slay the children" (209). She cannot bear any more sufferings and lies down to her bed "fixing on something harmless in this world" (211).

Denver is also isolated from the community because of her mother's act of murdering. After several months of attending Lady Jone's school, Denver got the knowledge of her killed sister and she "never went back" (121). She hated to go to her house when she is fed with terrifying feelings about her mother. "Terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her. Later on, after Baby Suggs died, she didn't wonder why Howard and Buglar had run away. She did not agree with Sethe that they left because of the ghost" (121). But, later scared by seeing her mother's gradual destruction by Beloved, she realized that something terrible could make her mother kill her too, she "never

leaves (the) house and watches over the yard, so it can't happen again" (205).

After "eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" (173), Denver thus determines to "step off the hedge of the world" (281) for help from the community.

Cincinnati community is the community that stands along with Baby Suggs through her preaching and supports Sethe during the Clearing. In fact, Cincinnati is a place where free Afrikans lived alongside the whites. Its inhabitants act like one big family helping each other as well as others. Stamp Paid together with Ella and John lend a hand to every Afrikans who try to get across the river. But, when Sethe was released from prison and lived as though she were alone, the community left Sethe and her family including Baby Suggs to their fate.

Community influences in the novel when Sethe's family failed to recover from the disasters made by the ghost of Beloved. The Cincinnati community feels that they should "wipe the slate clean" and gathers in front of Sethe's house. They exorcize Beloved and thus makes up for its past misbehavior. At the same time, by discovering the world around, Denver also finds her own self and matures as a young intelligent woman who is preparing to go to a college. Afrikan community, thus, helped to escape Sethe and Denver from the haunted stories and strengthen them enormously.

Apart from all other novels of study, community in Paul Beatty's *The Sell Out* empowers mainly through psychological experiments. The novel is set in a fictitious agrarian ghetto community called as Dum Dum Donuts Community. Being set in the 21st century, the community activities reach into another realm of empowering. That is, empowering Afrikans with education, making a consciousness of self-esteem and feeling of belonging to a place or society. The protagonist Bonbon has made lots of experiments to exfoliate the guiltiness of black psyche in the post racial America. According to him,

the only time black people didn't feel guilty is when we've actually done something wrong, because that relieves us of the cognitive dissonance of being black and innocent, and in a way the prospect of going to jail becomes a relief. In the way that cooning is a relief voting Republican is a relief, marrying white is a relief- albeit a temporary one. (18)

Dum Dum Donuts is a community that is emerged around an inner- city Donut shop, and the people who gather there as a part of community activities are known as Dum Dum Donuts Intellectuals. "It is a place where there is no robbery or burglary occurs. Even the bicyclists leave their vehicles unlocked and unattended. It is clean and the employees there are always same and respectful" (46). It is this place in Dickens where the niggers knew how to act. The three basic

laws of ghetto community are that “Niggers in your face tend to stay in your face; no matter where the sun is in the sky, the time is always ‘Half past a monkey’s ass and a quarter to his balls’; and the third is that whenever someone you love has been shot, invariably you will be back home on winter break” (42). And “in 7.81 square miles of vaunted black community, the 850 square feet of Dum Dum Donuts was the only place in the ‘community’ where one could experience the Latin root of the word, where a citizen could revel in common togetherness” (46). In this donut shop, Afrikans come, gather and share knowledge on politics, economics, social and religious. Thus, this shop provides an opportunity for information exchange; public advocacy, and communal counsel.

As a part of empowering and supporting other community members, Me’s father has also worked as Nigger-Whisperer on Fridays. Nigger-Whisperer is a person who has a lot of responsibilities in the Afrikan community. It is a “call to duty out of a sense of familial pride and communal concern”. And the Nigger Whisperer has the responsibility to cure Afrikans with psychological diseases, while facing the bitter realities in America. His main aim is to establish a knowledge in black psyche about “who am I” and “how can I be that person”. Being his son, Me is also secured with a confidence in this thought. “So introspective questions like ‘who am I? and how can I be that person?’ didn’t pertain to me then, because I already knew the answer. Like the entire town of

Dickens, I was my father's child, a product of my environment and nothing more" (40).

