

**The Problematical Portrayal of Racial Discrimination in Jacqueline
Woodson's novel "*The Brown Girl Dreaming*"**

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Abstract

African American Literature can be defined as writings by people of African decent living in the United States. The genre began during the 18th and 19th centuries with writers such as poet Phillis Wheatley and Orator Frederick Douglass reached as an early highpoint with the Harlem Renaissance and continues with the authors such as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Walter Mosley, James Baldwin etc. The themes and issues explored in African American literature are tradition, culture, racism, religion, slavery, segregation, migration, and feminism and more. This paper deals with the perspectives of clashes between black and white communities through the novel *The Brown Dreaming girl* by Jacqueline Woodson. It clearly explains about the Whites ill-treatment and how the blacks suffer under the hands of white people. The essential part of human kind is Identification and Freedom which has been completely wiped off from the hearts and minds of the black people.

Key Words: Segregation, Migration, Identification, Freedom, Communities

Afro-American Literature has been influenced by the African Diasporas heritage and got shaped it in American, and now, it has become a prominent body of literary tradition of American Literature. The diasporic person is at home either in another land or in their own land. So this can be termed as "Unhomed" in the most essential term. However, those who have been

able to identify with are blessed with a bi-cultural perception which enables them to write their autobiography with their wider angle. Their style and content of writings differ from which they adapt new country life and tend to write about the people and events they perceive

Race is a concept determined by complex social, history, economic and political factors rather than static reductionist biological concept. Race is a group of people with the same skin color and physical features. In essence 'racism' is a word used to describe a complex set of attitudes and actions, which discriminate people on the basis of their skin color, country of origin, religion or nationality? This discrimination can be conscious or unconscious, intentional, but is undoubtedly present in many different areas of social interaction. Racism acts as a justification for non-equal treatment of members of that race. The term "race" commonly used for negative sense, associated with race based prejudice, violence, dislike, discrimination, or oppression. The few main races in the world are Europeans, Blacks or Asians, Race of whites and so on. It is differentiated due to the racial stereotype picture which made them to act in prejudice way.

"Racist" are people who believe that some group are better and more important than others. They think that their own race is the best and the rest are physically and mentally inferior to them. In many cases, racists feel inferior to others. Racism exist many countries. Minorities are often discriminated against racist and they are with the problems for getting jobs, houses, or the same education as others. Historical records were placed for the racist people. Throughout they were downtrodden by the superiors or the people with white skin. Western Scientists and philosophers have often tried to prove that white people are supreme to others. In the past, governments have often justified their legal economic system with racism. It has led to slavery and to the cold blooded murder of whole population groups. Racism has made people afraid to their leaders

Jacqueline Woodson's novel *Brown Girl Dreaming* depicts about her autobiography and she is an award-winning author of young adult books was born on February 12, 1963 in Columbus, Ohio. She was raised and educated in Greenville, South Carolina, and Brooklyn, New York. Woodson graduated with B.A. in English and worked in New York City as a drama therapist for runaways and homeless children. Woodson often writes about characters that feel

out of place and the difficulties that black people face. Woodson knew she wanted to become a writer when she began reading and writing, and she loved to tell stories with her friends and family. She has written 32 books varying in genre over the years. The most genres of her writings are general fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, verse novel, and multicultural picture books. She received many laurel by awards such as Coretta Scott King Award, The Newberry Medal, National Book Award, ALA Best Book prize etc. She also addresses the importance of Multicultural diversity.

Woodson's youth was split between South Carolina and Brooklyn. In her with Jennifer M. Brown she remembered, The south was so lush and so slow moving and so much about community. The city was thriving and fast-moving and electric. Brooklyn was so much more diverse: on the block where she grew up, there were German people, people from the Dominican Republic, people from Puerto Rico, African-Americans from the south, Caribbean Americans, Asians etc. Racial Discrimination is a plague which was experienced by all the relatives, family members even by herself.

For many centuries blacks were kept slaves in the United States. Racism is a driving force behind the slave trade, and behind states based on racial segregation such as U.S. in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the South Africa, the white government followed a policy of segregation which they called Apartheid Whites, Blacks and Asians lived in separate areas, attended their own churches, hospitals and schools. Apartheid ended in 1990, when Nelson Mandela became the first black president in the country and the African National Congress took over power. Although racism may not have the same influence today, it still exists.

