

**RESTORING HUMANITY TO THE SLAVE: IDENTITY, MASCULINITY AND
FAMILY IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND EDWARD P. JONES'S *THE
KNOWN WORLD***

FAMUREWA AYOBAMI OMOBOLANLE

ARP10/11/H/0937

B. A. (HONS.) Ife

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE COLLEGE,
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
MASTER OF ARTS (M. A.) DEGREE IN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY,
ILE-IFE, NIGERIA**

2014

AUTHORISATION TO COPY

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria,

Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library,

Postgraduate Thesis.

Author: FAMUREWA Ayobami Omobolanle

Title: Restoring Humanity to the Slave: Identity, Masculinity and Family in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*

Degree: M.A. (Literature in English)

Year: 2014

I, FAMUREWA Ayobami Omobolanle, hereby authorise the management of Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library to copy my thesis in whole or parts, in response to the requests of individual researchers and organisations for the purpose of private study or research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by FAMUREWA Ayobami Omobolanle in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, under my supervision.

Dr I. C. Anyadike

Supervisor

Date

Prof. O.A. Adekoya

Co Examiner

Date

Dr I. C. Anyadike

Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

To the Firstborn over all creation...

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to everyone who has made this study possible. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Chima Anyadike, for his faith in my ability to complete the work and for his patience, insightful suggestions and corrections.

I am grateful to my teachers Drs Oyeniyi Okunoye and Kayode Ogunfolabi who made their books and materials available and recommended other sources for me to consult. I would also like to appreciate the interest shown in my work by Prof. Olusegun Adekoya, Dr. Taiwo Soneye and Dr. Folashade Hunsu.

I appreciate the support and encouragement provided by Arthur Anyaduba, who never stopped encouraging me to complete the work on time.

I would like to say thank you to my wonderful sister, JolaaJesu for running innumerable errands.

I want to appreciate Oladapo for insisting that I could do this and for always asking 'How far with the Thesis?'

Finally, I want to appreciate my mother, Dr. Olusola Famurewa, without whose unrelenting faith, support, encouragement, and chastisement I would never have been able to complete this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
AUTHORISATION TO COPY	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
African American Literature and the Heritage of Slavery	1
CHAPTER TWO	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Literature Review	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Identity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Masculinity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Family	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER THREE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Dream and the Dreamer: Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Self Lost and Regained: Identity in Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Black Masculinity in <i>Beloved</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Family in <i>Beloved</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER FOUR	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Another Kind of Slavery in Edward P. Jones' <i>The Known World</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Black Identity in Edward P Jones' <i>The Known World</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Black Masculinity in <i>The Known World</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Black Family in <i>The Known World</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CHAPTER FIVE	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CONCLUSION	Error! Bookmark not defined.
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Abstract

The study examined ways in which actual historical accounts were reconstructed in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*. It discussed the distinctive ways in which the questions of masculinity, identity and family became important elements in the humanisation of slaves in the texts. The study carried out a comparative analysis of the treatment of masculinity, identity and family in both texts and situated the findings within the larger context of African American literary discourse on slavery. This was done with a view to exploring how Morrison and Jones used negative portrayals to assert the humanity of slaves.

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were used for the study. The primary source comprised Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*. These two texts were used due to their peculiar reconstructions of slavery. A close reading of the selected novels was carried out to identify their peculiar artistic and thematic concerns. The second source included books, journal articles and the Internet. Data were analysed using postmodern theory.

The results showed that in their exploration of the politics of representation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*, several literary critics devoted their attention to the positive portrayals of slaves to show how the two writers employed artistic strategies in the restoration of humanity to the slave. It found out that negative portrayals were often ignored or labelled as detrimental to the discourse of racial validation as it pertained to questions of identity, masculinity, and family. It further demonstrated that Morrison and Jones emphasise the humanity of slaves by making issues of identity, masculinity and family central to their

narratives. This was done by demonstrating both the positive and negative aspects of the slaves' character within the text.

