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## **The African Americans and the Quest for Identity**

Submitted by: BenazouzSomia

Members of the Board:

Chairperson: Mr. DjamelSebbah

Supervisor: Dr. LarbiYoucef

Examiner: Mr. Boudjellel

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## **Dedications**

**I dedicate this work to my parents and my son Souhil.**

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## **Abstract**

The quest of identity has been always a controversial issue in shaping the history of African Americans. Through which blacks desired to challenge the dominant race “white race”. From the post emancipation of slavery, the status of Blacks had transformed from object –article of merchandize- to be a qualified subject holding cultural backgrounds. Although the Blacks were excluded from the American society racism, segregation, and white prejudices, thus they strived to find pragmatic and solutions and strategies to be included within the social, cultural, and political community. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was an era of maturation about racial, political, and cultural uplifting. The quest for cultural and political identities were embodied through black movements such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Right Movement, as being the direct roads to search for cultural and political inclusion. Furthermore, black leaders and artists had an influential role in transforming the stereotypes of black race’s inferiority to black’s racial pride.

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## **General Introduction**

Identity is ultimately the most significant feature that identifies the individuals in relation to their ethnic groups. Thereby, the African Americans had strong belief that Blacks should be identified by their origin “heritage”. They aimed also to reconcile and overcome the ancestral stigma of “inferiority.” Consequently, The African Americans strived for political, cultural and social integration. The twentieth century sparked new perception about Blackness which became a sign of beauty, self-determination, and racial consciousness.

My motivation for picking up such topic “the Afro Americans and the quest of identity” is that, it is a contested and complex issue in the history of Blacks, mainly in America. Moreover, I want to highlight the perpetual quest for blacks’ inclusion of during their transitional status from object to subject. Interestingly, want to explore the conceptualization of cultural and political identities and to seek for its contributions in constructing, racial empowerment, cultural celebrations and self –respect. Hence, this research is going to respond set of questions, what are the different, strategies, measures that were used by the African Americans to construct and reconstruct their identity? Another inquiring, how do the African American identify himself African or American being a child of Africa and a citizen of America, or to be black functions celebrating the African heritage or abandon it and adopt the American norms? Whether dual identities are trustworthy or it is betrayal to their authentic origin?

My hypothesis is that the African American had an effective role in constructing the black race and bringing a wide reputation to the African culture. The Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Right Movement were the formative movements of racial consciousness.

I used a qualitative research, to shape the arguments for the prior skepticisms. In deed the present work is divided into three chapters .Each chapter seeks to shed light on the important transitions in the life of the African Americans. The first chapter entitled “ the Status of Afro-Americans (1619-1877).” It is a historical background, to inform the readers about transitional status of the African Americans from exclusion to inclusion. For more illustrations, I am going to mention three subtitles, slavery in America, the

second title the inclusion of the Africans Americans, and the third title is the Amendments and the search for inclusion.

While, the second chapter entitled “Political Actions and Changes” I started this chapter by focusing on African Americans and the quest of political identity, where I am going to define the concept of identity in general than defining the concept of political identity in particular, the second subtitle is about the Blacks’ demands for changes, through which I am going to state prominent leaders who had different ideologies.

The third chapter entitled “The Harlem Renaissance and Cultural Identity” which highlights the significant changes in the Blacks’ cultural history. Harlem Renaissance as an artistic movement that shapes the African American heritage. Then the third subtitle is about the New Negro Movement and Racial Reconstruction.



## **Chapter One: The Status of Afro-Americans (1619-1877)**

Right from the beginning of the United States history, the story and the history of the of the White Anglo–Saxon puritan was the expansion over lands and human rights which were core of challenge by the “Blacks.” The latter were the aftermath generations of slavery which was a substantial capital of investment for the American economy. Indeed slavery is an inhuman institution which deprives human’s liberty and rights. This chapter highlights the transitional status of the African Americans from the enslavement till the emancipation of slavery, and their main interest was the quest for inclusion within the white society.

## I.1. The History of American Slavery

### I.1.1. Definition of slavery

Many historians define slavery as being the status or condition in which one human is owned by another one – property – such as slaves. Through which they became a chattel that can be sold and bought at the auction block. The scholar Jaen Allan in his article: *Slavery and Its Definition* (1912) claims that slavery is to deprive someone’s liberty; he becomes “un-free” serving the others. According to the work of Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery* (1993), slavery is a system that treated human being as object of white action rather than a subject in their own right denying their culture, belief, and behavior of their own.

### I.1.2 Slavery in America

In the work of the scholar Alton Hornsby, Jr, *A Companion to African American History* (1997) , the American Slavery started in 1619 when the Dutch introduced the first captured 20 Africans slaves on shores in the British colony of Jamestown Virginia. These individuals were not slaves but indentured servants -persons bound to an employer for a limited number of years.

In the late of the 16th century, the number of slave who were brought to the English colonies was doubled almost 760,000 and made up nearly one-fifth of the population of the

United States. Planting the seeds of slavery system that evolved into nightmare of abuse and cruelty, the African slaves became hand labor; they had to work in plantation for long hours with lower price. Later these colonies began enacting laws that defined and regulated slave relations, central to these laws was the provision that black slaves and children of slave women, would serve for life (op, cit.149).

Actually, the status of the first blacks in the New World was contended to be submissive, they must be viewed within the perspective of these conceptions and realities of servitude. Though many historians think of slavery in United States as primarily a system of race relations, as the chief business of slavery were the production of the white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar and tobacco. Hornsby, Jr claims “slavery was the ultimate segregation that marked undeniable split in structure and the culture of the blacks” the institution of slavery led to the classification of superior race “White race” and inferior race “Black race”, it generated the distortion of the African culture and the character. Colonists soon “became aware of differences between themselves and African immigrants and “color emerged as distinctive feature of the slave status; the trace of color became the trace of slavery” “It was dependent on a perception of the Negro as peculiar kind of social being fitting and proper to enslave for life (ibid.)