In an autobiography, Maya Angelo the famous writer of Afro-American writes the story of her own life and achievements That story follows the author's memories, which are colored by photos, letters and the other people interpretations and repetitions of past events. Angelou shared her experience of growing up as a poor black female in the segregated rural south. Throughout her career she continued to draw on her own experiences as the subject matter for her work.

Race, class gender, sexuality, nation, age and ethnicity
among other constituted major forms of expressions in the
United States. However, the convergence of race, class and

Gender oppressions characteristics of U.S slavery shaped
All subsequent relationship that women of African descent
Had within black American families and communities, with
employers, and among one another. It also created the political
context for black women's intellectual works. (Collins 6)

Jacqueline woodson writes a difficult period in her life. Through her writings she reveals her sufferings being an African in America. This autobiographical work received a National Book Award nomination. On the whole, Woodson's many achievements in writing field shows her talent, strength of her character and the power of vision. She has succeeded to communicating her remarkable experience and perspective.

The word "racism" was common in 1600's due to the enslavement of the Africans by the American and Europeans. One of the common examples of racism was Americans discrimination against the Africans. It is believed that slavery had existed since ancient times, it was practiced by the Americans. The dark-skinned people were done the menial work in the whites' farms under harsh climatic conditions. The Africans were also prevented to attend the same school with white kids. This is believed to be the most glaring example of racism in the world's history. Morrison tells about this color discrimination in her novel *Home* as:

"All color disappeared and the world become a black-and-white movie screen"(23)

The Jim Crow Laws were a number of laws requiring racial segregation in the United States These laws were enforced in different states between 1876and 1965. Jim crow laws provided a systematic legal basic for segregation and discriminating against African Americans. The laws first appeared after the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era and were enforced through the mid 20th century. They were about segregation between black and white people in all public buildings. "Jim crow" was a racist term for a black person. Black people were usually treated worse than white people. The segregation also done in the armed forces , on buses, restaurants, schools, and also in jobs the black get. Blacks and whites go to separate schools, ate at separate restaurants, rode on separate buses and drank from separate water foundations. Although they were given separate places the actual facilities were provided for whites. There was a law in bus that black people should sit in back of the bus. In 1955 Rosa parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus to white man in Montgomery, Alabama and so she was arrested

black community leaders gathered together with the help of Martin Luther king Jr, protest in response to the arrest of Rosa Parks.

Woodson's memoir *brown girl dreaming* tells of her childhood split between north and south, city country, the world of her Jehovah's Witness upbringing and her secular surroundings. It is focused on the 1960's and 1970's where the Civil Rights movements provided the backdrop to Woodson's patchwork of images, offering readers a child's perspective on what it means to grow up black in America.

Jacqueline grows up in the middle of two movements and her life is shaped by race mostly in negative point. Racial issue constantly infiltrates Jacqueline's life and the life of the people she loves. It determines the space she was allowed to occupy in stores and restaurants. Even after the success of the Civil Rights Movement and the fall of legalized segregation, racism still persists, Mama sits in the row desegregated bus. Mama does this because; despite of the changes in law she fears violence from the white people on the bus. Woodson's childhood began in Ohio where her father's family had for generations felt respected as Black Americans. This respect was powerful enough to keep Woodson's father rooted there. Woodson moves with her mother to south Carolina and the place itself creates an impact in moulding her. When she moves up North again she is influenced by new people language and events.

Ohio is a Northern state in the United States of America. It is the home state of Jackie, Kell and Hope as well as to the entire Woodson family; Ohio is a state with greater opportunity for blacks and greater freedom for them as well. Jackie's great-great-grandfather on her father's side was born free in Ohio in 1832. He succeeded in farming and mining before, later he fought in the civil War for the union. So his name is written in the stone on a Civil War Memorial. "William J. Woodson United States colored Troops, Union, Company B 5th Regt"(13)

