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Racial Prejudice and the Fear of the other in Amiri Baraka's Dutchman

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Abstract

This study focuses on the Racist Theory in Amiri Baraka's Dutchman, a play that revealed how racial prejudice and fear impacted people's lifestyles in 1964. A modern stage and racial thinking interact to initialise the understanding of races and turn towards individual experiences. Baraka's Dutchman focuses on the culture within white supremacy that has historically marginalised all other races by representing possible outcomes. This paper studies the work of Lula, who destroys the clay to symbolise the savage destruction of the white man for the cultural identity of black people. Furthermore, it displays the continuation of racial violence that has been rampant since the 1960s. This study registers racial thinking and modern stage interactions, and in doing so, the researcher has adopted a secondary qualitative data collection method. The entire process of this study has been conducted based on information collected from existing resources. Thus, this study is especially applicable for readers since it connects with prejudice and fear. Analysing several types of elements in racial prejudice based on Racist Theory, the result helps to provide a transparent viewpoint.

Keywords: Racial Prejudice, Dutchman, Society, Fear, Violence, Culture, American Society, Discrimination, Savage Destruction, Racial Violence, Black People.

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Introduction

The Racist Theory is one of the most remarkable literary theories claimed to be a cross-disciplinary intellectual and socialmovement. In Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, the theme of racial prejudice is found in many different aspects. This study has focused on describing Racist Theory and its impact on the life of black American men. The narrator of *Dutchman* represents an aspect connected with a revolt against American white racist society. Throughout the play, Baraka mentions the matter of racial division in 1964. The narrator tries to express the actual situation of American society at that time. The play focuses on Clay and Lula, who demonstrate the factors of racism and racial oppression.

Dutchman is set on a subway train, where the two protagonists of this play meet each other and progress the story forward. This play shows the audience the negative impact on 1960s society regarding racial discrimination. As this play is tied to global issues in racial criticism, Baraka continuously focuses on establishing a contrast between different people. Since the primary intention of this study is to mention the theoretical framework, much of the racial criticism has engaged in understanding the social, political, psychological, and cultural context of that time. The impact of racial discrimination has been found in several play areas. Based on an individual city's history, Baraka's work represents the nexus between imaginative invention and realistic reporting. This study will describe the key elements highlighting the Racist Theory in the following section.

Literature Review

The racist theory is a legal analysis framework associated with a cultural, aesthetical, political, historical, and economic legacy to show the real state of the contemporary period. As per de Souza et al. (2018), African Americans' racial rule has been significantly applied to black people to make a strong rule, especially for lower or working-class people. This theory helped the researcher by providing a different point of view that acknowledges how race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed one that appeared during that time in America. The main key terms of this play are based on the racial and social systems and their impact on black men.

Accompanied by this theory, incorporating analyses can possibly recognise contrasting aspects of a complex social system. In addition, disrupting the dominant discourse of racial power can also be implemented within this theoretical approach. It helps portray white and black people and leads to disagreements in a highly self-critical environment. As this theory can argue with academic systems of knowledge, it can ideally detect the experience of racism.

Depiction of Racist Theory based on the Fear and Racist Prejudice of the other in Dutchman

During the 20th century, white people ruled over black people and set specific rules and regulations highlighting racial discrimination. Baraka mentions the same impact as found throughout several incidents in *Dutchman*. By introducing the metaphorical subway journey, the narrator tries to provide a clear view to the readers to understand the real position of black people. Al-Harshan (2021) opined that the protagonist was born black and belonged to a middle-class family. Being black, he has been treated as an enslaved person under the social racist system. In addition, the silent passengers in the train mirror a racist society speeding toward genocide.

According to the main story, the genocidal nature of the white race desires black men to stand against any form of abuse. The narrator portrays a racial discrimination mentality through Lula's masochistic actions. The play turns from this scene into hatred and anger as Clay offers an apple to Lula, and eventually, the situation allows him to realise that he deserves to be enslaved. The narrator depicts social structure by stating, "The flying underbelly of the city steaming hot and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth". As argued by Moslund (2021), it has been shown that in the reality of American society, a black man can be turned into an enslaved person. White culture has carried Lula, and by wearing sunglasses, she hides her real self and presents the artifice of friendliness. Her attack on Clay shows the mentality against blacks set by the social structure.