He also argues that the white servitude was the historic base upon which slavery was constructed. Interestingly, the blacks lost the possibility to acquire property as the basis of genuine freedom, the true shift was that free blacks were not only losing property, but that blacks were gradually becoming property, a transition which was ultimately crystallized in race (ibid.1997).

Indeed, slavery was a central institution in the American history until 1865, through which the Africans were subjugated to very atrocious treatment from the early time of captivity then the Middle Passage till the life in the South colonies.

### I.1.3.Middle Passage

In the work of Rodriguez Junius, P, *Slavery in United States: A Social, Political and Historical Encyclopedia*,(2007) contends the Slave Trade and the Middle Passage (1600-18500) were the open doors to the exchange of Western products with slaves, in order to fulfill the demands of the hand labors mainly in the southwest of the country: Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi and later Texas, where there was abundant lands suitable for the agriculture of cotton this was the reason for about 84% of slaves being brought to the New World.

Between 1500 and 1860, about 12 million people are known to have left the shores of Africa destined for the Americas, and to a much lesser extent to Europe, although not everyone made it alive, and some died soon after the arrival. Despite a heavy loss of life during what has been called the “Middle Passage,” many more Africans crossed the Atlantic than Europeans. The transportation of enslaved Africans constituted the largest single migration of people before the middle of the nineteenth century. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the great majority of people moving from the Old World to the New World were black people. When gender is taken into consideration, then it can be said that far more black girls and women were forcibly taken to the Americas, at least before the middle of the nineteenth century. It follows, therefore, and not voluntary migration. While there is considerable debate over attempts to estimate the number of enslaved Africans who crossed the Atlantic, the broad parameters of this massive demographic movement are well understood (Rodriguez,1995. 419).

Unfortunately, millions of captives were shipped in very harsh conditions, climate cruelty of the traders and the voyage length that could vary considerably; it may take weeks and months across the Atlantic Ocean as from Angola to Virginia six months. Nevertheless, there was several examples of slave rebellion on the slave ship ,the most famous is Amistad Rebellion 1839 ,where slaves control the ship and killed most of the crew as defense to escape and go back to Africa but they failed (Anderson1995:86). Clearly, the trip to the New World was a second immigration in the American history, the first one was American dream whereas the second one was a nightmare to the African captives.

#### I.1.4. Slaves' Hardships

The slaves had to endure burden of atrocities and hardships while being transported from Africa to America and across the ocean, where life conditions were atrocious. The degree of violence was so extreme hard aboard slave ships. Overlooking the conditions that slaves had to endure while being enslaved is a tragic condition. They faced famine because of the poor ration and diseases with a high rate of mortality because of the crowd and the narrow space mainly on the ships.

“The enslaved Africans were all enclosed under grated hatchways, between decks .The space was so low that they sat between each other’s legs and stowed so close together, that there was no possibility of lying down, or at all changing their position by night or day ... They were all branded like sheep, with the owners marks f different forms. These were impressed under their breasts, or on their arms, and as the mate informed me with perfect indifference burnt with a red hot iron ...” (Anderson, 1995. 74)

For the enslaved African, this experience aboard the ship was transiting into even more than misery and death. For them it meant going from a kind of stench to another, more ferocious kind. Boarding these floating hellholes meant freedom through death.

Moreover the life in slavery was heterogeneous which means that the hardship of slavery deferred from man to woman for instance the novel of the African Americans slave narrative Harriet Jacobs: *The Incidents in The Life of Slave Girl* 1839 portrayed the double marginalization being black slave and being a women –her body belong to her master-acing harassment and the extent to which the life under slavery stigmatized the moral side of women.

Furthermore, there was two kinds of slaves , the house Negro and the field Negro; the former -lived in the same house with his master they dressed pretty , they ate good because they ate his food –they lived in the debasement but they still live near the master ,and they loved their master more than the master loves himself .On that same plantation ,the latter –those were the masses ,the Negro caught hell, they ate leftover what was left of the inside of the hog .The field Negro was beaten from morning to night ,living in a shake ,in hut they wish the death to their masters .Though the life under slavery was extremely marked by subjugation , cruelty ,and sexual exploitation of women , slavery for the

enslaved people was a hell upon earth .Thus there was no way to minimize its horror till the dawn of the Emancipation Proclamation (ibid)

## I.2. African Americans Inclusion

Although the difficulties of slavery, the African Americans still had a strong belief that one day they will trace a new path , their target aim was to change the stereotypes of being semi persons with no land, no root and no self-determination. They searched for place in America as being effective seekers for inclusion in the in the American policy

### I.2.1. the Declaration of Independence

The American Revolution ushered in number of changes on mainland, transformations which had important implications for the enslaved pushed by petitions of slaves, protest by anti-slavery activists. There was immediate end of slavery in the North since the northern economy became industrial so there was no need hand labor it was replaced by machines whereas the Southern states refused to abolish slavery.

The institution of slavery underwent a significant change during the Revolutionary era. In particular, The Declaration of Independence issued by Thomas Jefferson on 2July, 1776 as a framework was the aspiration to create a new nation based on individual freedom and self-government .But the Declaration did not extend “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” to African Americans. Indeed, the Blacks were excluded from being part of vital components .Since, they were considered as property – article of merchandise.

The African American Benjamin Banneker “free Black” corresponded with the American Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson as a response to their exclusion from the Declaration of Independence .He contended that the Blacks were intellectually equal to the Whites so they have to be independent from servitude.

More importantly, Jefferson claimed that slavery was the “abominable crime”, yet he held 195 slaves on his Monticello plantation (Kolchin , 41). To back up the decision,

Frederick Douglass argued that slavery was not justified in the constitution, the “glorious liberty document.