The study concluded that Morrison's *Beloved* and Jones' *The Known World* demonstrated that the evolution of the slaves' identity and the process of individuation were closely tied to an attempt to reclaim, at the very least within the realms of imagination, their humanity even while they recognised the influence of social context on what was perceived to be human.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. I. C. Anyadike

Number of Pages: 121

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

African American Literature and the Heritage of Slavery

The notion that Black people are human beings is a relatively new discovery in the modern west.

—West, The Cornel West Reader.

Available historical records indicate that the first African slaves arrived in the English colonies that would later be known as the United States in the early 1600s. Initially, like many Caucasians in America, Africans worked as indentured servants. They could work for three to seven years and regain their freedom.¹ However, unlike their European counterparts, these Africans did not arrive in what was to become the United States of their own free will. They were human chattels in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Yet, early American records refer to Africans as servants not as slaves. In those days before America made the move from having people of African origin as indentured servants to establishing racial slavery, it was possible for Africans to have a relatively normal life once they completed their years of servitude. This was the case for Antonio:

One of the few recorded histories of an African in America that we can glean from early court records is that of "Antonio the negro," as he was named in the 1625 Virginia census. He was brought to the colony in 1621. At this time, English and Colonial law did not define racial slavery; the census calls him not a slave but a "servant." Later, Antonio changed his name to Anthony Johnson, married an African American servant named Mary, and they had four children. Mary and Anthony also became free, and he soon owned land and cattle and even indentured servants of his own. By 1650, Anthony was still one of only 400

¹Joanne Turner-Sadler, *African American History*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 30.

Africans in the colony among nearly 19,000 settlers. In Johnson's own county, at least 20 African men and women were free, and 13 owned their own homes.²

However, as time went on, the society became less tolerant of the idea that individuals who had arrived on American shores as slaves could go on to be free individuals. The British colonies of America initially justified slavery on the basis of religion, claiming that they enslaved only non-Christians. However, that criterion for determining those who deserved to be enslaved changed from religion to skin colour as colony after colony in North America recognized slavery as a legal institution. The Virginia General Assembly went on to declare in 1705 that all Negroes, mulattos and Native American slaves “shall be held to be real estate.”³ Eventually, slavery became the lot of every Black person who arrived in the United States on a slave ship or was born on American soil. In a significant sense, the county of Virginia led the way: “In 1662, Virginia decided all children born in the colony to a slave mother would be enslaved. Slavery was not only a life-long condition; now it could be passed, like skin colour, from generation to generation.”⁴

Even though slavery was legal, its legitimacy was always in question. Thomas Jefferson, who proclaimed in America's declaration of independence that “all men are created equal”, was himself a slaveholder. However, his writings indicate that he had a measure of conflict over the disparity between his espoused ideas and his actions. In a letter to Thomas Cooper he states that “...there is nothing I would not sacrifice to a practicable plan of abolishing every vestige of this moral and political depravity.”⁵ Yet, this system of slavery was fast becoming a key component

²*Africans in America*, “From Indentured Servitude to Racial Slavery.” PBS Online via <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1narr3.html> (accessed August 12, 2012).

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid*

⁵Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, Monticello, September 10, 1814, in *The Quotable Jefferson*, ed. John P. Kaminski (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006) 377-8.

of the American economic system with Jefferson himself benefitting financially from owning slaves. He, like a number of other early Americans continued to find ways to justify slavery. Most of such justifications were rooted in prejudice against people of African descent. For those who wanted to justify enslaving fellow human beings, it was necessary for them to claim or imply that the enslaved people were not necessarily human or were at the very least inferior in essential terms to those who enslaved them. One key area where Black people were maligned is in the area of mental capacity. Jefferson offers several levels of comparison between White and Black races. Although he qualifies his observations and admits there are limitations to his assertions, his claims are worth quoting because they touch on key points in the discourse that questioned the Black slave's humanity. He writes:

The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us....Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? [...]Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions,

which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. To this must be ascribed their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labour. An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course. Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous... I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and

For more information, please contact ir-help@oauife.edu.ng