It has been identified as another example of an American social system where it has been clearly understood that black people exist to endure white people's dominance. In Yekani's (2019) words, black people's helplessness is described perfectly within this scenario. When Lula decides to throw clay from the train, it also highlights the racial rules stuck in people's minds that black people are born to accept white people's torture and brutal behaviour.

Racist theory signifies an intellectual movement caused by the segregation between individuals based on their race, colour, and culture. *Dutchman* sketches the culture dominated by white supremacy. Other races are marginalised by white people, who are highly concerned about their white man's burden. Issues related to racial prejudice were deeply rooted in American society; as per Al-Douri's (2019) opinion, Baraka endeavours to explore the psyche behind racial discrimination. *Dutchman* wants to provide a message to all black Americans to raise their voices against the cruelty

created by white people. The setting of this play is a subway train, and in this space, the two central characters, Clay and Lula, experience their first meeting.

Dutchman examines the psychology of individuals behind the suppression of their real identities. According to Udah (2018), many black individuals think they are inferior to white people due to their different cultures and colours. These thoughts compel black people to accept white individuals as superior. In the play, Lula mocks and seduces Clay for the acceptance of standards related to white society. However, Clay does not want to suppress his black identity; hence, he does not accept Lula's advice. As a result, Clay is stabbed to death by Lula. Subway passengers are ordered to throw their bodies at clay after the incident. This act explicitly portrays white individuals' concealed rage and cruel minds over black people.

Anger and hatred for white American society are revealed in *Dutchman*. This play can be read in the light of critical race theory, which helps intellectuals think of causes that make black individuals feel oppressed by white Americans. From the perspective of Hardeman et al. (2022), racism theory plays an indispensable role in providing a realistic picture of white racism. Racial discrimination causes mental disorders, stress, and depression in black individuals. They are persistently deprived of the mainstream society that white individuals significantly dominate. Lula portrays the mindset of white people in the field of eradicating black individuals from society.

Racial barbarity was one unrestrained in America; Lula symbolises white America, whereas Baraka has sketched black America through the character of the clay. This individual is strict about not losing his real identity, and consequently, Clay has to accept death for his non-acceptance of the standards designed by white society. The way Lula demolishes clay exemplifies the endeavours of white men to destroy the cultural recognition of black individuals. As per Albulanee's (2021) opinion, Baraka portrays in his writing that dissimilar skin colours and different cultures can create racial violence in society. Clay’s ingenious responses to Lula mirror his slave mentality. Dutchman examines black-white tension existing in American society, while racial prejudice is still a significant illness in society.

The discomfort and uneasiness of black people intensified the level of segregation among white and black individuals. If black individuals protest against the oppression forcefully put over them by white people, white supremacists do not have adequate chances to repress black people. According to white (2021), Black Nationalism is affirmed by common insecurities and racial repression among black people. Violence is considered the national consequence of racial alienation, hatred, and suppression. The play's conversation between Clay and Lula mirrors the relationship between white and black Americans. This relationship can be compared to the bond between a master and a slave.

Black Americans suffer from an inferiority complex that highlights their identity as “others” in American society. From the perspective of Goldberg et al. (2022), individuals included in the “other” group think that their different races and cultures make them inferior to white people. This thought compels black individuals to feel psychologically oppressed in white society. An unknown fear of being different moulds the external feelings of back individuals. Lula tries to manipulate clay by staring at his body. Many white individuals think that black people feel a sexual attraction toward whites. Lula’s character represents this wrong and filthy notion of white individuals. From the beginning of the play, clay is accused by Lula, who persistently endeavours to create guilty feelings in clay. Lula’s conniving seduction showcases the trials of white people in compensating black individuals for their guilt.