No, take the constitution according to its plain reading, and defy the  
Presentation of single pro-slavery clause in it .On the other hand it  
Will be found to contain principles and purposes entirely hostile to  
The existence of slavery

Clearly, Douglass resorted to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to confirm the black’s quest for existence in America, denouncing the extent to which slavery was a fault. (Larbi Youcef, 50)

After the American Revolution, many colonists-particularly in the North, where slavery was relatively unimportant to the agricultural economy-began to link the oppression of black slaves to their own oppression by the British authority and to call for slavery’s abolition. From 1830sto the 1860s, the movement to abolish slavery in America gained strength led by White staunch supporters, to the end of slavery such as William Lloyd Garrison<sup>1</sup>the founder of a radical newspaper *The Liberator* 1831 and Harriet Beecher Stowe<sup>2</sup> 1852who published the bestselling antislavery novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin which is considered one of the most influential publication that gave birth to the abolition sentiment.

## I.2.2.The Africans Americans and the Civil War

Fought from April 1861 to April 1865, the American Civil War or “ the War of Secession” is bloodiest war in United States after decades of rising tensions between Northern and Southern states over slavery ,states ‘rights and westward expansion

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<sup>1</sup>William Lloyd Garrison (December10,1805 –May 24,1879) was a prominent American Abolitionist, journalist and social reformer and social .He was one of the founders of the American Anti- Slavery Society insisted on the "immediate emancipation" of slaves in the United States. ([www .BlackHistory.com](http://www.BlackHistory.com))

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe (June 14,1811 – July 1,1896) was an American abolitionist and she was internationally famous for her belief of the Anti –slavery novel actions.was an American abolitionist and she was internationally famous for her antislavery novel “Uncle Tom Cabin ” that denounced the immorality of slavery .

(Hornsby,Jr1997. 258).The election of Abraham Lincoln<sup>3</sup>in 1860 caused seven Southern states to secede and form the confederate State of America (CSA) in April ,Fort Sumter in Charleston , South Carolina fell to confederacy signaling the beginning of war (Hornsby, Jr 1997.262) .

Most standard histories of the Civil War – such as those of *Bruce Catton* , Allan Nevins ,and Shelby Foot mention the African American in the Civil War in passing as being members of troops .Though there was also an extensive literature describing the African Americans’ struggles for freedom in Civil War era , among these works are James McPherson’ *Battle Cry of Freedom* , *The Negro’s Civil War* and *Marching Toward Freedom*, Benjamin Quarles’ *The Negro in The Civil War* and *Gerald Astor’s The Right To Fight* .All these works are consistent in their assertions and depictions of the bravery of African American soldiers in the face of northern forces (op, cit. 258).

In spite of Lincoln’s ban, African American offered their services to defend the Union and defeat slavery. Frederick Douglas opposed Lincoln’s ban and argued for their participation. “Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service, and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of emancipation among slaves”. To grasp the full meaning of this quotation Douglas asserted for the competency of the Blacks, to be “soldiers” in order to end slavery (ibid).

To open the window of opportunity, the belief to put an end to the life of bondage urged slaves to find out way for freedom as Benjamin Quarles described how African Americans met Twelve Street Baptist church in Boston to discuss their promise to defend as well as free their enslaved brethren “our feeling urge us to say to our countrymen that we are ready to stand and defend the Government with our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor” stated the resolutions committee .Quarrels in (Hornsby,J1997:265)stated that black women volunteered as nurses, seamstresses, and warriors if need.

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<sup>3</sup> Abraham Lincoln (February 12, 1809 to April 15, 1865) was the 16th president of the United States and was regarded as one of America's greatest heroes ,due to his role as savior of the Union and emancipator of the slaves. His eloquence of democracy and insistence that the Union was worth saving embody the ideals of self-government that all nations strive to achieve. [www.britanica.com](http://www.britanica.com)



Although the African Americans soldiers had a crucial role in the war, they experienced humiliation since most of them were serving under incompetent abused and mistreated their men. Fortunately, Africans American fought against adversity and proved to be courageous, loyal, and intelligent soldier's .Their sacrifice and effort resulted in the abolition of slavery by way of the Thirteenth Amendment, and birth of a long and proud history of African Americans (ibid.).

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln<sup>2</sup> on January 1, 1863. It declared that all persons held as slaves shall be free .It applied only the state in rebellion not to the slave holding Border States of Delaware, Kentucky to areas of confederacy that had already come under Union control. The careful planning of this document ,with Lincoln releasing it at just the moment in the war ensured that it had a great positive impact on the union efforts and redefined the purpose of the war -the abolition of slavery was a necessary war measure. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation stated the following

That on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January ,A.D. 1863 all persons held as slaves within any states or designated part of a state the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be , thenceforward , and forever free and the executive government of United States , including the military and naval authority thereof ,will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act to repress such persons , or any of them , in any effort they may make for their actual freedom. (Hornsby,1997. 262)

In practice the Proclamation would abolish slavery in any rebel sates or territory that fell under the Union control .It had no effect on slavery in the Border States .Quarles asserted the different interpretation of Emancipation Proclamation, it turned into a fight for Black freedom and opened the Union Army to black troops - it was quite calculated- in its vision "inclusion in other form" (op. cit., 264).

Unpredictably, African Americans were the most welcomed of Lincoln's Proclamation ,and showed their appreciation by holding celebrations on New Year's day in 1863 .Quarles in the writing of Hornsby, Jr 1997 described how Port Royal , a huge all day celebration was held when African American sing " My country 'tis of thee" (Ibid :1997).

The Black slaves had great aspiration from the new political change as Emancipation Proclamation went into effect changing the legal status of 3 million of slaves in United States federal government specific areas of the South from “un-free” to “free” .Yet it continues to be an ironic symbol of equality and social justice.

### I.2.3.The Amendment and the Search for Inclusion

However, the promises and expectations of the Emancipation Proclamation betrayed the Afro Americans ,overall instilled a sense of expectation of full enjoyment of American citizenship But within a decades of the declaration that they would be “henceforth and forever free” and the guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment that no state “ shall make or enforce any law” denying them full citizenship .According to scholar Charles McKinney ,the 15 years of emancipation , most of southern states had codified the new state system of disenfranchisement, segregation, discrimination and an exclusion in public facilities -” separate but equal” doctrine -Jim Crow law<sup>4</sup>.The African American did not endure this period without responding in various ways .Just as stories of violence against Blacks are grouped, overt and covert resistance to the hard element of Jim Crow regiment .(ibid 1997). The 13Amendments proposed by Congress on January 31, 1865 outlawed the institution of slavery.