Racial prejudice not only hinders Jacqueline and her family but also the legacy of slavery result in economic disadvantages for Woodson's family. When Mary Ann must go to work, the only job available to her as a black woman is house work for white people's families, which is hard work that is not paid especially well paid. Since Jacqueline's daily life is so affected by race, her sense of her own existence is inseparable. She decides to change the social movements attempting to change the racist policy. To Jack, Ohio is a place of home and he longs to see his children grow up and succeed beyond their expectation in Ohio. His children are young enough

and Ohio never truly becomes home to them, as they travel South and North Carolina ultimately becomes what they consider to home

In her poem “ *second daughter’s second day on earth*, Jacqueline describes her certificate denoting as “negro”. This shows that the way that Jacqueline is legally racialized from the moment she was born. In the poem *Football dreams* Jacqueline discusses Jack’s youth playing football , also jack noted that no sane black person would ever want to go the south. Woodson shows that because of the racism in the south, jack gather’s negative opinion about south Carolina. For him the overt racism and segregation is so disturbing, and so he rejects the south entirely.

Baby Jacqueline’s hands curl into fists, the way of every baby’s hands, according to her mother. For Jacqueline, her fists, symbolically shows her readiness to change the world. Nelsonville is a primarily black community in Greenville, Mary Ann reminds Jackie that her ancestor William woodson, was the only black child in all white class and that Jackie will too face a similar situation. Here Mary Ann speaks not only of face, but which makes Jackie different from everyone else. In a family full of doctors, lawyers and professionals, Jackie wants to become a writer, something different.

I am born brown-skinned, black-haired
and wide-eyed.

I am born Negro here and Colored there...

Deep in my heart, I do believe

That we shall overcome someday(3)

Gunner works in a printing press as a foreman, he faces struggle in supervising white people. Grandma Georgiana does the cleaning work. Grandma Georgiana took on cleaning work inorder to support the new family members. She told her grandchildren to never take day work themselves. She travelled along with other black women to the areas of Greenville where they worked for white people. Grandfather of Jackie told about the freedom they achieved due to

the Civil Rights Movements but ends in vain. All over Greenville, Jacqueline and her siblings see protestors being taken away by police.

First they brought us here.

Then we worked for free. Then it was 1863,

And we were supposed to be free but we weren't

And that's why people are so mad.(72)

Effectively, Woodson shows a vision of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements that highlights the Movements' effects on individuals, and it did not have a monopoly on activism; While these movements leads to invisible gestures of defiance. Jacqueline ,refuses to shop at Woolworth's in Newyork because of their poor treatment of black customers in the south. Her Grandfather noted as:

More than a hundred years, My grandfather says,
and we're still fighting for the free life
we're supposed to be living (74)

Trainings are going on, about how to change the south without violence, even when violence is used against them. Grandma Georgiana explains that marches have been going on for years: everyone shares the same American dream of living freely as equals. In the sterling High school, Greenville the student had been marching. A white women who owns the fabric store considered Gerogianna and her family as people not Negroes, thieves or shameful. Mostly black people are not allowed inside some white shops.

For a long time, I don't put one foot inside Woolworth's
They wouldn't let Black people eat at their lunch counters

The segregation laws have changed, but Grandma Georgiana still sits with her grandchildren at the back, so no one will look her as a dirt, Jackie admired the bravery of the blacks who set up front.

...It's easier, my grandmother says,
Than having white folks look at me like I'm dirt.
But we aren't dirt. We are people
Paying the same fare as other people.(237)

Jackie's best friend Maria, spends part of her summer in upstate Newyork, She shares her experience to Jackie, she tells" the air update is different" In Oakland Jackie and Maria started to have a free breakfast programme for poor kids. In Bushwick black people are not allowed to cross the Wyckoff Avenue Street. Once a black boy was beaten for walking on the Avenue street. The same incident was exposed by Kathryn Stockett's The Help. Robert Brown, a black

boy was beaten and blinded by white men for using the white's bathroom at a local lawn and garden store.