In the play, Lula continuously reminds clay about his origin of servitude and persistently tries to make clay feel suppressed. For instance, Lula says to clay, “Everything you say is wrong” (Salem, 2021, p. 4). This speech indicates that clay becomes incapable of satisfying Lula. Baraka wants to alert all black individuals that they should not obey wrong advice told by white individuals. Habib (2022) noted that white Americans are provided with a chance by black people in the field of oppression. Clay represents a moulded and framed quality of black identity. Lula constantly mocks clay for his real recognition, as Lula tells clay that the people accept you as a ghost of the future (Salem, 2021, p. 7). This line reflects how white individuals try to damage the actual identity of black people to prove their white supremacy.

Protests by clay create the main reason for his death. As per Knopf et al. (2021), in every field, black individuals have been doomed to death if they raise their voices against the barbarism created by white people. White Americans were used to thinking that black people were “niggers”. This thinking is reflected when Lula says to clay, “Cause you’re an escaped nigger” (Salem, 2021). This preconception makes white people thicken the line of racial discrimination. Despite being insulted multiple times, Lula is criticised by clay as a manifestation of the entire white American society. Unfortunately, clay is slaughtered by Lula at the end of the play, showing that oppressors sometimes murder oppressed others to retain their identity. Baraka’s notion about the culture of America is dominated by physical and neurotic violence.

The playwright has proved that a good relationship between black and white people is impossible in a racist society. The core factors of racism continuously create a barrier to the way individuals from different cultures are integrated. According to Zhu (2022), Baraka portrays black individuals who cannot be brought into the mainstream of American society in case these people do not protest against the cruelty of white individuals. The history of clay's slavery and the history of Lula regarding such suppression has created significant barriers in the union between these two characters. Human beings create racial prejudice, and the robust covering of this discrimination restricts black and white individuals from being in relationships with each other. Lula's murder of clay symbolises the attempt of white individuals to their attitudes toward supremacy.

Baraka is considered one of the major leaders of the Black Arts Movement. He closely observes the pain of black people and pens down the oppressed psychology of black individuals in his creations. As Amar (2021), Baraka desires to inspire African Americans to raise their voices for better positions. Baraka comprehends that racial prejudice will remain until black individuals fight for themselves. Baraka aims to motivate American blacks to fight for equal rights obtained by white individuals.

Racial groups are generally held based on specific languages, behavioural patterns, and biological ties. Harris (2018) remarked that European Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans are divided into the United States based on dissimilar races. In *Dutchman* Clay, the black American is continuously accused and insulted by Lula. This demonstrates how white Americans prefer to suppress black individuals without any reason. Baraka shows that if clay was a white American, a relationship between Lula and Clay could be developed. However, Lula's inner self is structured by the characteristics of an oppressor. Clay has to confront death at the end of the play, and this pathetic incident highlights the poor condition of black people in white American society.

Methodology

This section is based on the sources and methods used to gather information related to the topic. This study collected secondary data from journals, websites, and books on Baraka's *Dutchman*. In Yan et al. (2018), secondary data sources generally include journals, magazines, books, articles, and government records. The secondary data collection method aids the researcher in gathering information based on existing data. This topic is based on the creation of Baraka, who portrays the oppressed life of black individuals through his play. Some themes based on the topic are structured in this paper. Thematic analysis is followed in the study as secondary qualitative data has been collected. These themes are framed based on the racial discrimination outlined in the play.

The researcher has collected secondary qualitative data, as this collection type plays an essential role in saving both money and time for researchers. According to Labra et al. (2020), thematic analysis is necessary for helping an individual associated with the study explain information by structuring broader themes. Thematic interpretation aids researchers in addressing and utilise specific themes to get a clear idea about the topic. Secondary data saves both expenses and efforts, and unlike the primary data collection procedure, the present method of data gathering saves precious time for the researcher. Hence, secondary qualitative data is used to evaluate and depict specific themes framed by the topic.

Symbolism and Race in Baraka's Dutchman

Baraka, previously known as LeRoi Jones, was a black American novelist, essayist, dramatist, music critic, poet, and co-founder of the Black Arts Movement. The author made *Dutchman* express his sentiments about racism and discrimination. At that time, society was influenced by racism and in need of equality and freedom for black Americans. Racist Theory assists in working on ideas and attitudes to modify social relations. Habib (2022) opined that the struggle of black people in the area of racial society is a beneficial theory. Its usage in this play has been identified as mitigating oppression and coercive power on white people.

