FROM "NEGRO" TO "AFRICAN AMERICAN": THE EVOLUTION OF BLACKS' IDENTITY REFERENT IN AMERICA[1]

***Abstract**: Blacks in America have gone through a long process of identity quest often in a hostile environment. Throughout their American experience, they have been successively referred to as "Negro," "New Negro," "Blacks" and finally "African Americans." These different referents traced the change in their identity according to the reality they were faced with at specific periods. Indeed, such periods as the 1920s, the 1960s and the 1980s were important landmarks that characterized this change. Thus, the expression of cultural heritage, the feeling of racial pride, the expression of a double identity (African and American), were in turn developed as the passage from slavery to freedom and self-assertion or from rejection to recognition.*

***Keywords**: Negro,"negroization", black, African American, identity referent*.

Introduction

Since their first contact with America, Blacks have lived a very traumatic experience. From slavery up today, they have traveled a long journey, wearing different identities depending on how the American society regards them or how they view themselves. During the period of slavery, they were referred to as "Negroes." Then the 1920s witnessed a shift in this identity to "New Negro" or "Afro American." This period was essentially marked by a conscience awakening from the Blacks with regard to their cultural heritage. It was, in fact, a period of an ideological attempt to be reconnected with the ancestral land. As a continuum of this shift, the 1960s focused on a greater interest in "blackness," a feeling of racial pride. This was a stage where being Black was no longer lived as a handicap or a prejudice but as a pride (e.g. "I'm Black and I'm Proud" as James Brown would sing it). Since the 1980s, another expression of black identity erupted. It stemmed from the geopolitical context of claiming attachment to a particular place of the world. Thus as American minorities sought more and more to demonstrate this attachment (Chinese Americans, Hispanic Americans, Japanese Americans, Latin Americans), Americans of African descent thought it opportune to find a term that could better express their ties to Africa. The idiom "African American" therefore came out to define their double identity. It referred to both their "Africanity" and their "Americanity." By choosing to analyze the shift from "Negro" to "African American," this project intends to demonstrate the evolution of the Blacks' identity referent all along their American history, from pejorative to recognition. In this purpose, attention will be paid to a constructivist perception of identity, that is to say a dynamic, permanent process by which Blacks deconstructed the stereotypes leveled at them and constructed their identity through a confrontation with the norms of the dominant culture. This will help to articulate that their struggle during the periods understudy is all meant to enhance their image.

1. The "*negroization*" of the Black

Around 1442, while in search of a sea route to India, slave-trade Portuguese came across Sub-Saharan Africans. They first referred to them as "negroes," a Spanish word meaning black. Later, in the mid-1600s, with the development of slavery, the term became

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known in America. At first neutral in connotation, it gradually became more derogatory as slavery became a legal institution, narrowing the relationship between masters and slaves. It was finally capitalized as an identity resource to typify all people of Sub-Saharan African origin. But what I term "*negroization*" is not the geographical reference to the origin of these Blacks who were brought in the Americas against their will. I rather hint at the process by which, through their interaction with slaveholders, they were categorized and relegated to the rank of property. "*Negroization*" therefore circumscribes to the environment of segregation and ill-treatment in which Blacks were made to live and how they were thought of by Whites. It also articulates the master/slave paradigm that Hegel so skillfully developed. In fact, for Hegel, man's self-consciousness is always nurtured by a desire for recognition by the other. But when this ultimate goal is mired, then it gives way to a conflict that operates as a perilous struggle, a fight for death between two adversaries who want to force recognition from one another, without reciprocating. The adversary wanting recognition without reciprocating becomes the master. Conversely, the other who recognizes but is not recognized becomes the slave. In this dialectic, the master gains recognition and reduces the slave to an instrument of his will, a convenient means of fulfilling his needs. But paradoxically, both adversaries must live insofar as the death of one of them deprives the other of recognition. In these circumstances, the sole way out is that the one, the master, adopts the principle of "conquer or die" and risks his life till he is recognized. The other, the slave, submits for fear of death. He therefore decides to become a slave and live. The master's idea of himself and his self-worth are reflected back to him by recognition from the slave. He elevates himself and is elevated to human life and reveals as an autonomous, determining consciousness while the slave is reduced and reduces himself to animal life, becoming a dependent, determined consciousness (Bulhan, 1985, 102-104). This is what exactly happened during American slavery. Because the master wanted to assert his self-worth and attain self-consciousness as a human being, he needed the slave upon whom to exercise his oppression. And the slave, too, in order to get recognition and survive, had to behave in a docile way (even if there were some individual and collective examples of slave rebellions in the colonies as a resistance to bondage).

