

An Intersectional Feminist Study of the Selected Poems of Morgan Parker

Aram Omar Esmaeel¹, Zanyar Faiq Saeed²

¹Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Raparin, Sulaimani, Iraq.

²Department of English, College of Languages, University of Sulaimani, Sulaimani, Iraq.

Email: aram.omar@uor.edu.krd¹, zanyar.saeed@univsul.edu.iq²

Abstract:

African-American women have experienced discrimination and subjugation throughout history. African-American authors have utilized their creative works to emphasize the mistreatment of African-American women. Morgan Parker is an author who endeavors to demonstrate the cultural subjugation inflicted upon African-American females in her literary works. Oppression in its many forms, such as gender, race, and class, can be seen in various cultural contexts. A feminist perspective with consideration for the intersections of race, gender, and other forms of social discrimination is used to comprehend the subject of cultural subjugation portrayed in the chosen poems. The importance of this paper lies in the fact that readers may become more conscious of and empathetic toward the mistreatment of African-American women throughout history when they are made aware of the multiple forms of oppression they have experienced. This may cause readers to consider taking action to ensure African-American women have a better quality of life.

Keywords: Morgan Parker, Gender, Race, Class, Cultural Oppression, Intersectional Feminism

الملخص:

واجهت النساء الأميركيات من أصول إفريقية انتزلاً وإخضاعاً عبر التاريخ. استخدم المؤلفون الأميركيون من أصل أفريقي أعمالهم الإبداعية للتأكيد على سوء معاملة النساء الأميركيات من أصول إفريقية، منها مورغان باركر، فهي مؤلفة تسعى لإظهار الإخضاع الثقافي الذي يلحق بالإناث الإفريقيات - الأميركيات، في أعمالها الأدبية. إذ يمكن رؤية الاضطهاد في أشكاله العديدة ، مثل الجنس والعرق والطبقة ، في سياقات ثقافية مختلفة. في هذا البحث يتم استخدام منظور نسوي مع النظر في تقاطعات العرق والجنس وأشكال أخرى من التمييز الاجتماعي لفهم موضوع الإخضاع الثقافي الذي تم تصويره في القصائد المختارة لدى مورغان. وتكمّن أهمية هذه الدراسة في حقيقة أن القراء قد يصبحون أكثر وعيًا بالتعاطف مع سوء معاملة النساء الأميركيات من أصول إفريقية عبر التاريخ عندما يتم إدراكهم لأشكال متعددة من الاضطهاد التي عانوا منها وذاقوها. وقد يتسبب ذلك في القراء أن يفكروا في اتخاذ إجراءات لضمان تتمتع النساء إفريقية - الأميركيات بجودة حياة أفضل .

الكلمات المفتاحية: مورغان باركر ، الجنس ، العرق ، الطبقة ، الاضطهاد الثقافي ، النسوية المتقطعة.

پوخته:

به دریزایی میز و نافرمانی ئەفریقى-ئەمریکى تۇوشى ھەلاردن و ژىردىستەبىي بۇونەتھۇو. نۇسەرانى ئەفریقى-ئەمریکى كەلکىان لە كارە داهىنەر مەكانىان و مەركىتۇو بۇ جەختىرىنىھۇ لەسەر خراب مامەلەكىردن لەگەل نافرمانى ئەفریقى-ئەمریکى. مۇرگان پاركەر يەكىكە لە نۇسەرانەي كە ھەولەدەت لە بەرھەمە ئەدەبىيەكەنيدا ئەو ژىردىستەبىيە كۆلتۈرۈييە نىشان بىدات كە بەسەر ئافرمانى ئەفریقى-ئەمریکىيەكەندا ھاتوو لە چوڭچىۋە كۆلتۈرۈييە چىبازى مەكاندا چەمۇساندىنەو بە شىۋازى جۆر اوجۇرى و مەكۆچەمۇساندىنەو لەسەر بەنەماكانى جىئىندرەر مەگىز و چىنایەتى دەبىنرېت بەم توپىزىنەوەيە ھەولىكە بۇ تىگەمېشتن لە بابەتى ژىردىستەبىي كۆلتۈرۈ بە رەچاۋىكەنلىكىشى ھەر يەك لە جىئىندرەر مەگىز و فۇرمەكانى ترى جىاكارى روانگەمەكى فيمېنیستى يەمە كە لە شىعرە ھەلبىزىردىرا مەكانى مۇرگان پاركەردا رەنگى داۋەتھۇو. گەنگى ئەم توپىزىنەوەيە لەمەدەيە كە رەنگە خوینەران زىاتر ھۆشىار و ھاوسمۇزى بن لە مامەلەكىردن لەگەل ئافرمانى ئەفریقى-ئەمریکى كە بە دریزایي میز و لە فەرە سەتمانىيەن ئەزمۇون كەردوو. ئەمەش رەنگە بىتىتە ھۆرى ئەمە خوینەران بىر لە ھەنگۇنان بەكەنەو بۇ دەلىباپۇن لەمەدەيە كە ئافرمانى ئەفریقى-ئەمریکى ژيانىكى باشتىريان ھەبىت.

كىلىلە و شە: مۇرگان پاركەر، جىئىندرەر، رەنگەز، چىنی كۆمەلەيەتى، سەتمى كۆلتۈرۈ، فيمېنیزىمى تىكەمەلکىش (يەكتىرىر).

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, African-American women have been subjected to systemic discrimination and oppressive societal structures that have profoundly shaped their experiences. The intersecting dynamics of race, gender, and class have often overshadowed their struggles, resilience, and contributions to various aspects of society. African-American authors have wielded their creative voices within the literature to shed light on the injustices African-American women face. One such author, Morgan Parker, has emerged as a distinctive voice, using her literary prowess to delve into the cultural subjugation inflicted upon African-American females. This paper embarks on a journey to explore the intricate fabric of cultural subjugation as portrayed in the literary works of Morgan Parker. This research seeks to unravel the multifaceted layers of oppression these women have confronted, encompassing dimensions of gender, race, and class. The overarching objective of this study is to offer a comprehensive understanding of how African-American women's experiences have been shaped by oppressive forces, illuminating the often-hidden aspects of their history.