Apart from this novel, Baraka also examines racial tensions and violence in contemporary America in his various works. *Dutchman* began at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York in March 1964. As Udah (2018) described, this story highlights Baraka's inner sentiment about the hatred between some races. The entire story was written based on the cultural domination of white supremacy. In that contemporary period, white people were considered a burden, and according to them, black people were born to be dominated and tortured.

Similarly, Lula, white, is insulted in front of other train passengers just for offering apples. This incident shows that black people are good at heart. Thus, white people did not consider them a socially accepted group.

During the conversation between Clay and Lula, Lula continuously mocks clay and indicates his social standard in white society. Being repressed repeatedly for his black colour, clay slaps Lula in front of all the passengers who exited the train as the dam of his endurance breaks. As per Labra et al. (2020), the author tries to show that black people also deserve freedom, and they can protest against the contemporary social structure if they are hurt. In a myth-like story, the words "myth" and "underground" depict the elements that portray racial discrimination in white society. The mythic quality has been identified with the statement: *"*In the flying underbelly of the city steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground the subway heaped in modern myth*"* (Labra et al., 2020, p. 3). In this play, Lula carries the culture of white people. Accompanied with the presentation of revolutionary novels against racism, he is an icon of revolt against the American white racist society.

It has been identified as another example of a racial system where it has been clearly understood that black people exist to endure the dominance of white people. In the words of Yan (2018), the black people how helplessness is described perfectly within this scenario. When clay slaps Lula, she becomes angry with him and decides to throw him from the train; this highlights the constant rules of white society that black people are born to accept white people's torture and brutal behaviour. Baraka thus brilliantly describes the racial system's negative impacts on society within racism theory. Influenced by savage destruction, Lula destroys clay's cultural identity as a black individual, symbolising the protest against a white man.

The Theme of an Enslaved Person in Baraka's Dutchman

In *Dutchman*, racial violence is seen in two diffident incidents. First, Clay slaps Lula for mocking him in front of all the passengers on the train. Second, Lula throws clay from the running train to take revenge. Every scenario depicts a struggle against racism from the contemporary social structure. In addition, clay is shown to be worthy as an enslaved person, as he belongs to a black class society. Goldberg et al. (2022) noted that Lula defines the character of the emblematic temptress and destroyer, as she has played the role of the methodological character of Eve to make a downfall in clay's life. Within the statement, "You look like death eating a soda cracker", the playwright has tried to express the discrimination present in racial society. In this regard, the author has stated that:

> "And now, each night, I count the stars.
> And each night I get the same number.
> And when the stars won't come to be counted,
> I count the holes they leave." (Yan, 2018, p. 10)

Accompanied by this, Baraka's Dutchman's social condition and negative impact have been seen. Apart from this, Lula's language usage of clay and how she mocks him as he does not belong to her society indicates that she also supports the contemporary social system by accepting racial discrimination. This play depicts how black people were considered enslaved people, but they could not lose their self-esteem to survive.

Conclusion

American writer Amiri Baraka portrays how racial discrimination creates a strong wall between white and black individuals in his play *Dutchman*. The two central characters, Lula and Clay, are structured in a certain way that highlights the pathetic situation persistently faced by black people in the United States. At the end of this play, a white supremacist mindset forces Lula to kill clay. Lula endeavours to seduce clay from the start of *Dutchman*; this particular factor highlights the thoughts of white people about black Americans. Many white people at that time thought that black individuals felt an erotic attraction toward white individuals. However, clay proves this notion wrong when he refuses to follow the standards of white society.

Clay is continuously frightened by Lula since she desires to make clay believe that he is inferior. Clay does not want to follow Lula's advice as she mocks his behavioural patterns. Lula's trial for murdering clay can be considered the endeavour of white people to eliminate the cultural identity of black people from the country. In the United States, black people have struggled to benefit from having equal rights compared to white people. Baraka depicts that this deprivation causes extreme rage and pain in black people, and this pain should be turned into revolt. The playwright wants to send a message to all black people through his writings that it is the time for black Americans to raise their voices against the cruelty of white Americans. Black and "other" oppressed people should fight against the barbarism of white people to retain their cultural recognition.

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