#### Section1 :( Abolition of Slavery)

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, nor any place subject to their jurisdiction

#### Section 2 Power to Enforce This Article: The Congress shall have power to enforce this

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<sup>4</sup>Jim Crow Law were set laws that imposed racial segregation in the South of the colonies , it occurred between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the Civil Right movement 1950 [www.wiki.org.com](http://www.wiki.org.com)

Article by appropriate legislation (Larbi Youcef, 50).

Though the American constitution prohibited slavery all over the colonies, the new slaves “free” had to face other forms of complexities like the issue of citizenship and segregation.

a- Dred Scott and Citizenship (1857)

The case is about the Black slave Dred Scott who lived in slave state Missouri from 1833 to 1843 and he was taken to free state in the north Illinois, where the slavery was forbidden by the Missouri Compromise 1820. He lived 4 years. At the end of the period he was brought back to the South, and he became un-free for the second time. Dred sued to the court asking for his freedom, the judge Sanford told him that he did not have the right to sue since he was not a citizen.

Arguably, the blacks did not have the same rights and duties like the white, “blackness entails inferiority”, “they doom to slavery” the Blacks were considered as property and they will be slaves forever. They were excluded from the civilized government the Birth certificate of the nation, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution” all men are born equal” here equality for the Whites with Whites not with Black

a- Plessey and Blacks’ Equality

On May 18, 1896 was the in which the American Court issued the controversial “Separate but Equal” doctrine for assessing the constitutionality of racial laws. Plessey v. Ferguson was a first inquiring into the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment. In reaching this conclusion the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Civil Rights Cases (1883) lied on the interpretation which found that racial segregation was protected by the laws of separate public facilities, schools, and transports these laws pretended to provide the state “public peace and order” as a criticism to the law “Separate but Equal” is deemed to be a badge of the inferiority of African American the act imposed a badge of servitude upon them in violation of the Thirteenth Amendment. For the scholar Harlan in his article the effect of the law, he argued, was to interfere with the personal liberty and freedom of movement of both African Americans and whites. The clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> of “Our Constitution is color-blind”, the scholar Marshall Harlan wrote

And neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.

He concluded that the judgment that day of Plessey and Blacks' Equality was proved to be quite malicious .Henceforth, both cases red Scott and citizenship and Plessey and Blacks' Equality were a vivid form about the American segregation and discrimination.

## **Chapter Two: The Political Actions and Changes**

After the struggles of the Post -Reconstruction era the African Americans still had another political challenge that must be accomplished .The former was a mirror to their quest of political identity which aimed to narrow the gap between Blacks and Whites, thereby the Black activists adopted variety of demands to challenge the arbitrary government and to search place in America. Clearly, this chapter explores the concept of identity and its relevant aspect and the divergent ideologies of the Blacks' demands.

## II.1.Definition of Political Identity

### II.1.1.The Concept of Identity

It is better to grasp the meaning of identity as starting point to the political identity. According to article Philip Gleason Philip Gleason, *Identifying Identity* (1983) identity comes from the Latin root idem, the same, and it has been used in English since the sixteenth century. The meaning of identity in this philosophical context is close to its meaning in daily usage, which is clarified by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED):

The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in circumstance;  
The condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something Else: individuality, personality. Personal identity (In Psychology),The Condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various Phases of existence; continuity of the personality.

The dictionary defines identity as the features, beliefs..., etc., that makes a particular person or group unique from others “oneness”. More importantly ,the scholar Sandra Fullerton Joireman: *Nationalism and Political Identity*,( 2003) asserts that identity is a source of mobilization and motivation rather than being a product of it .That means identity is a crucial boost for fostering political ,social and cultural quests as being an active components in the society .On the other hand the sociological Niel Norgaadakeriteshen: *The Meaning and Dimensions of Citizens Political Identity* , 2003 argues that the conceptualization of identity is conceived as something that the citizens acquires according to a regions, cultures ,and customs , rather than something that is possessed .

Identity is not a stable feature, but it is rather subjectively developed. Arguably, the process of identity development may be described by features interactions, where identity develops in social environments, two features that are particularly important in the structure of symbolic interaction are “society” and “self”, society seen as reflexive mirror – through actions (Rile Hayward, 2010. 22).

Another illustration, identity is also originates from the process of identification with groups, that is based on the surrounding conditions, it is an essential property to a given subject, the creation of identity is always pragmatically constructed upon the paradoxical combination of sameness and difference, hence we create our individual identity by collecting characteristics that apply to our inner and outer side such as skin color, gender profession, language, and region, etc. The combination distinguishes “us” from “them” groups which hold different features and values (Foreman, 4).

To link the previous arguments with the history of African Americans ‘quest of identity’, the key strength was the navigation through the notion of the oppression of racism and segregation. To support the advantage side of the Afro-American identity formation Fullerton Joireman asserted that “the identity of African Americans is an “awareness” and “acceptance” of specific realization upon “who am I”, “who I wish to be”. (Ibid 2003). Michael Dawson’s theory in the work of Jane Jun 2009, the common shared belief by the African Americans community since slavery “the linked fate”, such an ethnic identity formation” of African Americans conception. Consensually, identity was the common share of the African Americans as means of self –protection against the boundaries of race.

Moreover, Pearl Gross (1971) in the writing of Ronald L. Jackson, II (2010) *Niggers Model: Negro to Black Conversion Experience* which identified African Americans identity progressed through four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, emersion and internalization. The stages represented a shift in African American identity from “pro-white, anti-Blacks to pro-Black to multicultural dimensions.

## II.1.1 The Definition of Political Identity

The political identity is a major aspect of identity which was used in the political discourse since the late of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly during the Civil Right Movement .According to The sociopolitical scholar Richard Thompson ford II claims “all politics are identities and all identities are political” of course there is a mutual relationship between them, hence identity politics is a political orientation build around a social environment. The aim of identity politics is based on the classification of the social identities such as race, ethnicity and gender as being fundamental components of individual’s political motives.