Despite significant strides in promoting equality and social justice, the mistreatment of African-American women remains a deeply entrenched concern. Their experiences of oppression have been underrepresented and insufficiently acknowledged within broader narratives of societal progress. This research thus addresses the pressing need to bring to light the historical and ongoing cultural subjugation faced by African-American women.

This study aims to achieve a nuanced comprehension of the intricate cultural subjugation experienced by African-American women as depicted in the literary works of Morgan Parker. By closely examining Parker's writings through a feminist lens that acknowledges the intersections of race, gender, and other forms of social discrimination, this research strives to unravel the layers of subjugation that have influenced their lives.

To achieve the study's objective, the following research questions will guide the exploration: How does Morgan Parker's literary work shed light on the various dimensions of cultural subjugation faced by African-American women? How do the themes of gender, race, and class intersect in Parker's narratives, contributing to the portrayal of oppression? How does a feminist perspective enhance our

understanding of African-American women's historical and contemporary mistreatment within the context of Parker's poems?

The study of Morgan Parker's poems reveals the interconnected nature of oppression faced by African-American women, highlighting their unique struggles. Parker's work illustrates the complexity of their identities and the influence of gender, race, and class injustices. The poems consistently address oppressive forces in the US affecting African-American women's lives. They emphasize that a single perspective cannot encompass their diverse mistreatment across historical and present subjugation. Parker's poetry captures the distinctiveness of intersectionality—each woman's experience of oppression is singular. This underscores the importance of intersectional feminism, offering a thorough analysis of their challenges and raising reader awareness. This awareness may drive efforts to protect women's rights and ensure their dignified existence.

An intersectional feminist perspective informs the research methodology. The conceptual framework for analyzing chosen extracts of Parker's poetry is built on ideas and concepts associated with different forms of oppression against African-American women. By examining her poetry through the lens of feminist intersectionality, one can gain a much more thorough comprehension of her viewpoint as an individual and a poet and her repudiation of the maltreatment of women. Intersectional feminism encompasses feminist, racial, and sexual perspectives and is a new concept in Europe, the United States, and other social sciences. This approach offers a conceptual basis and an attuned understanding of the interconnectedness of power dynamics in society (Collins and Bilge 26). It seeks to acknowledge the connections between various forms of oppression, including racism, classism, male dominance, and gender-based prejudice. This acknowledgment illustrates the effect that gender, age, sexual orientation, and racial background have on one's identity. Despite a complex web of factors that often weave together exclusion, oppression, discrimination, and privilege, intersectionality examines how various kinds of discrimination interact and continuously affect each other. The associated structures show a wide range of variation across different locations, periods, and cultures.

GENDER OPPRESSION

The intentional maltreatment of people according to gender is known as gender oppression (Butler 36). The effects of sexism are far-reaching and touch every aspect of a woman's life. It can be seen in the wage gap, the prevalence of sexual assault, and how women are treated in the media. Women's oppression based on gender can significantly impact their lives, restricting their opportunities, liberty, and safety under the rule of patriarchy, which is "the power of the father: a familial-social, ideological political system in which men- by force, direct pressure or through ritual, traditional, law and language, wisdom, etiquette, education and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (Eisenstein 5). Although there has been substantial progress toward eliminating gender discrimination, a tremendous amount of effort still needs to be conducted. When one gender is favored over another, it creates an imbalance of power and perpetuates discrimination; this can happen in some ways, such as through distributing resources, opportunities, or power. Besides, gender oppression can be discrimination in fields like work or education. Finally, by limiting the roles and behaviors of one gender, cultural norms and expectations can perpetuate gender oppression. A variety of factors cause gender

oppression. One of the reasons is that some individuals misunderstand that males are superior to women; it originates from a range of factors, one of which is the opinion that males are physiologically more powerful than women and also think that women are not as intelligent as men; this is only one of the many elements that contribute to the basis for this belief. Oppression of gender can be shown in many ways, a few examples being wage gaps, sexual harassment, rape, or violence (Roth 76).

In addition, individuals and societal institutions often perpetuate gender oppression, which can result in significant emotional and physical harm to individuals. There are many different ways that gender oppression can manifest in any culture, such as being denied the right to vote, own property, or work in specific jobs, women being expected to do all home tasks, and being considered inferior to males. Wearing restrictive and uncomfortable clothing is also something that women are forced to do. African-American women denied any associations with the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which gave rise to Second Wave Feminism. They strongly disputed the essentialist concept that natural gender distinctions would create a universal bond among women. Michelle Wallace outlines the reasons behind black women's rejection of white sisterhood and observes how African-American women have been subjugated to racist and sexist power structures. African-American women did not accept feminism, which they called "whitey's thing," due to their hostility towards white women (Hull et al. 10).

The lack of recognition can be an emotionally draining experience, as someone feels that his contributions are not valued and have not been given the respect he deserves. This feeling of marginalization can be particularly hurtful, implying that one's contributions and efforts are not valued. Therefore, treating everyone with the same admiration and dignity, regardless of background or experience, is vital. Parker seeks to draw attention to the inner turmoil and distress experienced by African-American women, which often goes unrecognized and unacknowledged in "RoboBeyonce." By exploring these feelings through poetry, the poet hopes to bring to light the struggles those women face and seeks to bring to light the complexity and struggles of being a black woman in today's American society:

The reason I was built
is to outlast some terribly
feminine sickness
that is delivered
to the blood through kale
salad and pity and men
with straight-haired girlfriends (page 23, lines 8-15)

In the above stanza, the narrator in the poem indicates that African-American women have long suffered injustices and mistreatment due to their femininity. Being oppressed for being a woman has created a collective feeling of marginalization and a sense of being born only to suffer through innumerable feminine hardships. As a result, African-American women have been undervalued and overlooked for generations, struggling to be heard and seen in a society that has denied them their basic rights and dignity. Matthew and Valerie shed light on the persisting gender oppression in

America; they claim that to remove social inequality among Black African-American women and White men, between 2000 and 2016, three percentage points of African-American women were required to change jobs (Matthew and Valerie). Undeniably, the difficulties they have faced are systemic and pervasive, and it is high time that society recognizes this and works to rectify the injustices they have suffered. The persona asserts that African-American women are born into a patriarchal society that demands them to adhere to specific gender roles, seen as a form of illness, from birth until death. The feminine sickness, according to the speaker, is essentially a result of the expectations and stereotypes placed on women of color, creating an environment where they cannot express their true selves. Furthermore, it restricts the individual's freedom and autonomy, limiting their potential and creating a hostile environment.