When the protagonist's father has shot to death, "eventually the call went out for the Nigger Whisperer" (50) and the protagonist himself becomes the Nigger-Whisperer and Hominy soon becomes a psychotic patient of the protagonist. "I can't count how many times I had to wrap a blanket around him because he was trying to commit suicide- by- gangbanger by wearing red in the blue neighborhoods" (66). Hominy is the last surviving member of the Little Rascal, a gang for mischievous activities. Hominy thinks that he is a slave and he never want to get rid of it even though slavery has ended up in America. "I know taint nobody forcin' me, but dis here one slave you aint never gwine be rid of. Freedom can kiss my postbellum black ass" (83). This is the problem that Afrikans generally faced in the post slavery era- "well, neither is slaveholdin'. Like children, dog, dice, and overpromising politicians, and apparently prostitutes, slaves don't do what you tell them to do" (81). Hominy did some works carelessly or purposefully by thinking that he is still a slave. He tried to end his life three times because of the despairs and impacts of slavery. And the protagonist tried to rescue Hominy from these psychological problems in the novel.

Dum Dum Donut Community has functioned as a "representative government" (93). One of the many sad ironies of Afrikan life is that "every banal

dysfunctional social gathering is called a 'function'. And black functions never start on time" (93). Since his father's death, the Dum Dum Donuts Intellectuals had devolved into a group of "star – struck, middle class black out- of- towners and academics, who met bimonthly to fawn over the semi famous Foy Cheshire" (93). The meetings consisted mostly of the members who showed up every other week arguing with the ones who came bimonthly. *The Ticker* is a hand out about an update of statistics related to Dickens which helps Afrikan to know more about the society they belong. "*The Ticker* was a societal measure my father had designed to look like a Dow Jones stock report . . . Everything that was always up- unemployment, poverty, lawlessness, infant mortality- was up. Everything that's always down- graduation rates, literacy, life expectancy- was even further down" (94). In short, Dum Dum Donuts Community acted as a wholesome body for Afrikans to educate, to nourish knowledge on everything.

If one comes down from the peripheral level of community to more deep into the subject matter, the basic political unit of African culture is the family. The network of relationships among family members is remarkably extended and deep. In fact, the word 'family', 'father', 'mother', 'son', 'daughter', 'brother', 'sister' etc. defines far more for Africans than what they mean today for the average European or North American. The family for the traditional African usually includes one's direct parents, grand and great grandparents, etc. and it is a custom

that people generally do not ask a child his/her personal name. Rather, a child is identified as 'a child of so and so parents'. Typical African family structure is polygamous which gives importance to the extended family with kinship system. That is, in an African family, man is the head and woman acts inferior to man in all the ways. Marriages are not between individuals alone, but also between all members of the two extended families.

Mothers' responsibilities are comprised in the household activities, and the upbringing of children. "Little Kunta basked thus every day in his mother's tenderness. Back in her hut each evening, after cooking and serving Omoro's dinner, Binta would soften her baby's skin by greasing him from head to toe with shea tree butter" (5). This means that the attachment between a mother and her child are more than that of a father and child. Women also have to collect and preserve food for the entire family. In *Roots*, it has clearly shown that "since the size of each woman's plot was decided each year by Juffure's Council of Elders, according to how many mouths each women had to feed with rice, Binta's plot was still a small one" (5). Binta wisely decided to end up nursing Kunta, since she knows that "for Moslem husbands, by ancient custom, would often select and marry a second wife during that time when their first wives had babies still nursing" (6). But Omoro never had taken another wife. In the years gone, they had two children apart from Kunta and they lived in the same house.

Roots depicts what an African family was before the slavery. Though the African segment of the novel is exotic, it is also an excursion to the primitive world of Kunta Kinte. The novel opens “early in the spring of 1750, in the village of Juffure, four days upriver from the coast of The Gambia, West Africa” (1). When a boy named Kunta Kinte was born to Omoro and Binta Kinta. In the “unspoiled” village of Kunta’s birth place, Juffure society is tightly structured. The family is the basic unit of that society and engenders pride. But, in the African community, slavery has made a tremendous change in the family structure. It breaks up family structure, abolishes family pride, and features of family life. Instead of considering Africans as humans, it is considered that slaves are property to be bought and sold. It is evident in the selling of Aunt Sally in *Jubilee*. “Big Missy and Marse John had arranged to sell Aunt Sally. She would go first to Savannah and then by boat to New Orleans, where she would go on the auction block and be sold to the highest bidder” (84). They are also given names that do not reflect their lineage as in *Roots*, where toubob (a particular name attributed to the colonizer by Africans) named Kunta as Toby, irrespective of his lineage.