Through slavery, the Negroes were demeaned and assimilated to livestock. Their identity was constructed through racial segregation and an extreme otherness. Their status as slaves and as members of a racial minority developed simultaneously, since there was no tradition of slavery or of racial discrimination in the colonies to inform their initial status (Weinstein and Gatell, 1968, 313). The enormities inflicted upon them were that slaveholders permanently regarded them as property rather than as human beings. As a consequence, he treated them in a complete indifference. He saw them suffer privations and writhe under blows. All his life, he regarded them as domestic animals, heard them stormed at and saw them cuffed and caned. Thus, treating them as animals was for most slave holders a mere matter of course and made no impression of their mind. Slaves were often "tortured by iron collars, with long prongs or 'horns' and sometimes bells attached to them – they were made to wear chains, handcuffs, fetters, iron, clogs, bars, rings, and bands of iron upon their limbs, iron marks upon their face, iron gags in their mouths." (Curry and Cowden, 1972: 72-73) Of their horrible situation, George Buchanan, M.D., a member of the American Philosophical Society would say in a 1791 speech in Baltimore:

> Their situation (the slaves') is *insupportable*; misery inhabits their cabins, and pursues them in the field. Inhumanly beaten, they often fall sacrifices to the turbulent tempers of their masters! Who is there, unless insured to savage cruelties, that can hear of the inhuman punishments *daily inflicted* upon the unfortunate blacks, without feeling for them? Can a man

> calls himself a Christian, coolly and deliberately tie up, *thumbscrew, torture with pincers*, and beat unmercifully a poor slave, for perhaps a trifling neglect of duty? (Idem, 59-60)

With such barbarous inhumanity, slaves had no identity but what the masters wanted them to wear. Slavery, in fact, was organized as an institution in all the colonies, with laws giving slaveholders the right to exercise their proprietorship on the slaves. As Curry and Cowden observe:

> The laws of the slave states make them property, equally with goats and swine; they are levied upon for debt in the same way; they are included in the same advertisements of public sales with cattle, swine, and asses; when moved from one part of the country to another, they are herded in droves like cattle, and like them urged on by drivers; their labor is compelled in the same way. They are bought and sold, and separated like cattle: when exposed for sale, their good qualities are described as jockies show off the good points of their horses; their strength, activity, skill, power of endurance &c. are lauded, - and those who bid upon them examine their persons, just as purchasers inspect horses and oxen; they open their mouths to see if their teeth are sound; strip their backs to see if they are badly scarred, and handle their limbs and muscles to see if they are firmly knit. Like horses, they are warranted to be "sound," or to be returned to the owner if 'unsound.' A father gives his son a horse and *a slave*; by his will he distributes among them his race-horses, hounds, game-cocks, and *slaves*. (101)

This quotation clearly shows the animalization of the slaves. According to the legal codes of the South, a slave could not acquire any property by purchase, gift, or devise. He might not make a will and could not, by will, inherit anything. He could not hire himself out, locate his own employment, establish his own residence, or pass contracts for any purpose, including marriage. He could neither possess nor acquire anything but what should belong to his master. He could engage in financial transactions only on behalf of his mater. During a court suit for freedom, he could not be a party but could be represented by a free person. He might only be witness in cases involving slaves or free Negroes. In case a testimony of a slave was allowed, he was not put under oath as a responsible person. Furthermore, teaching him to read and to write was prohibited and instruction in religion was also subject to legal restrictions (Weinstein and Gatell, 1968: 316).

The slave codes of the South fostered the domination of the master in matters of policy and discipline. On the plantations or in the master's home, the slave was bound to respect them. His relation with his master was based on a complete subordination, in a permanent fear of the latter. As Kenneth M. Stamp reports, the slave "must be made to work, and should always be given to understand that if he fails to perform his duty he will be punished for it." (Idem, 52) This master/slave relationship was also a double-faced one: a paternalist manorial one and an exploitative commercial one. Under its paternalist aspect, the mater could beat him in case of misconduct, as a father can beat his child for misbehavior or a misdeed. Sometimes, slaveholders treated their slaves worse than they did their brutes. However, they were not held responsible for the death of the latter following a correction; they just had to recover damages for an assault or homicide against them. The second face of the relation between the master and the slave, the most important one, which is also contained in the observation of Curry and Cowden to which I referred above, was economic. Though slaves could be sold as goods, they also constituted economic manpower for their owner by working on his plantation. Even if antislavery supporters postulated that the peculiar institution was detrimental to the economy of the South, slaves were really sources of revenue for their masters. For proslavery people, it was "an economic good because it transformed ignorant and inferior African savages into productive workers." (Idem, 264)

In such colony as Georgia, the cost of a slave varied according his/her origin, age, sex, skill, and health. In early 1750s, for example, a newly imported male salve was sold between £28 and £32 while a woman salve cost £3 cheaper. Slaves born in the colony or acclimatized were more expensive. As an instance, a country-born slave or seasoned one cost between £28 and £36, a female one of the similar origins intended for field work cost between £26 and £33, and £57 if she was to be used as a domestic hand. Children less than eight years old were usually sold with their mothers. But those between eight and fifteen were respectively sold between £10 and £25 for a newly imported boy and £14 to £35 for a country-born male. As far as girls were concerned, regardless of their origins, they were sold between £10 and £21 (Wood, 1984: 96). These different figures demonstrate the economic value of slaves as they permitted slaveholders to make profit through their sale. While passing from hand to hand through economic transactions, slaves wore the identity of goods that the owner could use as he pleased.