The persona shows that African-American women have been subjected to a unique form of oppression as women permanently. They often experience a feeling of being excluded and misunderstood in various aspects of life because they have often treated as if they are not women. They have experienced higher poverty and confinement and inevitably experience sexual and gender-based violence than other women. They often feel they have not been treated as equal members of society, which can harm their mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being. African-American women have long felt that black men have not given them the same respect and recognition as white women. The feeling of being overlooked as a black woman has been further intensified by challenges such as gender discrimination in the workplace, unequal access to educational and economic opportunities, and higher poverty levels among African-American women. The long-standing history of gender inequality in the United States has compounded these feelings of unfairness and inequality. As a result, many African-American women feel neglected and undervalued, which has led to a strained relationship between black men and women. Such oppression has led to marginalization and under-appreciation within the African-American community and caused many African-American women to lack self-esteem and self-worth. Despite decades of progress, Gerda Lerner emphasized that despite the progress made in recent years, African-American women have continued to experience a wide disparity in opportunities in clerical work, nursing, and sales compared to their white counterparts in America (320).

Women have long been considered the most oppressed group in society. Throughout history, they have been denied basic rights, such as voting, owning property, and receiving an education. They have been subject to discrimination in the workplace and other areas of life and denied access to positions of power and influence. Even today, women are often underrepresented in politics, corporate leadership, and other areas of society and face unequal pay, domestic violence, and other forms of discrimination. It is clear that women still have a long way to go before achieving true equality. Parker presents African-American women as a powerful example of those subject to the most extreme form of oppression. Their long-standing oppression is evident in various aspects of their lives. According to "The Book of Negros", they have endured for centuries, and it is an ongoing battle. She shows the power of collective action in the face of oppression:

The women are only crying
The slave cabins are dull. You're trying
to text this dude: Negro, please,
why sleep when the world so bad.
For him you would be pumice shined to pearl.
He makes you wanna write your name.
Everyone has an opinion.
You shiver and it is permission. (page 32, lines 30- 38)

The image of the “slave cabins is a strong reference to the history of slavery, which is the kernel cause of all that African Americans is going through presently. It might as well gives references to the slave cabins in the ships that first brought the Africans to the newly discovered continent of America. In those ships, cabins were filled with crying women and children while men sat silently as they were ripped off their dignity and pride. By using the word “Negro” Parker enhances this reference to those white traders who forcefully took the Africans from their villages to the ships towards Europe and America; those traders called the Africans “Negros” Hence, Parker conjures the tragic history of the black in the opening lines of this stanza. Furthermore, the word “Negro” illustrates the lower social standing of African-Americans compared to those of other racial groups. Parker focuses on African-American women’s past and present experiences by examining how they were treated as enslaved people; they can understand how far they have come. She highlights the long-term effects of slavery and the current obstacles they face regarding gender oppression. The comparison brings attention to the plight of African-American women. It demonstrates the need for further change and progress for them to be fully equal and respected members of society. She paints a vivid image of the slave cabins, describing them as dull and uninspiring; by highlighting the dullness of the cabins, she reminds us of the struggles that so many endured and the importance of never forgetting the past. The poet’s choice of language further emphasizes the cabin’s oppressive atmosphere. The dullness of the cabins serves as an unambiguous cue of the oppression and injustice inflicted upon the enslaved people. Calvin Hernton states that African-American women in America “have born the constant ongoing to racial barbarity in America from the first day she was brought in chains to this soil. The Negro woman through the years have suffered every sexual outrage” (123). After the abolition of slavery, African-American women’s oppression continued.

The poet raises a rhetorical question when she says, “why sleep when the world is bad,” wondering about the passivity of the African American men against all forms of atrocity inflicted on them. Parker expresses that African-American men are to blame for African-American women’s issues. She holds them directly responsible and suggests that they are the main contributors to the difficulties that African-American women experience. She believes that for African-American women to gain freedom and liberation, African-American men must take direct action and be held accountable for their actions. She explains the complexity of the relationship between African-American men and women and the need to unite to create a better future and end historical oppression. In addition, Simone de Beauvoir believes that men’s image of women foreshadows women’s subjugation as fundamentally distinct from them. Here, the women’s position is reduced to that of the weaker partner (30).

The poet uses the literary trope metaphor when she says, “For him, you would be a pumice shines to pearl.” The meaning indicated is that African American woman is like a piece of harsh rock, “pumice” polished to be shiny like a “pearl.” The African American man fails to evaluate and treat women of his race equally. A reason that might drive women to seek equality with them is “make you wanna write your name”. The main idea in this line is that African-American women often feel that they are seen as unimportant and unattractive by African-American men, leading them to strive to meet specific standards of beauty to be considered desirable, as they are referred to as “pumice.” J. Lee Greene confirms the portrayal of African-American men’s preference for white women over African-American women as explicitly invoking the relationship between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden since the late 19th century. Greene expresses that the relationship symbolizes the actual view of men toward African-American women (168). As a result, many African-American women feel they must take more essential measurements than their white counterparts to look attractive to men.

Furthermore, they must work hard to create an appearance that they believe will be acceptable to men; this is especially true regarding physical appearance, as many African-American women feel they must go to extraordinary lengths for their white counterparts to look attractive. In addition, the sense of not being beautiful is taxing for African-American women emotionally and financially. Fran Sanders also highlights the unfair obstacles that victimize African-American women, unlike white women:

Certain fixed notions are uniformly projected onto the Black woman regardless of age, background, personality, education, ability, etc. All of the notions are those which caused women to chafe under the yoke of Victorianism (90).