In Afrikan community and family, the opportunity for normal societal growth does not exist. Matilda’s expression of family unity- “we is family and we is gonna stay family” (357) – mirrors an attitude that one would probably find in eighteenth century Juffure. *Roots* is the family story, although couched in the

struggle for freedom. Kunta and his descendants survive as a family in spite of obstacles of slavery and later of white racism. Thus, they become a symbol for all the blacks who had been sold into slavery. Unfortunately, the legacy of slavery lingers on in today's black community because normal family life such as that found in idyllic Juffure remains unrealized. The black family of today is still more fragmented than the family of other groups, although the desire and struggle go on. It will be remembered that the legacies of slavery have damaged the Afrikan culture. Lacking a culture, the slaves were forced to adopt, or at least adapt to, the culture imposed by their masters.

. . . even though the structure of African households and families has been changing for many years . . . , some aspects of the African family were transformed while others were forced to adjust and accommodate the new realities of socio- economic and political systems that were brought about by colonial rule, urbanization and the penetration of other forms of Western influence into the African hinterland. (Adepoju and Mbugua 128)

After this adjustment, emancipation arrived as a second cultural break- "a crisis in the life of the Negro that tended to destroy all his traditional ways of thinking and acting. To some slaves who saw the old order collapse and heard the announcement that they were free men, emancipation appeared 'like notin' but de

Judgment day' (Frazier, 73). The third major disruption in black cultural life came with the great migrations to northern cities, in which rural blacks, "uprooted from the soil", lost their "roots in a communal life and [broke] all social ties" (Frazier, 224). For Frazier, these overwhelming cultural traumas had specific results destructive to Afrikan family life- illegitimate births, the abandonment of families by men, households headed by single women, and thus a family structure classified as matriarchy. This matriarchal family structure of Afrikans in the United States is different both from the family organization of the white majority and from the typical African family structure.

These factors suggest that the dislodgement of spousal relationship which is often visible as the male absence and the prevalence of female- headed homes are also included among the various transformations witnessed within the most Afrikan families in America. That is, most African values- the beauty of chastity, motherhood and so on, are drastically influenced at the wake of its penetration. Taking the position of the woman into account, the family concerns that exist at the present time among the Afrikan urban workers can be cited as follows,

The status of husband and wife in the black worker's family assumes roughly three patterns. Naturally, among the relatively large percentage of families with woman heads, the woman occupies a dominant position. But, because of the traditional role of the black life as a contributor to the support of

the family, she continues to occupy a position of authority and is not completely subordinate to masculine authority even in these families where the man is present. . . . The entrance of the black worker in industry where he has earned completely good wages has enabled the black worker's wife to remain at home. Therefore, the authority of the father in the family has been strengthened, and the wife has lost some of her authority in family matters. . . . Wives as well as children are completely subject to the will of the male head. However, especially in southern cities, the black workers' authority in his family may be challenged by his mother-in-law. (Frazier, 93)

The first pattern of Afrikan family is visible in Walker's protagonist Vyry's family life, where the woman occupies a dominant position. Because she has a good living experience with Dutton's family and enjoyed relatively better freedom and education, she has been treated by her husbands (Randell Ware and Innis Brown) equally or above them. Both her husbands give her the freedom of expression and decision making. It is evident that "well, as you say, that her decision. She can make up her mind whichever one of us she wants, and I ain't gwine think hard of her if she don't choose me. I knows it's hard to split a family. We's all got childrens and I specs we loves em" I'm gwine bide by her choice and trust it'll be the will of the Lawd" (468-69). Thus Walker's Vyry is a realistic female character with individual personality and strength.