On the other hand, slaveholders incurred profit from slaves' labor. Indeed, though they were sometimes thought to be "careless and slovenly worker[s] who needed constant supervision and could be trusted with only the most primitive of tools," (Weinstein and Gatell, 343) their owner profited from their labor. As field hands, they were used in the plantations of cotton, sugar, hemp, tobacco that the master sole to earn money. A colony such as Virginia owed its important economic position during the 18th century to the production of tobacco that needed huge numbers of manpower. Thus, by 1700, there were 6,000 slaves in the colony and eight years later, 6,000 more were brought (3,000 of whom arrived between 1705 and 1708). That rapid increase of slaves not only aimed to meet the need of manpower but mainly to help maintain the colony's leading economic role; hence, the economic power of planters. It is therefore understandable that planters' focus upon the establishment of the institution of Negro slavery was primarily for economic reasons. They did not want to lose their personal economic privilege and that of their colony as the first colony in the production of this raw material nationwide. In Georgia, the contribution of salves in the economic income of planters was so important that some of them could arrange credit with interest rate sometimes hovering around 8 percent. For most masters, a slave could plant up to ten acres of corn, peas, and potatoes and around three acres of rice a year. Also, if slaves were conveniently managed, the proprietor of a hundred-acre plantation manned by eleven slaves could expect an internal rate of return of between 37 and 43 percent while a two hundred-acre plantation employing forty slaves could yield 25% per annum on invested capital. This economic profitability urged Georgian planters to turn to slave-manned rice plantations even if they had to go into debt in order to secure slaves (Wood, 97-98). As it can be noted, whatever they might be thought of and even if they did not make the master earn as much as he expected, slaves were outstandingly money making: they provided economic wealth through their sale and also by their labor.

The peculiar institution, introduced a system of caste into the status of Negro. As a slave, he occupied both a slave status and a caste one. He was subject to disabilities and legally categorized as a property. Furthermore, these disabilities continued to define his status as a freed person. As it can be noticed, caste law as well as slave law governed the status of the slave. In such circumstances, he lost all his personality as in any change that psychoanalysis interprets as productive of nothing apart from leaving "only destruction, shock, and howling bedlam behind it unless some future basis of stability and order lies waiting to guarantee it and give it reality." (Idem, 236-37) As a system of exploitation, slavery brought a new change in the habits of slaves. In their native African countries, they were not used to living and working in such harsh and horrifying conditions they

experienced in America. And since this capitalistic system was institutionalized, nothing could defend and guarantee their human condition. As a matter of fact, they lost their personality.

The male father, for instance, had no authority over his child since discipline, parental responsibility, control of rewards and punishments rested upon the master's hands. He could not protect his wife. Also, he was defined by property and as such, the master had absolute power over him and he, in turn, was linked to the latter by a total dependency. Slaves might never be as human beings as the master was. One of the greatest losses of his personality was when, regardless of his age, the Negro was always made to be a child. He was a "dependent upon the white race; dependent for guidance and direction even to the procurement of his most indispensable necessaries […] Not only was he a child; he was a happy child. Few Southern writers failed to describe with obvious fondness the bubbling gaiety of a plantation holiday or the perpetual good humor that seemed to mark the Negro character, the good humor of an everlasting childhood." (Idem, 246) However, despite the adversity, the hostility and humiliation, the Negro was always inspired by a longing for freedom, a desire to depend upon himself. All the way through his bondage, he resisted but he was constantly repressed till the legal end of slavery when he was given the opportunity to be his self-responsible. Since that independence, he started to look for ways to reconnect with his ancestry. This search reached its first climax during the 1920s with the celebration of his cultural heritage.

2. The "New Negro" era or the Negro vogue

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1861 that in theory freed slaves sat the room for Blacks to settle everywhere on the national territory as independent people. They therefore massively left the South for Northern industrial cities, hoping to find better living conditions and leaving behind them the memories of slavery. But because their agrarian background did not fit these highly competitive environments, they generally ended up in the ghettoes of large cities as New York or Chicago. Harlem, New York, then welcomed huge numbers of them. Face to the new hardship, they would progressively develop a group consciousness centered on an ideology of racial elevation and self-respect that reached its pick during 1920s with the advent of the "New Negro" also called "Negro Renaissance" or "Harlem Renaissance." For the first time in their life as free people, or put differently, in their American experience, Blacks could think and act by themselves and for themselves. It is this freedom of action and of thought, this total independence that I intend to develop here.