The poem tackles the deep-rooted issues of injustice and inequality between races and genders of the same race. Alice Walker critiques how African-American women have been mistreated, and she compares them with “exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away their lives in an era, a century, that did not acknowledge them, except as “the mule of the world” (qtd. in Ritchie and Kate, 315). She assumes that they have been only manipulated without appreciation and acknowledgment. The poet’s words highlight the unfairness of this reality, emphasizing the lack of true peace and security these women have been able to experience. The contrast emphasizes the African-American community’s struggles with discrimination and oppression. The word choice demonstrates the disparity between the freedom and autonomy of the persona and the oppression of African-Americans; it serves to underline the inequality aids as a reminder of the difficulties faced by African-Americans in this era. Parker asserts that African-American women experience the most suffering and are acutely aware of their plight compared to African-American men due to the intersectionality of gender and racial oppression, leaving African-American women particularly vulnerable to systemic discrimination and prejudice. Her words emphasize the need to recognize the suffering of African-American women as a unique experience rather than generalizing it, and it should not be overlooked or minimized. Perhaps, women have been overlooked mainly globally, yet African-American women have suffered the worst forms of marginalization and oppression. Giulia Kerstin suggests that African-American women’s roles were often disregarded. They were outcasted, scorned, and ostracized by society. If an African-American woman was in a leadership position, it

was perceived as a challenge to advancing her community. She was regarded as hostile toward African Americans (qtd. in Sunday and Ekpo 41).

The poem provides a powerful message to African-American women, encouraging them to take control of their female identity, and tells them that men often try to limit their power and control by forcing them to follow their demands to erase their identity and individuality. It acknowledges that African-American women have been oppressed yet encourages them to take control of their accounts and defy their restrictions. It shows they are not given the same respect and recognition as men and must take steps to prove their value. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak insists that patriarchy does not allow women to progress and liberate under its impositions, instead misleads women by abusing some women. The patriarchal society gives few women a misleading sense of strength because they use it to sustain the status quo. Authority is kept from a great proportion of women and given to a select group so that genuinely competent women may acquire the opportunity for leadership, acknowledgment, and compensation; therefore, merit-based equality triumphs. The symbolic woman is taught to observe herself as distinct from most women, as unusually gifted and worthy, and to distance herself from the broader female experience. “Average” women likewise view her as distinct, possibly even more powerful than themselves (145).

The poem becomes more direct when it highlights that African-American women are under-represented in the public sphere and the inequality and lack of recognition faced by these women in society; it also brings forth the need for more inclusivity and recognition of their voices. They are often the ones whose voices are unheard, whose opinions are ignored, and whose contributions have been unnoticed. Despite their immense contributions to society, they are still not given the same respect and recognition as everyone else. The poem sheds light on how African-American women have been systematically silenced. By highlighting this issue, Parker suggests that African-American women have been denied their right to have their voices heard and their stories told. This conveys these women’s deep-seated oppression, with the injustice of their voices being muted and disregarded. Frances Beal describes this state well:

African-American women in the United States are aptly defined as “slaves of slaves.” Her bodily characteristics have been intentionally defamed; she has been violently raped and mistreated by the white oppressor; and she has endured the worst form of financial oppression, having been compelled to work as the white woman’s maid and substitute mother for white children, while her children were frequently dying of hunger and ignored. (qtd. in Guy-Sheftall 148).

The persona speaks about the power dynamics experienced by African-American women, noting that men control everything in their lives. She emphasizes a sobering reminder of black women’s lack of autonomy, as men must authorize even their physical reactions to the environment before they can act. She brings the repressive aspect of gender oppression embedded in American patriarchal culture for centuries to the surface. She emphasizes that men in the patriarchal society have complete control over African-American women in the various forms of discrimination and oppression that African-American women experience daily, from the lack of access to economic and educational opportunities to the disproportionate rates of sexual violence and physical abuse. As a result, African-American

women have been prevented from achieving their full potential and relegated to a subordinate societal role. Collins, an eminent black scholar, believes that white men controlled everything in the United States:

In the United States, because affluent White men control government and industry, public policies usually benefit this group. In other words, despite the US Constitution's stated commitment to equality of all American citizens, historically, the differential treatment of US Blacks, women, the working class, and other subordinated groups meant that the United States operated as a nation-state that disproportionately benefited affluent White men (230-231).

When people are denied acceptance and feel like they do not belong, it can extensively impact their sense of self-worth and belonging. Being rejected or excluded from a group can lead to isolation and a lack of social belonging. In extreme cases, it can lead to the development of anxiety and depression. In "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife," Parker conveys a strong sense of the oppression and invisibility of African-American women in American society. Through her words, she emphasizes the lack of recognition, respect, and agency experienced by this group of individuals and their struggles to be seen and heard:

Of course I exist
I have every small name
Metaphorically draped in linen
I am often used to describe
the invisible how it carries
I answer your phone and pack
your lunches for it is written
a woman must, a man shall receive
Scrolling through profile pictures, I am
ashamed (page 36, lines 5-16)

African-American women are left unseen despite their strength and determination; their contributions to the nation are unrecognized. The persona is emphatic in her response when her very existence has been questioned; she firmly states, "Of course, I exist." Her confidence and self-assurance underscore the importance of her presence and identity as a woman, and her story is just as valid as anyone else's. She refused to be ignored or dismissed and declared her existence with conviction. In her statement, she spoke for herself and all African-American women who have been made to feel invisible and unimportant; in a world that often overlooks and undervalues their contributions. Her words stress the strength and resilience of her identity, despite any doubts that might have been cast. It is a powerful statement of her self-assuredness and is suitable for societal space.

The speaker alludes to her frequent utilization as a representative of the historical struggles endured by marginalized communities, particularly African-American women. Through her discourse, she exemplifies the profound significance of portraying her lived experience as an African-American woman within the societal framework. She articulates the actuality that African-American women have been emblematically associated with the notion of the "unseen," a concept laden with the gravity

of the oppression and marginalization that has befallen them. The term 'invisible' accentuates the onus borne by women as constituents of a marginalized cohort, underscoring the anguish of being disregarded and relegated to the periphery.

The speaker advances the proposition that conventional gender roles persist as well-defined and deeply entrenched within the societal fabric, perpetuating the expectation that individuals conform to predetermined roles and behaviors predicated upon their gender. These gender roles constrict personal development and advancement and are perceived as potential sources of oppressive imposition. Across myriad cultures and societies, men are anticipated to embrace roles of greater dominance, while women are predisposed to assume more submissive roles. Gender roles have persisted as pervasive stereotypes over an extended temporal span, and the speaker's viewpoint resonates with the entrenched nature of these roles within society.