Unlike the polygamous extended African family structure, Vyry had two husbands. Because of slavery and political uprisings in America, Vyry lost her first husband Randell Ware and consequently insisted herself to live with Innis Brown. Both of her husbands are very different from each other. Randell Ware, the free black, is well educated and intelligent, “Randell Ware was a literate man. He understood printed materials, could read and write and figure his own accounts, and he had read much abolitionist material” (92). He has a strong faith in Negro education that attracted her towards him

A nigger with book learning? A nigger with money and a nigger free on top of all of this? Was she dreaming? Was such a thing ever heard of in Georgia? *Maybe he can me how to read and and write and cipher on my hands.* But it was the idea of freedom and the proposition he had raised in connection with that miraculous idea that fascinated her most. (94)

Contrary to Randell, the stable and hardworking Innis lacks Vyry’s faith in education, which he sees as denying him the field helps that he needs.

As a mother, Vyry takes the traditional role of nurturing and nursing her children Jim and Minna. When Randell puts forward the idea of running away from Georgia, her motherhood was shaken and she asked. “How I’m gwine run away with two children?” (165). Randell who acted as a protective husband told

that “if you’ll just trust me and do like I say, you’ll get your babies back again, but you can’t run far with them pulling on you” (165). But as a mother, she knows her duty towards children. She fails to leave her children in cabin when Minna starts to cry and she takes her children along with her which ended in her capturing and consequent punishment of severe whipping. “She never did know how many lashes he gave her, whether he cut her the required seventy – five times as he was told to do, or whether he quilt short of that number, thinking she was already dead and further beating was useless” (173). But she makes sure that “the children were not alarmed, and for that she was glad” (171). All these show that as a mother of Jim and Minna, and as a wife of Randell, Vyry enjoys freedom and dominance in her own created family.

This is the same with Innis also. After the Emancipation Proclamation, Vyry and Innis are freed to live as a family, and eventually they migrate to the South. There they live as a complete family- husband, wife and children. Innis is a good husband. He has worked hard to feed the family. Jim also helps him whereas Vyry and Minna manage to plant herbs and fruits for them and have done all the household activities. Thus their house and living become an ideal one. “Vyry could hardly believe that all she and Innis wanted seemed so near the point of coming true, their new house and farm, a chance for Minna and Jim to go to school and learn to read and write, and the organization of a new church. Her heart

felt full to the breaking point” (371). Vyry has taught her son Jim to help Innis in field works, and Minna in the household works. “Minna was in the house with Harry. She could clean the house and wash the dishes and tend Vyry’s cooking pots while the others were in the field” (374). Thus their family structure and living show some of the rich African cultural heritage.

As a typical Afrikan mother, who is responsible to support her family, Vyry starts to sell eggs and vegetables in the market when the family lost everything during the Ku Klux Klan attack. “In the meantime Innis had been taking vyry to town twice and sometimes three times a week to sell eggs, butter and occasionally some buttermilk” (419). Meanwhile, she started to work as a midwife and earns some money for the family.

They certainly did need a granny and often in those early summer weeks Vyry was called to practice her new role of midwife. She kept a little package ready with her scissors handy and a small bag packed, for sometimes she was gone overnight or several days. She worked very hard at home to keep her family from suffering during these sudden absences (442).

The second pattern of Afrikan family structure is visible in Kunta Kinte’s family in America, where he is acted as the head of the family and lived with his wife, Bell and daughter Kizzy. With Kunta, Bell acts like a traditional wife, who

Saw to it that the same supper she fed the massa- unless it was pork, of course- was simmering over the fireplace in their cabin when he got home. And he liked eating on her white crockery dishes with the knives, spoons, and forks she had obviously supplied for herself from the big house. Bell had even white washed her cabin- he often had to remind himself that now it was *their* cabin- on the outside as well as inside. All in all, he was amazed to find that he liked almost everything about her. (327)

Kunta imagines that he got the best wife who possesses African traits. When Kizzy was born, the new parents enjoyed their child's play vigorously. She even nurses her husband even though he resisted against her in his fever and thus performed as a dutiful wife.

"Leave me alone, woman. I am fine"

"now you aren't!" Bell said decisively, taking him by the hand, helping him up and leading him into the bedroom without his further resistance.

Kunta set on the edge of the bed while she helped him out of his clothes, then he lay down, sighing.