Although it gained its nobility during the 1920s, the term "New Negro" and the ideas associated with it did not originate in that period. They seem to date back to June 28, 1895, when in its editorial, the Cleveland *Gazette* talked about a new class of Blacks with education, class, and money that had arisen since the Civil War. Since that concept originated by the end of the century, there were conflicting interpretations about what it really meant. For some people, the essence of the New Negro was his commitment to the idea of self-help. For others, he was ready to protest against discrimination or any infringement of his civil rights (Wintz, 1988: 30-31). But it is not my intention to lay stress on that debate of terminology that characterizes any new movement, though it seems vital. Such attitude would divert my approach and consequently, the objective of my argument. As I seek to demonstrate that the identity referent of the Blacks in America was a dynamic, an evolving one going from denial to recognition, it is important to underscore the positive

aspects of that period. In this perspective, the term "New Negro" can be understood as the culmination of a general social and intellectual development that was booming among black masses in the years following Reconstruction, and as a synthesis of a number of divergent strains that had dominated black thought before World War I. It was also meant to correct the ideology according to which Blacks had no culture valuable enough to be considered or paid attention to, an ideology that greatly developed during slavery period and served as one of the motifs for belittling them. The advent of the New Negro thus marked a new phase in Blacks' resistance. It was no longer the physical resistance to bondage on the plantations whose issues had been disastrous for them, but a peaceful and more efficient one that had to be carried out through ideas and intellectual debates to impose their vision of their world, their self-image to the whole America. The migration that had driven them from the South to the North, the Midwest and the East, had made them urban and industrial men. And because it forced them from the simple to the complex life, from homogeneity to pluralism, they had to see themselves in broad and sophisticated terms and adjust their new life to the urban realities. This could not be possible without a group consciousness, without turning the page onto the stereotypes of "aunties," "uncles," "mammies," "Uncle Toms," or "Samboes" that characterized their race and embodied by the generation before them.

In his attitude, the New Negro should differ from his former brother by developing an ideological aggressiveness centered on his cultural heritage. He should counter attack white dominant culture by forcing recognition and admiration of his own culture to emulate America. As Countee Cullen advocates, "Negroes should be concerned with making good impressions… Every phase of Negro life should not be the white man's concern. The parlor should be large enough for his entertainment and instruction." (Hutchínson, 1995, 189) This request was all the more accurate as in their relation, the White man had always viewed the Black man as a second-hand citizen and was not ready to change his mind. It therefore belonged to the Black to fight to correct this image. Cary D. Wintz (1988) sees this ideological struggle, this new racial and cultural attitude that throve among Blacks during the 1920s as the expression of an Africanism:

> This new belief that their African heritage should be a source of pride and the basis of a racial solidarity that linked all colored people was another ingredient in the emerging black consciousness that would be known as the New Negro. Unlike an earlier generation that had addressed the decline and corruption of African culture, and in doing so apologized for their African roots, the New Negro embraced Africanism. (45)

Politically, economically as well as literary, Blacks were embarked in a feeling of racial pride and acknowledgment. If this ideological focus on Africa started earlier with thinkers as Booker T. Washington, William DuBois and others, Alain Locke was undoubtedly one of its most prominent artisans and ideologues during the 1920s.

Indeed, for Locke, the common condition of slave and the common problem of segregation had defined Blacks as a race. This was a reality they were imposed. But to make a race by themselves, they had to build a racial consciousness and a life together. They had to free themselves from the dependency of patronizing and philanthropist white America. As Nathan Irvin Huggins stipulates, "the New Negro's race consciousness and racial cooperation were clear indications that his time had come to be a race, to be free and self-assertive." (1971: 59) His task was to discover and define his culture and also to contribute to white civilization. He must be a collaborator and a participant in American civilization rather than a passive consumer of it. In so doing, he could pull his talents from confinement and disregard to recognition and creative expression. It was therefore through a cultural awakening that the Negro had to express himself and construct his new identity.

Through this enterprise, he had to respond to the thought that the speech of his ancestors was not proper English, that the tales he had heard about them were not of culture, and that their gospel songs and blues were not good rhythms (Ibid, 63). Like in public relations, the New Negro had to be promoted, to be "sold." But unlike commercial items whose value is promoted by the seller, he had to be convinced of his worth as he was both the item and the seller. However, as a social construction, this new identity to be built through race consciousness and racial cooperation needed a territory to be effective. Harlem then offered such a place. Thus, in the mid-1920s, it "contained a thriving colony of black writers and artists who worked, partied, and played in association with each other. They reflected attitudes similar to other writers of the twenties, but they also possessed characteristics unique to the black experience and to the fact that their bohemia was located in the heart of the black metropolis." (Wintz, 88)