The speaker underscores that the achievement of men is substantially underpinned by the contributions of women in their lives. She emphasizes the necessity for men to express gratitude for these contributions. She alludes to her frequently assumed responsibility for mundane aspects of daily management, such as telephone correspondence and meal preparation, aligned with her implicit role as a caregiver. A palpable sense of duty conveys her unwavering dedication to these responsibilities, and she stands poised to shoulder these duties with unwavering commitment. Within this context, Hartiningish asserts that African-American women, subject to pressures from white and black men, encounter comparable circumstances wherein their parity with white women is denied, thus exacerbating the severity of their mistreatment (17).

Then the speaker crystalizes the distinctions between the roles and functions men and women have been given in society. She emphatically states that a woman must be the one to take the initiative and that a man shall be the one to receive it, this sentiment reflects the power dynamics between the genders, and her words are a call to action for women to take control of their destinies. She posits that women have been pressured to adhere to society's expectations, often to their detriment. Although the disparity is particularly evident, women are often disadvantaged, facing discrimination and a lack of access to resources and decision-making power. She advocates for greater gender equality so that all people, regardless of gender, can have equal access to opportunities and rights. Such expectation has been a source of oppression, women's lack of economic and political representation, and the limitations placed on their ability to pursue their interests. Gender imbalance has created a cycle in which women are often relegated to subordinate roles, further entrenching the gender gap. She notes that, in comparison to women, men have more opportunities and rights. Recent statistics show that while African-American women have been qualified and eligible but yet face extra complications than men, from 2000 to 2017, high school graduation rates climbed drastically, with the proportion of African-American women attending universities by 40% exceeding that of White males 38% (McFarland et al.).

The speaker believes that gender distinctions have been around for a long time and have been echoed throughout history. It is clear that these differences are deeply rooted in American culture and have been a part of our society for centuries. The distinction is not only evident in the physical and biological differences between the sexes but also in the different roles and expectations that have long

been placed on them by society, consequently resulting in a wide variety of cultural norms and practices that have evolved and continue to shape how men and women interact in the modern world. The persona expresses her frustration after scrolling through profile pictures, feeling ashamed of her image. Her feeling was not necessarily associated with the pictures themselves but rather with how they highlighted the discrimination and marginalization that still exists in society today. She shares her shame, likely in response to the lack of representation of people of color in the photos she was seeing. She acknowledges the unfair societal expectations of beauty and worth, which she recognizes as oppressive and wrong.

RACIAL OPPRESSION

Racial oppression is a kind of injustice when individuals are mistreated according to their race or ethnicity. It encompasses discrimination against individuals in education, employment, housing, and healthcare. The mental and physical health of those affected by racial oppression can suffer. Racial oppression can also result in different social and economic statuses for different races, like a person not getting the job he interviewed for, being mistreated at work, or hearing racist comments. Maxine Craig assumes that the experience of racial oppression can lead to adverse emotional and physical outcomes. These negative emotions can lead to further problems down the road. Racial oppression is an umbrella term encompassing many different actions but typically refers to discrimination against people of a certain race or ethnicity. Racial oppression manifests in various ways and can be found in any society. This idea is widely accepted by society and is often reinforced by social institutions such as the government, the media, and the educational system. As a result, people's actions and thoughts can perpetuate it (25).

African-American women in the United States have borne the weight of persistent racial oppression over an extensive temporal arc. This grievous legacy is evident in historical events such as the institution of slavery, the imposition of Jim Crow laws, and the prevailing phenomenon of mass incarceration affecting the African-American population. This protracted history has precipitated disparities encompassing various dimensions, most notably poverty, and violence, where African-American women are disproportionately impacted compared to their counterparts from different demographic groups. Despite notable advancements, contemporary challenges continue to beset African-American women, underscoring the enduring nature of their struggles.

Poverty and the specter of violence bear disproportionately upon women of color, particularly African-American women, echoing a persistently skewed distribution of socioeconomic resources and the prevalence of detrimental circumstances. This group exhibits a higher likelihood of incarceration than their counterparts from divergent backgrounds within the United States. It is significant to recognize that despite the legal emancipation from slavery, African-American women remained subjected to continued discrimination and prejudicial treatment from the predominantly white populace.

This historical trajectory has relegated African-American women to the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic hierarchy, thereby perpetuating a chronic narrative of economic and social inequality. Joel Kovel aptly points out that racial disparities have left an indelible imprint upon the various structural facets of American culture. The intertwining of economic inequality with racial inequity

has contributed to the perpetuation of a racially charged paradigm. Consequently, the conscious strategy of segregating African-Americans from impoverished white individuals and indigenous Americans traces back to slavery, shaping a trajectory that persists today (11).

The annals of racial oppression witness a protracted and somber history that has inflicted enduring harm upon individuals of non-white backgrounds, persistently reverberating within contemporary individuals and communities. The perpetuation of racial oppression is facilitated by entrenched institutional policies and practices that systematically disadvantage minority cohorts. Cultural dimensions contribute to the propagation of racism, thereby engendering disparities in essential domains like education, employment, and housing for specific demographic groups. The pernicious ramifications of racial oppression extend to individuals and institutions alike, fostering an environment wherein certain groups assert dominance over others predicated solely upon skin color, fueling the flames of racism and intolerance against those deemed outside the purview of the purportedly superior group.

Historical antecedents, including the harrowing chapters of slavery and colonization, have bequeathed a legacy of inequality and maltreatment, casting a long shadow over particular racial collectives. Robert Coles observes that African-Americans have been compelled to attune themselves to the distinct challenges endured by individuals of differing skin tones within American society. In light of this, African-American parents are tasked with instilling a profound sense of the significance of their black identity within their progeny, often commencing this essential process during their tender early years, sometimes even as early as the age of two. Coles grapples with the inherent difficulty of articulating the profound role of skin color in shaping American society. Nevertheless, he remains steadfastly resolute in the conviction that irrespective of outward appearances, a higher power's love, and acceptance are all-encompassing (63).