It is typically related to class or group belonging as Avigail Eesenberg argued “groups are politicized on the basis of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, and race to make claim for political opportunities”, people most the time take a modified sort of identity, while they were participating in political processes just to cope with complex status as rights’ defenders. In addition, identity politics as a mode of classification ,is intimately related with social groups which are oppressed such as ethnic minorities “Black” in the United States.( R .Eisenstein : 1978) .

Appiah (2005) in Eesenberg : *identity politics* claimed that the broader principles of justice , freedom ,human rights ,and democratic citizenship were considered a basic normative political identity for the real recognition of identity .For instance, African Americans as a vivid form for the quest of full political normative in order to shape their identity.

Moreover another major historian, Jane Jum in her writing: *Ethnic Identity and Political Participation* (2009) highlighted the ultimate relationship between the group member ship and the political participation, the more identified and linked individuals feel with racial and ethnic groups the they are active in politics . The most important is that the political status of Afro -Americans is based on racial construction “ racial consciousness” ,which aimed to demolish the stereotypical picture about their ” backward origin ”( H.D .Minor: 2015) .



## II.2 .Blacks' Demands for Changes

The history of the Africans Americans sparked various political demands; the Pan Africanist belief was evoked by Marcus Garvey as the solution to enhance the Blacks' life conditions in America. Martin Luther King was for the social and political integration using the nonviolent protests. On the other hand, Malcolm X believed in “separation” as a catalyst system that served to demolish the racist institutions.

### II.2.1. Marcus Garvey and the Return to Africa

The late of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the departure point to a new African American movement “Back to Africa” homeland ,as being the right solution to end the Blacks' problematic of segregation .The movement passed through two phases, the first phase was controlled by the organization like the American Colonization Society (ACS)<sup>5</sup>, which was established in 1817 by a group of whites abolitionist who empathized with the Blacks, so that they facilitated their migration to Liberia - a free nation in the West of Africa – which was the refuge to the free” Blacks“, who resolute the return to Africa as the proper resolution.

The second phase occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which was the revival of pan Africanist Movement<sup>6</sup> by the intellectual man, Marcus Garvey who was born on August 7, 1887 in St .Ann's Bay, Jamaica .He was a major figure of the foremost man who gained a worldwide fame through his legacy of racial consciousness and pride – to be proud of your African roots .Marcus Garvey's philosophy contributed to help the African descendants to reach their political, economic and cultural autonomy. His exploration throughout the slavery and its oppression upon the African slaves in the world pushed him to hate the white race that is why Akinnyle Umoja in the article *Searching for Place: Nationalism, Separatism, and Pan –Africans* (1997) named him “a race leader” the one who promoted the Black race .He was inspired by the ideologies of Booker Taliaferro Washington who believed that the black race must be the self- determined and independent from the white

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<sup>5</sup> ACS was founded by a clergymen Robert Finley Washington , an American abolitionist who believed that the Blacks would have better life in Africa .

<sup>6</sup> Pan –Africanism was a worldwide intellectual movement “web” that aimed to encourage and solidify the relations between African descent all over the world ,based on the common fate “ slavery “ and the common interest .It takes the form of cultural or political movement .([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com))

race. In 1926 Marcus Garvey established an influential organization the Universal Improvement Association (UNIA), as being the source of challenge and awareness for the Blacks' pride history.

He was spokesman who raised the Pan- Africanism sentiment through his speeches through which he influenced the Africans in general and the Blacks in America in particular , segments from his speech “ we are rising the cry for liberty , freedom and democracy ” , “ a spirit that refuses to turn back , a spirit that says liberty or death “ , “ the ideal of a free and redeemed Africa those who have discouraged you in the past are those who have enslaved you centuries ” . Examining this quotation above we may tackle the extent to which his words and ideologies shake the Blacks. In fact, his beliefs were considered as stream of consciousness ( Ghantham Bain: 1940 ). Garvey's legacy of the racial consciousness and pride was a source of inspiration to the following movements. Clearly, The Back to Africa Movement provides a useful paradigm for the long evolution of the Civil Right Movement.

## II.2.2. Martin Luther King and Integration

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1986) was the key leader of the Civil Right Movement. Who brought tremendous changes in the life of the Africans Americans through his speeches, marches, and protests. His education gave him the tool to find out pragmatic solutions and to connect preaching with activism in order to develop the philosophy of “integration” as a challenge to the social injustice of Jim Crow Law. The latter banned Blacks from entering with the Whites to the same schools, restaurants and other public services, Therefore, Dr King had to find out ways for desegregation the with the whites “ integration . “Dr, King believed that the weapon of the nonviolent protest was the ultimate solution. (Lydia , Bjornlund, 2013. 242)

Dr. King organized a famous march on August 28,1963 ,where around 250,000 people marched from Washington Monument to Lincoln Memorial.(ibid :2013) , where the African Americans handled slogans demanding for Jobs and Freedom “ *we march for jobs for all now* ”,“*we demand voting rights now*” . Though the march was a transitional point for the blacks' civic duties during those powerful moments, Dr. King delivered his iconic speech “*I Have a Dream*”

*I have dream that one day on the red hill of Georgia, of sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owner will be able to side down together at table of brotherhood .I have dream that one day even the state of Mississippi a state sweltering with the heat of injustice sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” (King’s speech 1963)*

The speech is the aspiration of new South and hope for integration of Blacks with Whites -homogeneity-The scholar Thomas Ladenburg in his article “Striving for Justice”1974 claimed that King’s dream of integration stretched love , equality ,and nonviolence to indicate significant strength .Moreover , he believe that was important to remember King not merely as a dreamer but as a doer, since of the march had a progressive role which enforced the federal government to implement desegregation practices as the equal rights “the right to vote” .