Harlem, in fact, offered its Blacks a variety of opportunities for entertainment and amusement. It quickly became a place where black artists and writers as Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston and later Countee Cullen, George Schuyler, Arna Bontemps, Jessie Fausset, and Nella Larsen made a reputation for black culture. Progressively but surely, work songs, gospels, and hollers were transformed into blues, ragtime, and jazz. Places as Van Vechten mansion, A'Lelia Walker's hair straightening salon or the Sugar Cane Club, one of the most popular Harlem cabarets at 135th Street and Fifth Avenue, welcomed parties where black poets and black bankers mingled freely with black and white celebrities, business people and commercial bankers. Novelist Jessie Fauset's parties, for instance, were attended by editors, students, social workers who entertained themselves by discussing literature, reading poetry and conversing in French. Walter White, a writer and officer with the NAACP living in Harlem's tallest and most exclusive apartment extended dinner invitations to those who craved for literature while at Aaron Douglas's parties in the same building, guests collected fund to buy refreshment for attendants (92). These parties and speakeasies provided the most attractive features to Harlem and served as a melting pot for all classes of New Yorkers. Blacks of all types gathered in these areas to debate politics, religion, sex, and race problem. Black writers entertained their white friends and their sponsors. Young black writers submerged themselves in primitive black culture that flourished in the ghetto's speakeasies, gin-houses and jazz-rooms. Harlem became then the place of convergence of prostitutes, washwomen, poets, and intellectuals sharing the blues and swaying to the rhythm of jazz musicians. These gathering also brought black writers into contact with such black intellectuals as James Weldon Johnson and W. E. B. DuBois and White liberals as Alfred Knopf, Clarence Darrow, and Carl Van Vechten (93). On the whole, Harlem gathered all sorts of people regardless of their social class, their age and their race. Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson called the beginning of that era "when the Negro was in vogue." (94) Also, the fact that Negro folk materials were important in art went beyond music. James Weldon Johnson demonstrated this in his collection of poems *God's Trombones* (1927) as he infused his poems with the rhetoric, idiom and the images of the Negro preacher and used them as poetic materials (Huggins, 77).

The enthusiasm for black culture that took hold of Harlem, making it a black Mecca also attracted white people. Skeptical and reluctant toward this culture at the beginning, they suddenly started to visit Harlem to share its exoticism that black singers, dancers, and actors offered through their artistry. They invaded night-clubs and concert halls to hear Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, Bessie Smith, Ethyl Waters and Louis Armstrong. Black music, namely the blues and jazz, boomed in New York, America and exported to Western

Europe. In the same vein, though many Blacks rejected it, Carl Van Vachten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) that celebrated black culture, greatly contributed to change white audience's conception about what they formerly refused to acknowledge as a true culture. They became fascinated by anything related to Blacks and their art. Black writers and poets became therefore subject of interest for publishers. Exhibitions of African art were organized in museums and galleries with huge crowds of attendants, Amos *'n' Andy* became a hit radio show, and Harlem became no more a black slum but a place of sensual, exotic, and primitive thrill (Wintz, 94-95). As such, we can say that Blacks' celebration of their culture helped reconcile Americans with themselves, at least, for a while because social reality demonstrated that the racial gap between Blacks and Whites was still very large. Nevertheless, their ambition to create a black identity and impose it to the whole America was a success. They had pulled their culture from darkness to visibility, from ignorance to recognition, from denial to acceptance. Referred to as "Negroes," pagans, with no culture during slavery, they were now acclaimed, almost sanctified in the 1920s through the term "New Negroes," their new identity. But because racism and segregation continued adamantly during the following decades, they realized that they still had a long way to travel.

3. The 1960s and the "Black is Beautiful" ideology

After the effervescence of the 1920s that helped Blacks pull their culture out of darkness, they entered a new period of hostility during the following decades. This was marked by great racial tensions, especially, their demand for more civil rights through the Civil Rights Movements. They wanted to be affranchised from the tutorship they had been living ever since. And their role in enhancing America's image at the international level, namely during the two World Wars and that of Vietnam, was sufficient motif for them to claim true American citizenship. Indeed, they fought side by side with the White man. They saw him die, weep and fear danger. As such, they noticed that he was not such a superhuman as slavery posited him, nor was he a blessed and a chosen race as he thought of himself through his racist attitudes. They therefore wanted the same civil rights as him.

Many political movements were engaged in the battle for Blacks' rights. But that my intention is to demonstrate the progressive improvement of Blacks' identity, which political activism or overt conflict could hardly or even not guarantee, justifies my laying emphasis on the Black Arts movement (BAM) as this movement was the only one to advance social engagement as its aesthetic. Truly, most of the movements of the 1960s were generally concerned by the struggle to acquire civil rights for Blacks rather than by racial identity that had been ideologized during the 1920s. But the specificity of the Black Arts Movement is that its ideology revolved around the beautification of blackness. Yet, though it spanned the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, this ideology dated back to the Harlem renaissance period. Historically, New York City is referred to as the birthplace of this Movement due to the national reputation of such leading figures as Amiri Baraka or Larry Neal in Harlem and mainly Baraka's coinage of the term that designated it. Furthermore, for a long period, Harlem was considered as the center of Black American intellectual, artistic, and political life (Smethurst, 2005: 100).