Despite progress, African American women face considerable challenges due to racial oppression. Even though they have made significant progress in recent years, they are not in the same position as white women regarding education, income, and general socioeconomic standing. Moreover, they are more likely to experience racism in different forms and situations. Morgan Parker, in "Black Women for Beginners pt. 1," sheds light on the insecurity stance of African-American women due to racist acts of violence as follows:

Every time a hot comb simmers
we dread. We get hurt so often
we think it's a nickname.
When we say we remember
we mean hurricane, hunt,
meadow, lust, duty, escape,
tithe, kneel, Sphinx, throat,
offering, animal, deadwood.
We get hurt so often we never
run (lines, 1-11).

According to Parker, African-American women face exceptional challenges in the United States; they fear everything in America because they are black. They fear being targeted because of their race and feel they must be extra careful to stay safe. They feel like they must constantly be on guard, as they are often the targets of discrimination and violence; this feeling of insecurity among them has been passed down through generations of African-American women. They also fear they will never be truly accepted in American society. They have been told that they are not good enough, not worthy of love, and incapable of achieving their dreams, many of them have internalized these messages, so they often doubt themselves and their abilities. The income gap between African-American women and other groups is vast due to the effects of racism. This financial punishment can be traced back, at least partly, to bias and the unequal distribution of jobs. In 2019, for every dollar earned by white men, African-American women earned 68 cents, an improvement from the 65 cents they had earned in 2018(Joint Economic Committee). As a result, some African-American women believe their experiences of pain and hurt have defined them. Parker demonstrates that African-American women have a long history of discrimination issues. Their oppression includes institutionalized discrimination, such as that experienced by African-American women during the Jim Crow era, and the more subtle forms of discrimination that African-American women face daily. Nevertheless, they have historically been at the center of most movements and revolutions in the United States because they have always been a power to be acknowledged, from the early pioneers like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman to modern-day leaders like Oprah Winfrey and Beyonce (Dagbovie 241).

Furthermore, they have been active in the civil rights movement, fighting for equality for all African Americans, which they remember and continue fighting for. The poet explains that African-American women saw firsthand how racism was a significant societal problem. They were subjected to terrible conditions, such as working long hours without breaks and being paid little. The color of their skin made them targets for discrimination, violence, and false accusations; this is something African-American women remember because it was dehumanizing. The memories of being treated like animals, beaten, raped, lynched, and experiencing other forms of violence are still fresh in their minds. There were often no consequences for the perpetrators of such treatments. Fathima maintains that under slavery, African American women were treated like animals solely to augment the master's workforce (64).

African-American women were more likely to have depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems than white women. They have also been prevented from taking advantage of many opportunities available to other women. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is one of the current organizations that work to improve their condition; however, it has been making much effort to help improve the situation for African-American women, but much remains to be done before the issue is resolved. Violence against African-American women is a central problem that has not received enough attention. As a result, many have lost their lives. Too often, these women are ignored, or their stories are not taken seriously. The combined effects of multiple forms of discrimination keep those women under oppression. Consequently, they have been forced to submit to men and surrender their hope of attaining freedom. Fernandes and Alsaed have identified various ways, such as harassment, denial of job opportunities, and underpayment, that African-American women are discriminated against in modern-day America (57).

Parker, through “A Brief History of the Present,” seeks to draw attention to the long and painful history of oppression faced by African-Americans during history; she brings to light the many injustices and inequalities African-Americans have faced, from slavery to the present-day. Her poetry also bridges the gap between the past and present, highlighting the importance of understanding the history of oppression in contemporary America; she also seeks to draw attention to the need for continued progress toward greater racial equality. Although Parker invites the audience to reflect on the current state of African-Americans and their experiences, she also wants them to think about how the legacy of racial oppression has shaped the lives of African-Americans today:

There's no way a black woman
killed herself, because everyone knows we can withstand
inhuman amounts of pain. (There's no way she didn't
hang herself, dumb brown martyr, not mentally sound
to begin with.) lines 12-16

Through the persona, Parker refutes the belief that African-American women are weak and often resort to suicide. Instead, she reveals the strength and resilience of African-American women and celebrates their courage in the face of adversity. Her words demonstrate their capacity for self-empowerment, which is a testament to their strength and determination; they can rise above the false stereotypes imposed upon them, ultimately proving that they are far more potent than they have been given credit for. She conveys the strength and resilience of African-American women in the face. She confirms that they are strong, capable, and determined, despite the challenges due to the hardship that they endured. She brings to light the harsh reality of African-American women's long history of oppression in the United States. Marita Bonner, a well-known African-American dramatist, reveals her sentiments and discontent with the restrictions placed on African-American women as she proclaims:

You long to explode and hurt everything white; friendly and unfriendly. But you know that you cannot live with a chip on your shoulder... you know being a woman, you have to go about it gently and quietly, to find out and to discover just what is wrong, just what can be done... so being a woman... you can wait (qtd. in Busby 214).

African-Americans often experience disparities in access to resources, employment opportunities, and healthcare, among other areas. Because of these systemic differences, caused mainly by past and present discrimination, they are not treated like their white counterparts. They are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system, often facing harsher punishments than their white counterparts. Despite the progress in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, African-Americans still experience disproportionate poverty levels, discrimination, and violence; and this is particularly true in the criminal justice system, where people of color are disproportionately represented in prisons and jails and are more likely to be subjected to harsher sentences than white Americans (Hemphill 216). Parker, in “Magical Negro #1: Jesus Christ,” portrays how racial oppression has put African-American women in an unfairly low societal position for a long time; she draws the reader's attention to some ways in which American society's social structure has denied them the same rights and privileges that are available to white women. Their social position is primarily attributed to their race,

which has been used to oppress and marginalize them throughout history; as a result, African-American women are often excluded from positions of power and influence and are denied the respect and recognition they deserve.

Y'all know that nigger was a nigger.