The Civil Right Movement 1963 represents as the most organized manifestation of African Americans. It aimed to serve for new freedom and it was the most successful one .According to Hornsby 1997, the leaders gathered to form an organization that serve to employ a tactics of the Montgomery bus boycott .He argued the movement coincide with the beginning, when the United States Supreme Court ruled in Brown V. Board of education Topeka ,Kansas in 1955 as a major segregation law which changed the life of the little girl old Linda Brown. Who lived close to a white school thus she was refused to attend in the whites’ school ,she had to go to the colored school across town .Her father sued the school system to the court , at the end he won .From that time law stated that schools had to be desegregated.

Occasionally, in December 1955 the colored passenger Rosa Park was arrested because she refused to leave her seat on the bus for a white man. King Fred Shullkest worth and Ralph Abernathy were among the first leaders of the group that called the group Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). They helped and led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in other parts in the South. (Hornsby ,1997.550)

Most importantly was that the movement resulted the passage of two laws The Civil Right Act 1964 and the Voting Act in 1965, the former provide full equality for the Blacks in public services as the latter gave them the political rights - the right to vote- in order to shape a full American democracy as Dr King claimed in his speech “And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges” from these words, to keep tranquility in America, Blacks should be on the same foot with Whites -equal rights and duties- for. Just week after the assassination of Martin Luther King in April 1968, the congress passed the Fair Housing Act 1968 which prohibits private citizens from refusing to sell or rent housing to any person because of race and color.

## II.2.2 Malcolm X and Separation

The late of the 20<sup>th</sup> was marked by the rising of Blacks ‘consciousness about their social and political marginalization in America .The African American Malcolm X was a prototype of the Civil Right Movement ,his last name was changed to X to symbolize the mysterious African name ,that was supposed to be. While he was in prison encountered with Elijah Muhammed and the Nation of Islam who transformed “brainwash” his beliefs in God. Malcolm Shabazz. Indeed, his conversion to Islam gave him a spiritual and mental strength to challenge the stereotypes of the black race’s inferiority. He strongly believed that the independent system from dominant society was the basic step towards the revival of “ the Black nation .( Hornsby,1997,p.530).

Malcolm Shabazz was the formative leader of the Black Nationalism, he was famous spokesman well picked update -white” rhetoric words to shake peoples and rise their awareness about the richness of their race and the pride of their national identity (ibid, 1997).

By the late of 1963, he created his own organization to serve a better life for blacks and their descents. In fact the Organization of Afro Americans Unity (O.A.A.U) became a powerful political force that provoked the African Americans to strive for a total separation from American institutions and confronted the Ku Klux Klan’s oppression. The scholar

Tom Kerry in his *International Socialist Review: Malcolm X on African American history* 1967 contended that Malcolm X presented an ambivalent philosophy to King's vision of racial integration, for him the "self-determination" and "Black nationalism" can be only achieved via riots and wars as being the direct road to freedom.

Malcolm X delivered his masterpiece speech "*The Ballot or Bullet*" in 12 April, 1954 which had a crucial impact on the public opinion -quest for national identity, it was a stream of consciousness about philosophy of Black Nationalism and national consciousness that means the Black man should control the politics of his country -right to vote - as being their entire right.

To follow the arguments of the Nationalism, many historians asserted that education was a starting point to the separatism system, which had a constant role in shaping the Black descendants' minds, thereby, the Black Nationalist contended that their system of education should be separated from the integrated environment, where white teacher and parents dominant the schools. Hence, the educational plan should be relevant to the Black's perspectives, in order to provide a full protection for the African civilization in America and to rise their self-respect. Malcolm X's aim was the creation of black nation-inside white nation. (op. cit., p. 533)

**Chapter Three: The Harlem Renaissance and the Cultural Identity**

From the outset of world history, culture was a significant feature that shapes the richness of civilizations. This was mainly achieved through the African American culture which had greatly challenged the dominant culture “American culture.” In fact the Black cultural memory <sup>7</sup> had an essential role in shaping the Black identity, it secured their cultural survival. The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement which had undeniable mark in shaping the American history in general and the African American culture in particular thereby, it was a high time for Blacks to reconstruct their cultural identity. This chapter seeks to clarify the Harlem Renaissance era, the conceptualization of cultural identity, and its impacts on the beginning of the New Negro Movement.

### III.1.The Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance 1920 to 1935 was a movement of maturation where the Blacks exhibited their cultural identity through the art, literature, music, and theater. The movement was generated from the Great Migration, where 6 millions of Blacks migrated from the rural South to the urban North mainly in New York City “Harlem”, in order to escape from segregation and poor life conditions in the South to look for ,ore social opportunities in the North jobs ,houses, and high degree of education. The historian Eugene C. Holmes claims in his article: *Alain Locke and the New Negro Movement* (1968), the movement was a “show window” for celebrating the African heritage, where New York City became no more American city than “Negro America.” They started to search for place in public cities, where they could draw a beautiful image about the African culture which could challenge the American culture.

The period was marked the foundation of the NAACP in 1910 (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ),the key leader of the organization was W.E.B Du Bois .It had an influential role in securing the political social, economic, and educational equality for the colored people with the Whites . Moreover, there were another organization Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association 1920 (UNIA) which fostered the Pan-Africanist sentiment as consequence for the racial advance. Important new publishing houses opened its doors to black authors to publish books and

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<sup>7</sup> Cultural memory is the ability to create and recreate our past, - sets of undeniable memories -it is a process where society secure the continuity of culture and to reshape the cultural identity as a consequence to find place in the globalized world. (Jeantte Rodriguez And TeForter : *Cultural memory Resistant faith and identity* ,( university of Texas press ,2007, p.8).

magazines ,using Negro's topics such as "Opportunity" 1924 was published by the NAACP, " The Crisis" 1934 was published by the National Urban League. Conspicuously, the Harlem Renaissance was the outburst of the Blacks 'culture that gave birth to new Negro's spirit self-confident, potential, and valuable citizens (ibid).