Theoretically and practically, the activity of the Black Arts Movement focused on the development of Black theater groups, poetry performances and journals. Black theaters served as the focus of poetry, dance, and music performances in addition to formal and ritual drama. They were also places for community meetings, lectures, study groups, and

film screenings. The Drama Review, edited by Ed Bullins, became a Black Arts textbook that featured essays and plays by most of the major movers: Larry Neal, LeRoi Jones, Ishmael Reed, Sonia Sanchez, Askia Touré, Marvin X, Ron Milner, Woodie King, Jr., Bill Gunn, Ed Bullins, Adam David Miller, etc. (Ibid., 100).

As a beautification of blackness, the BAM's ideology operated as an aesthetic to be developed through insistence on "Natural Black Beauty." If in the 1920s, many Blacks were not so convinced as to proclaim the beauty of their race in a hostile environment, in the 1960s, on the contrary, they really started to do it. Thus, to the skepticism and the deception of artists such as Louis Armstrong in his "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue?" (1929), others, like James Brown, brought consolation and comforted them as they joined their voices to the praising of their racial identity. To them, blackness should be cried out everywhere. His "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968) well illustrated this ideal:

> Now we demand a chance to do things for ourself
> We're tired of beatin' our head against the wall
> And workin' for someone else
> We're people
> We're just like the birds and the bees
> We'd rather die on our feet
> Than be livin' on our knees
> Say it loud
> I'm black and I'm proud

Here, James Brown claims authorship and dignity for Blacks, a need to enfranchise themselves from the tutorship and the dependency of white dominant culture. The metaphor of birds and bees that should die on the feet rather than on the knees highlights this aspiration. For him, Blacks were responsible enough to act and think on their own behalf. On the other hand, the song is an invitation to Blacks for engagement in the struggle for the recognition of their blackness: "Say it loud." They must neither be afraid nor ashamed to proclaim it everywhere. Being Black then should no longer be lived as a stereotype, as a racial handicap, but as a pride.

It is this determination to proclaim their blackness that gave birth to the "Black is Beautiful" slogan that poet Joe Goncalves artistically postulated in the following terms:

> As for our natural beauty: Our lips complement our noses, our noses 'go with' our eyes and they all bless our skin, which is black. If your face does not complement itself, you are in a degree of trouble…. The real geometry of our faces, the natural geometry in terms of art is found, among other places, in African sculpture. Our natural architecture, our natural rhythm. (in Collins and Crawford, 2006: 154)

The morphology of the Black, the flatness of his nose, that were thought to contradict the dominant beauty standards became conversely, artistic combinations, real sources of beauty. For the poet, it seems, any Black who did not have such a physical appearance was not a purebred.

The idea of natural black beauty therefore turned out to be pivotal in the body politics of the Black Arts Movement. Being Black thus meant looking "natural" and "African," that is, bearing signs that authentically revealed one's African roots. The "Black is Beautiful" ideology of the Black Arts Movement, in fact, consisted in inscribing "Africa" on African American bodies. Clothing and hairstyles that were deemed African were then taken for identity sign posts by which Blacks celebrated this natural beauty. As a matter of fact, the hairstyle known as "Afro" was propelled as the natural hairstyle while dark-skinned blackness was regarded as the epitome of natural beauty. All the same, protruding

muscles or overflowing buttocks that could be viewed as ugliness passed for signs of beauty. A complete perception of beauty labels was conceptualized and promoted in opposition to thinness that the dominant culture posited as characteristic of elegance and sensuality. In sum, new beauty criteria were articulated and redefined, transformed and remodeled in black imagination as racial archetypes that only Blacks could have. This new vision was profusely exhibited through painting and photography of the epoch. It was in some way a total divergence in the celebration of what it meant to be beautiful insofar as Blacks and Whites had contradicting ideology about beauty standards. In such circumstances, racial mixture that should normally give birth to cultural hybridity in a context of melting pot was supplanted by a sort of transplantation of Africa in America. It is no wonder then why the ideology of the Black Arts Movement was greatly supported by extremist movements as The Nation of Islam and The Revolutionary Art Movement (RAM) that advocated separatism by the creation of a Black nation in America or an armed self-defense against any kind of racism Blacks were victim of.

One interesting thing that made the specificity of the Black Beauty ideology was its public performance through arts as poetry, drama, dance, and music. For, it "was relatively easy to stage a short play, a poetry reading, or a musical performance on a street corner, in a community center, at a rally or a convention, or in a public housing project courtyard and get an immediate response from a wide range of people." (Smethurst, 2005: 90) This was a means for creating interplay between Black Arts performance and collective audience that novels could not do in the broader social context of Blacks' struggle for their rights. Also, there was the sense that African cultures were essentially oral and musical whereas Western ones were literate. Thus, as Blacks sought to demonstrate their black identity through being natural and African, then leaning on oral art was all objectively understandable. While the novel stood for the Western approach of literature, oral-based poetry, music, and dram epitomized the African and non-Western.