Y'all know those whores

were whores. Sometimes

I go to the sink for water

and I come back with a jar

full of wine. Every second

I breathe, I forgive. (lines, 6- 11)

“Nigger” has long been used as a derogatory term, primarily towards African-Americans. Its usage is rooted in a history of racism and discrimination, and today it is seen as an offensive and insulting term used to degrade African-Americans and belittle their contributions to society. It is hurtful and disrespectful, further divides and marginalizes the African-American community, and carries a history of oppression and injustice. Parker reflects on the history of African-Americans, noting that, unfortunately, they are still seen in some circles as nothing more than enslaved people; she is reminding us that African-Americans have been subjected to oppression and subjugation for centuries. The painful legacy of racial oppression still casts a long shadow over the African-American community, a reminder of the struggles endured and the injustices that continue to be experienced. In addition, the lack of respect can hurt African-Americans’ mental health and well-being and make them feel like they do not belong. They view themselves as an instrument and signified rather than a person. Outside forces remain in control of one’s fate. Erich Fromm posits that “the alienated person doesn’t experience himself as the center of this world, as the creator of his own acts—but; his acts and their consequences have become his masters...The alienated person is out of touch with himself” (129).

Parker dwells on the long history of prejudice and discrimination African American women have faced in America; it is a reminder that they have often been wrongly stereotyped as promiscuous and immoral, a characterization used to justify the mistreatment of these women for centuries. Such a false stereotype has devastated the self-esteem of countless African-American women. In addition, she draws attention to a painful and unfortunate reality: African-American women have historically been unfairly labeled as “whores,” and this characterization has been used to degrade and oppress them. Ann Cudd holds those who have experienced psychological damage due to oppression accountable for the perpetuation of oppression. She states that people who had been oppressed suffered from victimization, degradation, humiliation, and prejudice due to the preconceived notions associated with the social group to which they belong. As a result, those who have been oppressed can struggle with feelings of inadequacy, shame, and despair, making it harder for them to keep up with their oppressors and reinforcing the notion that they are feeble, sluggish, inept, or even aggressive, and hostile (79-80).

Parker ponders on the transformative power of creative thought, noting that sometimes when the speaker goes to the sink for water, her imagination turns it into a jar full of wine, which is an intriguing notion that signifies her profound disappointment with the brighter future. She is engaged in escapism, perhaps to cope with life's difficulties; this example implies that there is always the potential for something extraordinary to occur, even in the most mundane activities. Parker laments the racism African-Americans face daily; they are subjected to countless discriminatory practices deeply ingrained in society and accepted as the norm. Racial oppression is so widespread and ingrained that it is almost impossible for them to avoid its effects. She calls for a greater understanding of African-American women's struggles and a more equitable society where people of all backgrounds can thrive. Parker recognizes the complexity of racial oppression and the fact that it is expressed in various forms. She asserts that due to the prevalence of various forms of racism, African-American women must be strong and not be discouraged by these injustices. They must strive to remain positive and not be overwhelmed by the discrimination they face. Ignoring the racism they experience is one way of standing up for themselves and taking power away from those who would oppress them; African-American women must not let the many forms of racism they face bring them down (Hooks 19).

African-American women are more likely to be victims of police brutality and racial profiling and are often subjected to harsher punishments than white individuals for the same crimes. The pervasive feeling of being targeted by the law has caused African-American women to feel that their rights are not being fully protected, leading to a lack of trust in the justice system.

Parker, in "Toward a New Theory of Negro Propaganda," explains that African-American women experience a heightened sense of fear and insecurity regarding the police due to a long history of racial oppression and discrimination. She argues that the support police for white women is often taken for granted; it is a source of apprehension and mistrust for African-American women. Claudia Jones critiques whites who preach racial equality yet refuse to perceive blacks outside of specific roles or stereotypes. She urges white socialists and liberal women, in particular, to discard their racist views about African-American women and actively stand against white chauvinism to fulfill utmost equality (qtd. in McDonald, 59).

On the other hand, African-American women are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement and are more likely to be subjected to violence and wrongful arrests. In addition, they are often overlooked and underrepresented in conversations about police brutality and reform, making their experiences of fear and insecurity even more pronounced:

Case study: Closing a window, a young Negro woman sees a police car idling in front of her apartment building and thinks What did I do wrong? A young white woman has called the police. It is possible that in the dark slumbering of their unconscious, the white imagines that the only remedy for fear is death. (lines, 32-36)

Parker draws attention to the alarming prevalence of police brutality against African-American women in modern society, which has been brought to the forefront of public discourse in recent years, revealing the realities of systemic racism and the violence that African-American women are subjected to at the hands of the police. As a result, numerous African-American women are subjected

to excessive force, racial profiling, and other forms of discrimination. The Center for Law and Social Justice, in an issued report in 1988, maintains that the police and the state courts play an important role in oppressive action. Prejudice is typically the motivation for attacks committed by police officers while recording the aggression committed by white male police officers against African-American women (Wun).

Through the poem, Parker addresses the injustice that African-American women face daily and brings the issue of police brutality to the forefront of public discourse. It is a call to action, a reminder that this issue must be addressed and that African-American women must be protected from violence. She mentions that when the African-American woman sees the police from the window, she is afraid and wonders what she has done. The police presence brings up a long history of racial discrimination and oppression, and the woman is reminded of the power imbalance between herself and the authorities. She had no idea what she had done wrong, but the oppressive presence of law enforcement was palpable and intimidating. She was concerned that her mere presence was enough to draw suspicion. She worried about the possible consequences and felt powerless and vulnerable. The fear that she may face unfair treatment or violence is all too real, and she is understandably anxious. It is a reminder of the racial oppression that African-American women face. Parker alludes to the fact that white women often use law enforcement as a tool to oppress and control African-American women. She focuses on the power dynamics and how white women have the privilege of being able to rely on the police to protect them. In contrast, African-American women are vulnerable to further violence from the police and others. Although this powerful statement brings to light the continued discrimination and injustice faced by African-American women, it is also a reminder that racism and sexism continue to be deeply entrenched in American society (Stephens 12).

Parker reflects on the difficulty of overcoming centuries of deep-rooted prejudice and expresses the belief that, despite surface-level progress, the underlying mindset of white people towards African-American people has remained unchanged in American society. She is aware that, while there have been some significant steps forward, white people's mindset about the oppression of African-Americans has not fundamentally changed. She opines that white people have a long history of discriminating against African Americans; it has been both overt and subtle and has had lasting and devastating effects on the African American community. She expresses the harsh reality that many members of the white community have an ingrained fear of the African-American community that can only be quelled through death. This notion reflects the unavoidable racial oppression in American society and serves as a reminder of the oppression African-Americans have faced and continue to face. Furthermore, it reveals an extreme lack of understanding of the complex history and presents the reality of race relations in America (Ford 68).