In addition, in the work of Kelly King Howes: *The Harlem Renaissance* (2000) the Harlem Renaissance was a transitional attitudes and self-image among African Americans that brought stream of thought and culture. The period was the starting point for redefining the African American cultural in order to transform the stereotypes of the black race' s inferiority to racial pride. Furthermore, it lead to creation of new of style music Jazz and Blues which emerged as real life depiction which had a public influence among the Whites.

Interestingly, the African American scholar Falola Toyin: *The Power of African Culture*, (2010) asserts on the crucial role of the Black artists, authors, and poets. Who seek for cultural inclusion within the mainstream<sup>8</sup>, as reason to make the African American cultural identity reviving, competitive, and more flexible with its counterpart cultures .The literary accomplishments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century strengthened the goals of the Civil Right Movement. The Harlem Renaissance was transformative era in the life of the African Americans form the rural blacks to urban black culture with racial pride.

### III.1.2The Conceptualization of Cultural Identity

The cultural identity refers to the common features of person "self-definition" in relation to race – genetic features- ages, traditions, religions, social class, and languages, etc. In the work of the scholar Cynthia Hansberry William : *The Sound Of Blackness : African American Language ,Social and Cultural Identities* (2007) the cultural identity is the emotional significance linked to their sense of belonging and affiliation of the cultural characteristics in relation ethnic group. In other words, the cultural identity utilizes the collective memories -the experiences of slavery - as being the common fate which has been always a sign debasement and inferiority. Thus, the Black descents have to reconcile it and overcome the walled segregation in order to trace a new start. Thereby, it is necessary to

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<sup>8</sup> Main stream ; is a wide world belief that includes popular culture , the American literary Mainstream is based on the distinctiveness and sameness with the American culture "mainstream" which include only the "WASP" white, homosexual ,male ,social class, and protestant .



reformulate the memories in the mind of Blacks descents to be a badge of courage, resistance, and morality rather than to be a sign of stigma.

The cultural identity may be used as a political weapon to support certain political claims to illustrate ; the philosopher Charles Taylor in Paul Gilbert's work, *Cultural Identity And Political Ethics*.(2010) claims that “ the political leader' s lodged in the name of follower's cultural identities ,individuals are what they are only because they are embodied in culture ” it means that the cultural identity has an effective rule usage - was a defensible argument- in politics. This was primarily used by the Civil Rights' leaders.

In the writing of Lionel Macpherson and Tommie Shelby: *Interpreting African American Identity* , (2010) argues that the cultural identity is multidimensional , it is not usually related to the shared physical characteristics “race”, ancestral relations ,or geographical situations. The following example highlights the skepticism of Macpherson's argument; is the case of the former president Barack Obama who has an American cultural identity without” looking white ” or having American White ancestry ,while his behavior and attitudes are notably implemented as an American form.

According to Appiah Kawame's argument in the writing of Macpherson, the conceptualization of cultural identity of African American became a significant social currency that enhance the Blacks 'cultural, social, political economic assimilations (Macpherson, 2010).

### III.3. The New Negro Beginning and the Black Reconstruction

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of drastic changes in the status of black culture in America. Where the belief that literature had mission to convey personal, social and political reality. This was mainly achieved through the literature of the New Negro Renaissance, where the black genius authors such as Alain Locke, W.E.B Du Bois, and Langston Hughes had significantly depicted the African Americans' quest for racial and cultural uplifting. Although these authors had different philosophical strategies to search

for place within the dominant culture and racial improvement, but they artistically merged to distort the stereotypes of the “old Negro” into strong racial pride of the New Negro”<sup>9</sup>

### III.3.1. Alain Locke and the New Negro Movement

The 1920s sparked a new beginning for the black arts and movements. The New Negro Movement was artistic philosophy which was evoked by the African American author, professor, and philosopher Alain Leroy Locke (September 13, 1885 – June 9, 1954) who had an ultimate contribution for the blossoming of black racial pride. In the period 1925, Locke published his masterpiece work an anthology called “*The New Negro: An Interpretation*” which includes works of major black samples, such as Langston Hughes, Mackey and Countee Cullen.

In the work of Michael D. Thompson: *The New Negro Movement*, (1999,p 92) claims that Locke’s work crystalizes the purpose of the Negro Renaissance which fostered the positive self –image, free expression “cultural democracy”, and racial pride. Locke declares in his work “life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self-determinations”, he stimulated the black artists to be more innovative and creative.

The historian Charles Johnson in Holmes characterized Alain Locke as the “Dean” of new black generation of the 1920’s. He was the one who encouraged the black writers, artists for the self-definition, and spiritual emancipation through arts, fiction, and poetry .Furthermore, his philosophical strategies for the racial uplifting, made him an important African American intellectual between the great W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King (Ibid. 61).

He had other major contributions in publishing journals such as Opportunity -journal of Negro Life- and Survey Graphic which contains hundreds of pages such as “The Making of Harlem” and “Black Workers and City.” Locke edited a special issue of the later publication which was devoted to the Harlem Renaissance to flourish the African

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<sup>3</sup> The term “New Negro” is wide spread during the Harlem Renaissance denoting the extent to which the Negroes have dignity and they are qualified. Michael, Thompson claims that the use of the term is a metaphor back to the African culture “origins” (Michael D. Thompson, 1999, p 926).

American art, literature, and music in New York City during the 1920s. This work aimed to reconfigure the blacks as literary subject (Op, cite., 50).

Locke as an author believed that the story of the Negro writers had to be sound via writing, performing and singing, they were defenders of social injustice and white's prejudices. He saw the position of Negro America culture as great deal more than an artistic works his further aspiration was the creation of the black national literature. That aimed to re-evaluate the stereotypical beliefs of slavery and its injustice, and reversing equation from uncivilized Black to civilized, who are valuable contributors in constructing the African American culture. Conspicuously, Alain Locke's philosophy is undeniable marker in shaping the history of the black culture which embodied the social injustice to racial pride through art, fiction, and poetry. Hence, the changes in race relations today are partly the aftermath impact of the New Negro Movement (Op, cite., 64).