Basically, the Black Arts revealed as a unified movement at its beginning as intellectuals such as Donald Freeman, Larry Neal, Ernest Allen, Jr., Muhammad Ahmad, Sonia Sanchez and Askia Touré traveled to help create networks of cultural and political activists. They helped organize traveling performance troupes to emulate Blacks and make them stay in touch. However, it was such journals as *Liberator*, *The crusader*, *Freedomways*, *Negro Digest*, *Black Dialogue*, *Soulbook*, *Black America*, and *JBP* that built the national community in which ideology and aesthetics were debated and most approaches to Blacks' artistic style and subject displayed (Ibid., 92). When the canals that helped Black Arts exploded as it began to reveal as a movement, new black publishers such as Broadside Press, Third World Press, Journal of Black Poetry Press, and Jihad Productions were submerged by letters requesting printed materials since these texts largely tied communities outside the large Black Arts centers to the movement. By the same token, reports, letters, news briefs, and announcements for scores of cities all the countrywide issued from similar sense of print (Ibid., 93).

The importance of poetry as Black Arts genre was not simply due to the fact that it was more dramatically performed than prose, particularly the novel. Rather, the brevity of the lyric poem met the space and economic requirements of journal and small press publishing far better than the novel. This was a sufficient reason for Black authors to develop a great interest for poetry since they were more likely to have their works published than if they produced fictional works. On the whole, Black artists played a key role in the development of American poetry of the 1960s.

In sum, it should be noted that the 1960s was a very important period in Blacks' search for the recognition of their identity. For a matter of strategy, ideology and efficiency, the battle for this objective left the tumultuous field of political mass protest of the 1940s and 1950s that led to many arrests, lynching, and assassinations for that of the speech and of intellectual debates as Blacks became more educated. Through the intellectual debate, they built for their race a power they had never have before. Also, through this, they celebrated their race as a beauty and not as a burden to be ashamed of. If the Black Arts Movement inherited a predilection to stress on the materiality of black voice, it also emphasized on the importance of the visual text as a means for conveying this materiality. This visual impact was heightened by the juxtaposition of nonverbal images with written texts in such books as Black Arts and Black Power journals, pamphlets and broadsides produced by Black Arts press. However, the desire for a land connection that erupted since the 1970s and 1980s among American minorities as an expression of identity led Blacks to look for another term to designate their race.

4. The "African American" coinage or the land base

In its editorial of December 21, 1988, The New York Times published Rev. Jesse Jackson's call for the use of the term "African-American" to designate Americans of African descent: "To be called African-Americans has cultural integrity… It puts us in our proper historical context. Every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some land base, some historical cultural base. African-Americans have hit that level of cultural maturity." He added: "There are Armenian-Americans and Jewish-Americans and Arab-Americans and Italian-Americans. And with a degree of accepted and reasonable pride, they connect their heritage to their mother country and where they are now." This highlights the double attachment of these Americans to America and to the land of their ancestors. But it is worth mentioning that the idea of claiming both African and American ties, their "Africanity" and their "Americanity" did not originate from Jackson's time.

Indeed, the term African American was first used officially when the Emancipation Proclamation was legally enacted. In support of this law, President Lincoln made some Africans who had newly arrived in the United States U.S Citizens and called them African Americans. They were offered residence or the possibility to go back to Africa or to settle anywhere they felt like on the American territory. As the latter were removed from their mother land for many years, they rejected the term African American. Thus, the official reference to them as citizens (half, 1/4 citizens) became Negro. African American came back into use after the country, in an effort to repair the image Blacks had suffered, instructed Black leaders to use the term African American. So they began misapplying it to Blacks born in America. The media, as part of the forces that influenced Black leaders to promote the term, began using it to re-enforce its use and acceptance. (http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Where_did_the_term_African-American_originate).

Another relevant indication that the use of the term African American did not originate from Jesse Jackson's call is William DuBois' concept of "double consciousness" in his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). For him,

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an

> American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (2-3)

From this, and as DuBois formulated it, the "double consciousness" was that psychological capability of the African Americans to view themselves, individually and as a group, through the eyes of American society, that is through the perception of the dominant culture. This produced within them "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" that always conflicted as the American view has despised and dehumanized them. Their struggle thus was to be both "Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face." The great dilemma they were confronted to was how they could merge into society as both Americans and as Africans, without being held back or looked down upon. As it can be noted, the claim to be recognized as Africans and Americans, the idea of the "land base" was already burgeoning within Black Americans many decades earlier.

However, it is since Jackson's declaration that the term African American has crept steadily into America's vocabulary. For example, in her special to The New York Times of January 31, 1989 entitled "'African-American' Favored By Many of America's Blacks," Isabel Wilkerson largely underlines the fact that the term African American has been used for many years in intellectual milieus meeting with rousing approval as well as skepticism. Thus, for many Blacks, its use was a sign that they are accepting their difficult past and resolving a long ambivalence toward Africa.

In her investigation, she discovered that the term was already used in grade-school textbooks, adopted by several black-run radio stations and newspapers around the country and appeared in the titles of popular books and in the conversations of many Blacks as they warm to the idea and speak of visiting Africa one day. For many, the issue is already settled, not only in their minds but in their hearts. As Roger Wikins, a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies said: "Whenever I go to Africa, I feel like a person with a legitimate place to stand on this earth. This is the name for all the feelings I've had all these years." By this assertion, the American scholar also proclaims his ties with the African continent; hence he ascertains the duality of his identity.