"Roll over an' I gives you a backrub". He obeyed, and she began kneading his back with her stiffened fingers" (405).

And as Kunta's fever steadily worsened, despite everything, Bell and the massa can do, the devout wife's prayers become more and more fervent.

The third aspect of Afrikan family centers on an older woman. Frazier indicates the following sanctions in explaining the place of such elderly female in Afrikan families:

The Negro grandmother's is due to the fact not only that she has been the 'oldest head' in a maternal family organization, but also to her position as 'granny' or midwife among a simple peasant folk. As the repository of folk wisdom concerning the inscrutable ways of nature, the grandmother has been depended upon my mother to ease the pains of childbirth, a safe entrance into the world. Even grown men and women refer to her as a second mother and sometimes show the same difference and respect for her that they accord their own mothers. (117)

Baby Suggs in *Beloved* is such a grandmother who has a powerful influence upon Sethe and Pauls. After getting freedom, she becomes a kind of mother- figure for others. She becomes a preacher and healer who exhort a community that has been damaged by the ravages of slavery to love them and each other. Her house is one of the centers of the community, where people stop by to share news and leave messages. She provides a great joy to her community

and is stabilizing influence in Sethe's life. When Suggs sees Sethe with a bloody nipple, she urged Sethe to "Clean up! Clean yourself up!" (179). She acts like a mother to Sethe. When Sethe has done the crime, she points the wrong in it. When she sees Sethe after imprisonment, quietly she takes Sethe to home and lives there with her grandchildren until her death. The novel opens after the death of Suggs, but Sethe's memories about her clearly reveals how much Sethe loved, cared and was guided by Suggs. In the end, Sethe follows the ways of Suggs' clearing as a means for escaping from her isolated mind. Thus Suggs becomes the central motif and controller of the family.

Wright's *Black Boy* falls into another category Afrikan history of slavery. It is characterized by depersonalization, displacement, and impoverishment which have significant impact on determining patterns on the psyche and identity of Afrikan male and female characters. It is said that:

...desertion by fathers is often prompted by their inability to bear the burden of being primary providers. The burden of failure becomes intolerable for those who lack the capacity to generate enough income as uneducated and unskilled laborers. . . . Many men 'die' as parents and husbands by indulging in alcohol drugs, or becoming irresponsible to their families. (Palkowitz, 158)

The Afrikan male could not act the man during slavery, nor could provide the needs of his family as expected of the black man across

the Atlantic, in Africa. Instead, black women often combine the roles of motherhood and fatherhood in child upbringing. They themselves have to be strong to take on both roles, loving, protecting and counseling in turns. African women may not be born that way, but they do wax strong, faced with the challenge in the African content. (Ngcobo 2007)

In *Black Boy*, despite his attempt to the ‘provider’ responsibility of fatherhood, Richard’s father inevitably fails in developing the emotional bond expected of a father within his family. His frustration with the social demands of fatherhood is manifest in the unfriendly and autocratic attitude he exerts in relating with his children. Wright features a scenario that climaxed in the bitter hatred which Richard gradually develops against his father. Thus,

it was in this tenement that the personality of my father first came fully into the orbit of my concern. He worked as a night porter in a Beale Street drugstore and he became important and forbidding to me only when I learned that I could not make noise when he was asleep in the day time. He was the lawgiver in our family and I never laughed in his presence. I used to lurk timidly in the kitchen doorway and watch his huge body sitting slumped at the table. . . .

He was always a stranger to me always somehow alien and remote.

(10)

Like some responsible men, his father seeks a paid job to provide food for his family. In spite of this effort, his threatening and unfriendly disposition towards his family is formulated from the notion that men are more powerful than women. Similarly, his description shows that his father's attitude defies the demands that fatherhood should be a role that integrates men into families, rather than separating them from children, women and other men (Richter and Morrell, 64). Moreover, his father's inability to establish a warm, nurturing relationship with his children significantly deters Richard's father from having an enormous positive influence expected of fatherhood on his boy's development.