CLASS OPPRESSION

Systematic discrimination against certain groups of people based on their socioeconomic status is class oppression. It can result in a lower standard of living, fewer employment prospects, and less access to essential amenities. The criminal justice system may discriminate against defendants in many ways, including biased policing, selective prosecution, and sentencing disparities. Modern class oppression is often invisible and challenging to identify and address. It can manifest in various ways, including economic exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion from social and political participation. Addressing class oppression requires a comprehensive understanding of its causes and effects. Martha Gimenez preserves that something in particular in the structure of class oppression is unique and demands extra attention. This differential treatment necessitates an in-depth examination of capitalist society as a system and a schema of material interactions between producing and reproductive capacity, accumulation, and dispossession. Its origins can be traced back to political economy, while its effects can be seen in the multifaceted fields of culture, worldview, and world affairs (24). It also requires a commitment to challenging and changing the systems and structures perpetuating it. Lack of opportunity and judgment often leads to the oppression of lower social classes; one has to work harder than others for the same recognition, one cannot do certain things because of one's social class, and one's peers constantly put him down. Class oppression usually leads to poverty and inequality.

African-American women in 21st-century America still face more considerable poverty risks. Institutional racism has caused them to be unable to hold jobs and opportunities that would provide them with socioeconomic stability. They are economically disadvantaged, and it is difficult to enter the marketplace, find jobs, and take advantage of other opportunities. Racial and gender oppression are also significant factors that must be addressed to diminish poverty among African-American women, though other factors contribute to their poverty. In a poem entitled "Whites Only," Morgan Parker assumes that African-American women are never given equal rights and privileges as white women since they are in America; the tremendous impacts of the inequalities still contribute to many financial insecurities in their lives; she mentions:

what it feels like to hold
a piece of your body and know
it is the reason for everything
why some window views aren't yours
and some have the memory
of firehoses on brick and you do not
belong and it has been late since this (Page 10, lines 12-18).

According to Parker, class oppression of African-American women is frequently connected to womanhood, which is generally considered the cause of most problems. In American society, black women often face discrimination in the workforce due to societal norms that dictate that they are not challenging or intelligent enough to be successful. As a result, African-American women face discrimination and marginalization throughout their lives and careers. Mary Helen Washington expresses that African-American women have been sidelined and underrepresented, resulting in

racist, social, economic, and political exclusion. She argues that African-American scholars also have been engaged in excluding the essence of black womanhood; she states: African-American men are always shown as escaped enslaved people, passionate speakers, public activists, and abolitionists. As a result, African-American women's brave attitudes and visions have been hidden in a society that needs them to be brave (qtd. in Sengupta, 57).

The persona wonders why African-American women are not as affluent as white women. Discrimination and systematic oppression are two critical socioeconomic factors that play a role in oppression. They may face more financial challenges because of their unique cultural factors. Despite the many obstacles African-American women face, there are many ways for them to become economically successful—unfortunately, economic disparities in the US result from its structural inequalities. African-American women have not been treated equally to white women throughout history and have long been denied the same rights, protections, and privileges as white women, leading to a lower standard of living. As they contemplate the past life of the aged women and observe the situation, African-American women pessimistically think it is too late to expect financial stability. The Socioeconomic disparities between black and white women persist due to many factors, including historical and institutional racism, sexism, and classism, and it is a complex issue and has been present for centuries. Parker concludes the poem by openly mentioning that both America and men are responsible for the financial injustice against African-American women; she claims, "I guess there is no difference between a country and a man" (lines 27-28). She highlights the issue of African-American women's class oppression in their patriarchal society, which is directly affected by gender. She is sad about how women are treated and looked at in society; they cannot care for themselves or their families. She believes that men are responsible for the majority of the oppression that black women face because they are the ones who create and enforce the laws and institutions that perpetuate inequality. America is also responsible for perpetuating the problem because it is the country where these laws and institutions were created.

In the past, white women have taken advantage of African-American women in the United States and made it possible for white women to live a fuller life. Though they have not forgotten the pain and suffering inflicted by white women, African-American women now feel resentment and anger. Even after slavery was abolished, women were still considered inferior to white women and used as servants. Some women could find other jobs, like working in the fields or as housekeepers in white homes, but most had to settle for low-paying, low-skill jobs. Labor unions had little effect on the unequal pay between African-American and White women; represented African-American women received \$874 to represented White women \$1,044, but non-unionized African-American women received \$683 to non-unionized White women's \$810 ("Table 2. Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics"). In addition, they were expected to do everything around the house, from cooking and cleaning to laundry, and they were often treated poorly. Some of the factors that shaped the inferior position of African-American women in society include: believing that they are less intelligent or capable than white women, viewing them as less attractive, feeling that they are more aggressive or threatening, perceiving them as being more sexually promiscuous, and holding negative stereotypes or generalizations about them. Although, according to a survey, African-American women still have the

same old concerns about equality, they are rarely accepted and treated as white women and African-American men; Catalyst states:

Even though African American women represent an important and growing source of talent, they currently represent only 1.1% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies...Experiencing a double outsider status – unlike white women or African American men – African American women report exclusion from informal networks and conflict relationships with white women among the challenges they face (2).

Brown reveals that the upward mobility of African-American women still encounters the same old barriers, and their position is far beyond their expectations. They are diminished in critical positions, and there is not much advancement. However, their colossal disenfranchisement might not be very visible today, but they are the most oppressed group in American society. Parker thinks that African-American women's class oppression has long roots in the history of the United States; older generations experienced much harsher conditions. William Piersen declares that the history of African-Americans is a long and horrible one of servitude; they have been the most prominent minority in American history. The growth of the entire global economy influenced the slave trade. It produced an almost voracious desire for a cheap workforce in America and a technical development that enabled the ability to forcefully move millions of African laborers throughout the ocean to fulfill the need (3). Parker reveals that African-American women, in particular, have been the victims of the bondages of slavery since they were brought here, and their hardships are never appreciated and respected. African-American women endured much more significant difficulties than other enslaved men because they had to work on the plantations, serve their owners' families, and mind their children. