

Religion, Race and Self – Identity

A perspective of Afro – American Womanhood

M.Subasini and Dr.V.N. Manjula.

Abstract— Black Women have repeatedly asked themselves: How does a black woman handle the claims of being both a black and women? There are simple answers. Some women see themselves as being black first and female second, others reverse in order. But others see black women as people and their race and sex which contribute to their total being. It is a great quest that black woman, how they aimed to integrate heritage with American Society and Culture. There is a need for the development of mentor relationships between female and male. Individual struggle must be connected with a larger to effect change and feminists need not reinvent theory or search again for history that was never recorded. Differences among them must be acknowledged and affirmed, rather than ignored.

1 Introduction

Black Women have repeatedly asked themselves: How does a black woman handle the claims of being both a black and women? There are simple answers. Some women see themselves as being black first and female second, others reverse in order. But others see black women as people and their race and sex which contribute to their total being. It is a great quest that black woman, how they aimed to integrate heritage with American Society and Culture. During the Harlem Renaissance, many Black women proved by writing number of Poems, Stories, and other Art related works. Their aspiration to high culture brought a bridge between races. It has become an achievement against discrimination. Many saw their ethnical identity and spatial heritage from their writings as an assertion of self.

2 Developments in Art and Literature

New Era of Black consciousness has started at the end of the First World War which made for democracy and self- determination not only for the Europeans but also for the Americans. Many Blacks migrated from South to North because of labor shortage and had opportunities to make money. But they expected more privileges instead found violence and despair in North. In this tense, atmosphere Blacks agitated for equality. Many people recognized Culture, a true measure of Civilization, Art and Literature not only as an entertaining tool instead as a political force to gain Equality. They kept Art and Literature as an instrument to define their identity.

“When God had made The Man, he made him out of stuff that sung all the time and glittered all

over. Some angels got jealous and chopped him into millions of pieces, but still he glittered and hummed. So they beat him down to nothing but sparks but each little spark had a shine and a song. So they covered each one over with mud. And the lonesomeness in the sparks makes them hunt for one another.”

— Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God.

3 Women Struggles

Analyzing Harlem Renaissance many women- centered fiction were focused on Womanhood, Sexual Struggles and differences, Interpersonal relationships with women as protagonists. At the end of slavery, Afro American began to strive for Civic participation, Political Equality, Economic and Cultural Self- Assertion. The Cultural Space is embedded in an African American cultural Context associated with the South and at the same time, Cultural space proves to be diverse, due to inward heterogeneity and external contexts.

Zora Neale Hurston “the genius of South” also named as “Free, Courageous and Foolish, Magical Zora” truth telling that the mother of South has taught an entire generation to celebrate the beauty and diversity of Black Culture. Hurston consciously blends both an African American and anthropologists writing strategy. Hurston also deals with gendered social space in which female characters are placed. Employing on Feministic criticism, Hurston gendered space is transparent, in which female subject is trapped in a

concerted interaction with male oppression. But framework not only influences individual female subjects but also determines the female social networks which contributed in forming a communal space of women.

It inter relates triple marginalization that of race, sex and Women face. In the later years of slavery, Cult of true womanhood dominated, American thought about the behavior and character of women. The attributes of true womanhood by which women judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbor and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues- Piety, Purity, Submissiveness and Domesticity. With them, she was promised happiness and power.

4 Women Self-Identity Emerges

Author represents much during Harlem Renaissance and documented girl's struggle and their dream embarks on the journey to womanhood. Zora wrote about Children, Parents but much about Male and Female relationships. Traditionally women viewed in relationship to their husbands and families, have been expected to make sacrifices, in order for happy living. Women must have their own identity and to provide with individual wish. These decisions can be made no longer when women are seen as man's appendages.

Hurston documented the position of a man held back by the women around him. Men think that compromises and sacrifices should be made willingly by Women. While depicting Men and Women in different roles and relationships the author attacks various stereotypes. She shows silent dependent women whose identities linked with their Men besides dominant, vocal and Matriarchal Women. She emphasizes society's contradictory views of women. How can women be simultaneously responsible and irresponsible? In Stories of Hurston, She documents typical black experiences by attacking the myth and black women's silence. She portrays black women's strength to assert them.