After Richard's father's desertion, his mother ardently dominates the household. "My mother finally went to work as a cook and left me and my brother alone in the flat each day with a loaf of bread and a pot of tea" (16). But post-slavery period is completely devastated with poverty in Negro families. Hence, his mother is unable to provide food, education and better living, and sends them to an orphanage. In course of time, they live along with their grandma who lives in Mississippi. Just like Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, Granny's in *Black Boy* is also a religious person. But his mother has grown tired of the strict religious routine of Granny at home that finally they decide to move on.

Of the half dozen or more daily family prayers that Granny insisted upon; her fiat that the day began at sunrise and that night commenced at sundown; the long, rambling Bible reading; the individual invocations muttered at each meal; and her declaration that Saturday was the Lord's Sabbath and that no one who lived in her house could work upon that day. (59)

These examples are not made to suggest that due attention has not been paid to the place of the father in the slave family, though it is undoubtedly true that he has received less study than has the mother into the derivation of present-day family types among the Afrikans. The fact of the matter, however, is that the roles of both parents are individually determined but a reading of the documents will reveal how the selling of children even very young children along with their mothers are stressed again and again as one of the most anguishing aspects of the slave trade. It is stated: "while because of the dependence of the children upon the mother it appears that the mother and smaller children were sold together" (Frazier 234). For instance, Sethe is brought to the New World along with her mother. Morrison is not at all mentioning anything about Sethe's father figure. Likewise, though Sethe has been married to Halle, she has to live with her children in Cincinnati. Halle, the father-figure has died before they reach Cincinnati. Hence, father-figure is absent in many Afrikan families.

There is another possibility for the absence of father- figure that these children are born illegally. Vyry in *Jubilee* is born illegally to Hetta in her white master John Morris Dutton.

and he had wanted Hetta, so his father gave her to him, and he had satisfied his lust with her. Because in the beginning that was all he had felt, a youthful lust. He still remembered her tears, and her frightened eyes, and how she had pleaded to be left alone, but he had persisted until she had given in to him. (9)

Kizzy, in *Roots* is brutally raped by her white master and gives birth to Chicken George. Brutality of slavery is visible in these incidents that these girls are mere slaves of their masters and the children, though they bear some of master's characteristics, are not allowed to call masters as father, instead they calls 'massa' and works as slaves. It is evident from Kizzy's master when he came to know that she is pregnant. "Well, what you expectin' me to do about it? I know you better not start playin' sick, tryin' to get out of workin'!" (434). Vyry also serves her father as massa until his death. In other words, Afrikan women lived under the double jeopardy of being a black and a woman. She is often abused and has to give birth to a lot of fatherless children.

Afrikan family in the modern era has witnessed a tremendous change. Two- parent households or extended family structure are on the decline in the

United States due to divorce, remarriage, etc. Babies are born to women who are single or living with a non-marital partner. As a result of these changes, there is no longer one dominant family structure in the United States either among Blacks or Whites. In *The Sell Out*, the protagonist is living with his father. His father is a renowned social scientist who is ever thinking about his research works only. The author is not mentioned about the protagonist's mother, rather points out to the broken family values and love. "I wasn't fed; I was presented with lukewarm appetitive stimuli. I wasn't punished, but broken of my unconditioned reflexes. I wasn't loved, but brought up in an atmosphere of calculated intimacy and intense levels of commitment" (27).

For as elsewhere the New World, an Afrikan child is rarely handicapped because of the nature of the relationship under which he has brought into the world. Kunta Kinte is strongly built up in African tribal society. He gets severe training in his childhood and adulthood by his family and Kintango. After his severe manhood training, he is about to becoming a prosperous young man. He starts to farm his plot, attends every meeting of Council of Elders and soon he reaches into the position of everyone to feel envy on him.

Within a few moons after his return, Kunta had grown so much more than he could eat himself, and made such shrewd trades for this or that household possession to adorn his hut, that Binta began

to grumble about it within his hearing. . . . Binta liked to say– he found himself watching a harvest-festival Seoruba, when the loveliest, longest-necked, sootiest –black maiden there chose to fling down her head wrap for him to pick up. (155-116)

That is, Kunta, physically, emotionally and psychologically becomes strong with his African tribal system of training at each Kafo.