### III.3.2. W.E.B Du Bois

The scholars Cary D Winte and Paul Finkelman *Encyclopedia of The Harlem Renaissance*, (2005) defines William Edward Burghart Du Bois (1868-1963 ) as a formative leader of the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century. He the founder of NAACP which was devoted to achieve the equal rights, and he was the editor of the NAACP's journal "Crisis" 1934 Du Bois published his best selected articles and editions about what blacks should fight for and what they could reach – aspirations- for future.

He had belief that Black elites were responsible for the advancement of their race and culture, therefore, he called the most competent and outstanding minority of blacks "Talented Tenth"<sup>10</sup> they believed that through their examples these individuals would help blacks to find suitable place in America. Hence, the writers, poets, and other artists in the Talented Tenth should focus not on their personal views and expressions but on the advancement of blacks as whole "racial power" (Ibid 2005). Du Bois had significant

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<sup>10</sup> Talented Tenth: is a name used by Du Bois to the black social intellectuals of the African American society; these minorities had further aspirations for racial advancement through their achievements ( Winte and Paul Finkelman, 2005)

impacts on race construction; he was a talented writer who sharpened the issue of the current problem the “Color Line”. He published his influential book: *The Souls of Black Folks* 1913a collection of essays and stories about the psychological and social experiences. The latter are concerned with Blacks who are living in dilemma -Double Consciousness or “the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of other’s (Dubois, 3). In other words Dubois brought pragmatic interpretations about Blacks’ inner struggles, whether to abandon the African culture and embrace the American one, Dubois asserted on the striving inner to be black and act as white , his analysis raised the attention of Blacks “self- conscious”(Ibid.). Hence, Du Bois’s clear response to the question: what does the African American wants. He simply insisted on the black men or women to be both Negro and American without being split in between in order to secure the opportunity of self-development.

### III.3.2.Langston Hughes

In the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> poetry had a significant impact on reversing the equation of “blackness”, it became a sign of beauty rather than ugliness. This was mainly achieved through the works of the African American poet Langston Hughes (February1, 1902-May22, 1967), he was one of the founding fathers of the Harlem Renaissance who created literary themes which were interrelated with the aspects of black urban working class such -beauty – as being the turning point in his works, for him the color black beautiful “I am black, I am beautiful” (Hughes, 1926). In addition, the social complexities, and human understanding were used to as stimulus to make the blacks striving to change their status. Langston Hughes used, social political and religious aspects of the African American experiences as source of inspiration, his poems declares to the world that the street of the black Americans contains vital culture (Hornsby,1997, p. 480).

In the work of Kelly King Howes: *The Harlem Renaissance 2000* Hughes is an iconic leader of the Negro Renaissance Movement, he was the one who adopted the perpetual quest for the social and racial equality. He published his celebrated poem “The Negro Speaks Rivers” 1921, and “The Weary Blues” 1926 which were typically portrayed the black culture and music.

In 1936 Langston's poem "Let America Be American Again" examined the social injustice and unrealized hopes of the African American from the American Dream. The scholar Lois Brown says in his writing: *Encyclopedia of The Harlem Renaissance* 2006 "Those black writers who believed in the American Dream became image-maker. They cited achievements of Negroes arts, music and literature as evidence that blacks were qualified for integration into American society." This quotation above examines the extent to which the African Americans used their qualifications to challenge the whites and to reach the quest social for inclusion.

One of Hughes' most acclaimed essays appeared in *The Nation* in 1926, entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain". It spoke of Black writers and poets, "who would surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration," where a talented Black writer would prefer to prove their racial pride." Langston Hughes gave voice to the proud spirit of his generation. Hughes' poems were considered as propaganda<sup>11</sup>, which later became a political power that aimed to secure cultural and political place within the American community. Furthermore, his main goal was the attempt to write like the Whites in order to attract their attentions; hence it would be easy for the white American or the world to erase the stereotypes of black race "inferiority" (Op. Cite., 60).

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<sup>11</sup> According to Merriam Webster Dictionary ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread to help a cause, a political leader, a government, etc.

## General Conclusion

As conclusion to the key elements of this research, the African Americans had a perpetual quest of identity, as being the stepping stone in shaping Blacks' history. Conspicuously, the African Americans overcame the walled of segregation, racism, and white's prejudices through the embodiment of measurable strategies of the Civil Rights leaders who persisted on the pragmatic solutions for social integration and political rights. On the other hand, artists of the New Negro renaissance had profoundly fashioned the African heritage through, arts, fiction, and poetry in order to reconfigure their cultural identity.

To sum up the arguments of the first chapter, slavery got the lion's share in building the American economic investment, whereas it was the dark chapter in the African American history – it was a stigma- that yielded several moral, cultural and social traumas. Hence, the Blacks had a crucial role in changing the stereotypes of their doom of slavery and servitude .They persisted on the aim, to change their position from an object to a subject – from slave ship to the center stage in order to search for political inclusion which was the boost to Civil Right Movement as being the vehicle to challenge the White “superiority and the Black inferiority.

In the shadow of the second chapter, the political identity is fundamental part in forming the individuals' beliefs and affiliations. Identity functions as an indicator of self-definition and self-determination for the construction a good citizen. That was later crystalized through the legacy of the Civil Right leadership that had realized the hopes of integration ,equal rights ,civil participants in politics “the right to vote” King' s charismatic leadership had substantial effect in tracing the political , social, and educational history of the Africans Americans .His legacy of America's race problems was solved , which may be seen nowadays , Black and White eating , working together ,even an marring each other” interracial marriage”. However, he was sharply criticized by Malcolm X for his nonviolent practice.

To conclude the arguments of the third chapter, the Harlem Renaissance had crucial role on the reconfiguration of the new Negro characters and falsification of the old Negroes' stereotypes; form being uncivilized, ugly and barbaric to be more valuable, beautiful and

self-respect subjects, who had ultimate role in bring a wide fame to the African American culture.

Although the artistic accomplishments of the Harlem Renaissance and the triumphs of the Civil Right Movement ,thus the African American had still faced vexing questions and complex situations about the dual identity , whether to African or American ,to be black and functions as white.

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