5 Women as a Protagonists

In her book "Mules and Men" (1935), Zora Neale Hurston has presented a collection of folk tales and sketches that shows the close relationship between

humor and tragedy in Agro-American life. In the midst of this renaissance, two strong voices from the West Indians were heard. Claude McKay in *Ginger Town* (1932) and *Banana bottom* (1933) explains the manner that debunked travelogue exoticism usually attributed to Negro life in the Caribbean area. Early in the Harlem literary renaissance period, the Black became an attraction for varied assortment of white celebrities and just thrill-seeking white people lost from their moorings as insipid rebels, defying more and up-bringing by socially equal and associated with Negros, others were searching for the mythological noble savage. These Negros were generally educated, who had become estranged from their families and the environment of their upbringing. Ironically these sophisticates made a definite contribution to the period of the "New negro literary renaissance". The Black American could also behave as the details of social protocol as the best bred and richest white person in the country. They could also balance a cocktail glass with expertness. Behind their pretense of being writers they are actors till this Era.

Having inquired into the life and works of Zora Neale Hurston it is possible to say that she was a spectacular and remarkable black woman writer of the Harlem Renaissance who did not care about conventions very much and endeavored to introduce black people and culture to whites, not through racial protests and superficial description of blacks like most of her contemporaries but she has focused on expressing blacks' inner qualities. Although Hurston's whole life was rather distressful, she did not feel rancor or injustice; she gathered all her strength, raised her head and continued in her trying.

With the publication of "Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road" Hurston's great popularity has started to decline owing to the numerous negative criticisms of themes and language in Hurston's works especially by her male contemporaries, and finally Hurston completely disappeared after the false accusation of molestation and last published novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*. In conclusion, it is not unambiguous to say why Zora Neale Hurston disappeared and was forgotten. The probable reason for her disappearance might have been the harsh criticism of Richard Wright, a pre-eminent writer since mid-1930's, and other Harlemites, mostly a male, who had

an impact on readers along with Hurston's accusation of molestation, which damaged Hurston's perception and took her strength and desire for life. Apart from the above reasons, there were also others which might have caused Hurston's retreat.

4 Conclusion

The Black American was formed to address the ways sexism, racism, and classism influences the lives of black women whose needs were ignored by the Black Men and also white women by white Men. Many in the feminist have acknowledged their racism and made attempts to address it in anti-racism. Feminist theory now includes an analysis of the way race, class, sexuality, as well as gender influence women's lives. The women's studies departments of many prominent universities and colleges now have courses which focus on Afro - American women's writings and history; however, it has not been as effective. There is a need for the development of mentor relationships between female and male. Individual struggle must be connected with a larger to effect change and feminists need not reinvent theory or search again for history that was never recorded. Differences among them must be acknowledged and affirmed, rather than ignored.

Acknowledgment

The author wish to thank my second author and the publisher.

References

Gordon, Vivian V. *Black Women, Feminism and Black Liberation: Which Way?* 1987.

James, Stan lie and Abena P.A. Busia, ed. *theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary*

Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. New York: Belknap Press, 1997. ISBN 0-674-37263-8

"The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966) by B Welter - Cited by 2152

Claude McKay - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Claude McKay.

Eltis, David; Richardson, David (1997). *Routes to slavery: direction, ethnicity, and mortality in the trans-atlantic slave trade*. Rutledge. P.No. 88. ISBN 0-7146-4820-5.

Hurston, Zora Neal. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006. Print.

Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford, 1977), 122.*

Abcarian, Richard and Marvin Klotz. "Zora Neale Hurston." In *Literature: The Human Experience*, 9th edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006, pp. 1562-3.

Baym, Nina (ed.), "Zora Neale Hurston." In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 6th edition, Vol. D. New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 2003, pp. 1506-07.