But irrespective of African counterparts, Afrikans in America are brought up in disintegrated families where father, mother or both are absent in certain situations. Consequently, children themselves have to establish their social positioning or run away from the house. Richard experiences a lot of bitter incidents in his childhood. As the very first scene of setting fire and the consequent incidents, it is clear that the complexity of the children during slavery in America is such that love and hostility, cruelty and kindness, and reward and punishment go hand in hand. Richard never questions his mother's love or society's speculations on him, and although he rarely mentions demonstrations of affection and stresses the negative aspects of his family life, the love between his family and himself or society is taken for granted. The perversion of this love as an impact of slavery and oppression is what upsets him and serves as the theme of the book.

Denver, Sethe's daughter, is the female survivor in *Beloved*. She is the first who propels out of the house by literal hunger. When she sees Sethe being locked in her obsession with Beloved, she realizes that "it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would" (281). Excluded from the Beloved- Sethe dyad, Denver is forced into the role of the outside other, and assuming that role is her salvation. She goes first to her former teacher Lady Jones, an old woman of mixed race, who has long struggle with the contempt of the black community and, equally, with self-contempt. After Denver asks her for food, Mrs. Jones compassionately croons, "Oh baby" (292), and that empathetic recognition of the hungry baby within finally frees Denver from the trap of her infantile needs. "'Denver looked up at her'. She did not know it then, but it was the word 'baby', said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman" (292). With this recognition, Denver for the first time begins to experience the contours of her own separate self. When Nelson Lord, an old school acquaintance, affectionately says, "take care of yourself, Denver", she "heard it as though it were what language was made for," and she realizes that "it was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (297). It is with this thought Denver understands how her mother suffered and finally becomes protective of Sethe as she sees that actual flesh at Sethe is disappearing in the devouring bond with Beloved. Denver thus becomes realistic to see that

something must be done, and it is through her agency that the community of women mobilize to exorcise Beloved. Thus she stands on her own feet and though her parentage figures but slightly in establishing her social position, she gave a self-recognition and self-identity for her mother.

Family is a very important concept for slaves who are under constant threat of being sold away from their families. As a consequence, slaves build strong communities. They often considered all Afrikans on the plantation as members of their family, just like those on the La plantation do. Children grow up with an extended group of people who will care for them, and, in particular, allowed children without fathers to experience the care and example of a male role model. For instance, Innis has acted as a role model for Jim in *Jubilee* when his original father Randall is absent due to the Civil War. The same is in the case of Richard in *Black Boy* when his father- figure is divorced his mother. In *Roots*, Chicken George has this sort of relationship with Uncle Mingo, his mentor in cockfighting.

From the view point of African cultural roots in Afrikan community, the status of the Afrikan family at present is thus to be regarded as a result of the play of various forces in the New World experience of the Afrikan, which is projected against a background of aboriginal tradition. Slavery does not cause the 'maternal' family, but it tends to continue certain elements in the cultural endowment brought to the New World by the Afrikans. The feeling between mother and children is

reinforced when the father is sold away from the rest of the family. Family disintegration with lots of familial violence is become a hallmark of Afrikan family after freedom. Morrison opens the novel, *Beloved* with such a disintegrated familial set up. Sethe is a single mother working at a low-paying job. She suffers a mental break down and loses her job. Her husband, Halle, died during the escape from the plantation. Her sons leave home, never to be seen again. One of her daughter is incapable of leaving home, and Sethe murders the other one. Thus, the family is essentially a shattered one.

The plantation system rendered the survival of African family types impossible, yet slavery by no means completely suppressed rough approximations of certain forms of African family life. Though slavery gave certain instability to the marriage tie, in the New World as a whole the many persons who lived out their lives in the same plantation were able to establish and maintain families. But the position of men and women in the black family has changed tremendously. The economic life of blacks still maintained its essential characteristic of the position of women in the transaction. And children have to find out their own identity. Regarding the black aesthetic activities, beliefs and practices, there have been certain changes, but which must be laid on the black of African culture. In short, blacks have gained certain elements of African culture, at the same time

they have to adapt new styles from the white culture in order to cope with their living in the United States.

Afrikan family and community is not completely African or American. It is an amalgamation of two cultures. Afrikans try to preserve their African cultural values in family and community life. But, as they have to cop up with the American culture, they have to adapt certain American ways in their life. Thus, a typical Afrikan family and community life is evolved in Afrikan ghettos. At the same time, it is noteworthy that they neither follow American individualistic nor materialistic ways of life. But Americans consider the modified Afrikan culture as barbaric.