“ Use the white bathroom at pinchman Lawn and garden ...;
Two white men were chased him and
beat him with a tire iron” (Kathryn 101)

Jackie's teacher named vivo reads aloud the poem which Jackie had written describing whites living in big houses and poor black living in little shacks. Jackie felt that each word gives her some strength while reading:

In big houses lived the whites
In little old shacks lived the blacks
But the blacks were smart
In fear they took no part.
One of them was Martin
With a heart of gold (312)

This is a novel of one girl's journey from the North to the south and how her perception of race and the self changed during that time. She remembers her life journey from African to American in the American Northeast and south in the 1960's. She always searches for her Identity, frequent trips are made to the south to visit her grandparents, who live in Nichol town of Greenville, South Carolina. Religion was segregated and the people were racially charged. The difference of opinion causes to move Mary Ann with her three children Hope, Odella and Jackie moves to south. The clutches of racism and segregation out of the door, but the family was within the house living peacefully with grandparents.

Woodson's skillful was visible through the handled in brown girl dreaming about how the people she most loved had been affected by Jim Crow laws and racial injustice. Robert and other had this afro as black identity. But later in prison his afro has gone. He has shaved his head and became muslim. Mary Ann wore an Afro, but she denied one to Jackie, because she was a child.

He is not Robert. His afro is gone now,
Shaved to a black shadow on his perfect skull.
His eyebrows are thicker than I remember, dipping down

In a newer, sadder way. (272)

Obstacles chase her wherever she moves and even in the hair style which emerged in the 1960's during the Civil Rights' Movements, Different styles indicated certain qualities about an individual during that period. An individual's age, wealth, marital status and religion, fertility could be identified simply by the style of their hair. People spotted the afro's as the show of their pride in their cultures and features.

When Robert comes over with his hair blown out into
An afro, I beg my mother
For the same hairstyle.
Everyone in the neighbourhood
Has one and all of the black people on Soul Train; Even
Michael Jackson and his brothers are all allowed to wear
Their hair this way (259)

This study enabled me to understand that this novel *brown girl dreaming* contains racism and the chaos faced by black people. African Americans were enslaved to work until they die but they did not die, instead they grew up to become doctors, teachers, architects and presidents. This book is also an example to show students, how we can overcome the obstacles to succeed in life. It is not a must for a youngster that he must gather knowledge or Study their subject from the best school, but everyone should have a dream to overcome the challenges in life. Not only dreams but also strive has which taken a lead oneself to a successful path. This novel portrays the struggle which was faced by the author and the resolution cleared by an excellent writer, Jacqueline Woodson. It also exposes the cultural and social impacts which were faced by her.

This novel is also concerned with a young black woman's quest for self- identity by a society that allows neither woman nor black people to exist naturally and freely. Through the female protagonist, she brings the status of black women and the roles available to them within American and African-American cultures and also she offers them an alternate frame of

reference for their unique experiences within the world. This novel of twentieth century, should be sentimental novel it is so passionate. It should be emotionally satisfying as it is impressive.

Jacqueline's life from beginning is completely left alone she receives all kinds of oppressions and her identity is blackened she has experienced silence for long because she was abused when she was young. Much of her silence also comes back to her gender. She travels from the beginning though she hates travelling. She meets various kinds and categories of people out of travel, some of the places was not liked by her, especially the city Newyork, because while she was young she have heard Newyork as a richest city, while migrating she found her view as wrong.

Now a critically acclaimed author, Woodson writes about characters from a variety of races, ethnicities, and social classes. Woodson says, "There are all kinds of people in the world, and I want to help introduce readers to the kinds of people they might not otherwise meet." Woodson's books also feature strong female characters and she often writes about friendship between girls. "Woodson might be describing herself when she uses words like "strong" and "independent." Even though it isn't always easy for her to write about the serious issues she does, she feels as though she has no other choice: "I can't write about nice, easy topics because that won't change the world. And I *do* want to change the world—one reader at a time." Changing the world means changing people's attitudes about things like teen pregnancy, racial issues, sexual abuse, and class tension. Sometimes it's difficult to do, but she considers it necessary work, so that her readers will be more aware of different types of people and be better equipped to effect change when they get older. For this same reason, Woodson travels often to schools and libraries, speaking about her literature and the important issues about which she

writes. She says, "Grown-ups are jaded. Children are much more open-minded, and they have the power to change the world.

"Things may change" is an expectation that most Afro-Americans believe for the past years. "One day the sun will shine brightly" is the hope which the people expect daily. This study brings it into the conclusion of hope; in which Jacqueline Woodson too expect that she will visit the sunshine towards her community.

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