Also, the article reveals that the term was unanimously used by many scholars and academies. This was meant to shift the definition of the group from the racial referent black to a cultural and ethnic identity that units the group to its ancestral land and fosters dignity and self-esteem. Because now, there does not seem to be the distaste toward "black" that many felt toward "Negro" or "colored." Instead, there is a feeling that "African-American" can sometimes convey a significance that "black" cannot.

In addition, several schools districts, Wilkerson notices, have adopted the term in their curriculums and encourage teachers to use it as Dr. Alice Jurica, director of social studies for the Chicago public schools asserts: "We just feel it's a more accurate term." Two of the largest black-oriented radio stations in New York City, WWRL and WLIB, have been using the term and more listeners who call refer to themselves as African-Americans. Several black newspapers, like The Amsterdam News in New York and The

Chicago Daily Defender, are now changing their usage rules to accommodate the new term, to the delight of black editors like J. Lowell Ware of The Atlanta Voice, who replaced "black" with "African-American."

In fact, the question of a name has caused pain and controversy since the first Africans were brought in the Americas in the 17th century as slaves. They called themselves Africans at first, but their masters gave them English names and called them Negroes, a term that some Blacks found degrading when Whites mispronounced it, accidentally or intentionally.

For the African American registry, the term African American has had several incarnations in previous years, with "Afro-American" gaining popularity since the end of the 19th century and particularly in the 1960s. But supporters of the current movement find fault with that usage. Today, it still arouses controversies among Blacks although it is greatly of usage. Barack Obama for instance, thinks that such arguments do not reflect the views of Black Americans who have united over the years with Africans and people from the Caribbean to fight colonialism and poverty. For him, Black descendants of slaves share more similarities than differences with black immigrants and their children. He sustains that some patterns of struggle and degradation that Blacks in the United States experienced are not different from the colonial experience in the Caribbean or the African continent. As such, the term African American should also be spread to those people who had the same experience. People like him who trace half of their heritage directly to Africa because they have an African parent and the other American, should also be considered as African American. Considering this idea of Obama, it appears that the term African American, from a post-colonial perspective, is more and more taking a diasporic content.

Polls show the number of Blacks using the term has steadily increased. In a survey conducted by ABC and The Washington Post in 2000, 66 percent said they preferred the term Black, 22 preferred African American, 10 percent liked both terms and 2 percent had no opinion. In 2000, the Census Bureau for the first time allowed respondents to check a box that carried the heading African American next to the term Black. In 2003, another poll by the same news organizations found that 48 percent of Blacks preferred the term African American, 35 percent favored Black and 17 percent liked both terms. The term has become such a fixture in the political dictionary that many white politicians, including President Bush and Senator John Kerry, his Democratic rival in 2004, favored it in their political speeches. This increase in the use of the term African American indicates that it is being rooted in the nation's vocabulary and the collective consciousness of Americans. It also asserts Blacks' double identity, their land base. (http://www.aaregistry.com/detail.php?id=2900)

Conclusion

Contrary to English names slave masters gave them through slavery, the change in the identity referent of Black Americans was done by themselves. Each period understudy in this paper was mirrored by a specific approach of self-identification that was in fact a group-identification to assert a collective identity. The group, as a whole, took up an ideology and made it its own and developed or consolidated it to such an extent that it forced admiration and recognition. In so doing, Blacks imposed their vision of themselves and how they wanted to be seen. Thus, from the stereotype of "Negro" at the time of slavery, their identity gradually moved to "New Negro" in the 1920s, "Blacks" during the 1960s and finally "African American" today. If Jesse Jackson was right and Blacks now

prefer to be called African Americans, it is not so much a sign of their maturity but of the nation's success. In part because of Jackson's electoral success, and today Barack Obama's election, Blacks may now feel comfortable enough in their standing as citizens to adopt the family surname: American. And their first name, African, conveys a pride in cultural heritage that all Americans cherish. With this success, Luther King's dream or, better, his prophecy has been accomplished. In fact, from slavery up today, from the cotton fields to the White House, Blacks have travelled a long journey. They have fought, resisted, dreamed and believed in themselves and in their destiny despite hostilities. Their identity has moved from neglect and demeaning to recognition and celebrity. The tears rolling down the cheeks of many Black viewers, including Jessie Jackson, during the oath ceremony of President Obama were then really those of joy and emotion. They testified to, or partly, Rev. King's conclusion at the end of his speech at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. on 28 August 1963: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank **God** Almighty, we are free at last!" Yes Blacks are at the end of their journey even though, as King said, many "valleys are still to be exalted, hills and mountains to be made low, rough places to be made plains and crooked places to be made straight." They have travelled a long journey. And to paraphrase Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into the Night*, we can say they have had a "long period's journey into history."

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