American outlook of Afrikan culture is entirely different from what is mentioned previously about Afrikans in this chapter. Americans can not see the Afrikan family unit and community in its real essence. Rather, they classified Afrikans under certain stereotypes. These racial stereotypes have a significant role in shaping attitudes towards Afrikans that time. These images include Sambo, Jim Crow, the Savage, Mammy, Aunt Jemimah, Sapphire and Jezebelle.

Sambo is a simple-minded docile Afrikan man who is dated back to the first period of colonization of America. The Sambo slave is considered to be a happy slave to serve his master. White slave owners molded Afrikan males, as a whole, into this caricature of a jolly overgrown child who is happy to serve his

master. Bishop Wipple's *Southern Diary; 1834-1844*, is an evidence of this argument of slavery, "they seem a happy race of beings and if you did not know it you would never imagine that they were slaves" (Boskin 42). However, the slaves are seen as naturally lazy like Sambo, and therefore reliant upon his master for direction. In this way, the institution of slavery is justified, and this image is perpetuated over the shaping attitudes towards Afrikans for centuries.

Jim Crow stereotype is an offensive weapon of Americans on Afrikans. This image is created by black face minstrel and is brought to the theatrical stage by the performer T D Rice. In fact, this "city dandy" is the northern counterpart to the southern "plantation darky", the Sambo, (Engle 3). This character also popularizes the Afrikans as lazy, stupid and inherently less human. This black caricature, thus, leads Americans especially of North and West, to have a negative view of Afrikan men in both their character and work ethics.

Americans constraint Afrikan woman as a caregiver to the white children as Mammy stereotype or a cook as Aunt Jemimah, and thus limited the works of African woman into a particular area of cooking and nursing. Mammy caricature is created as white-friendly. She understands the value of the white style. Jewell describes the particulars of Mammy that "she raised the 'massa's children and loved them dearly, even more than her own. . . . Although she treated whites with respect, the Mammy was a tyrant in her own family. She dominated her children

and husband, the Sambo, with her temper” (40). Aunt Jemimah image differs from Mammy in that her duties are restricted to cooking. It is through Aunt Jemimah that the association of Afrikan woman with domestic work becomes fixed in the mind of society. Thus, Afrikan woman as cook or care giver has deepened in the mind of American society.

Another aspect of Afrikan girl is associated with sexual side. Jazebelle caricature fulfills this aspect. The traditional Jazebelle is a light –skinned, slender Mulatto girl with long straight hair and small features and immensely attractive to white males. Goings observes the Jazebelle caricature as, “the creation of the hyper-sexual seductress Jezebel served to absolve white males of responsibility in the sexual abuse and rape African-American women. Black women in such cases were said to be “askin” for it (67). Rape and other sexual abuses of American males are justified through this image, and the whites consider Afrikan girls as instruments for sex. As a result, Afrikan females have undeniably experienced gang rape and persistent sexual abuses for years.

There are lots of stereotypes other than mentioned above, which make negative attitudes and oppression of Afrikans. We see these images are so often accepted as the truth. The whites have formulated their attitudes towards Afrikans based on these images. Consequently, they did not treat Afrikans as humans who have inner feelings and emotions like whites. These images thus caused to form a

veil upon American face to see the Afrikans as they are. On the contrary, Afrikans who have suffered the humiliations, mistreatment and slavery from whites often failed to see the whites as humans. Instead, they saw whites as murderers, rapists and in-humans.

To conclude, Re-evaluation of these existing stereotypes will bring a good result to the racial problems that are existing in America. Discussion of racial stereotypes and attitudes in a safe format would allow people to intervene and possibly discard stereotypes. Individuals, both Afrikans and Americans, can reassess their own prejudices and biases and thus, make a change within them. By suspending our disbelief and seeing each person as a human, who has individual feelings and aspirations, rather than through the eyes of a preconceived stereotype, the existing veil between Afrikans and Americans can be removed at individual level. Once such a change happens at individual level, it will be a great milestone for resolution on the communal and social level.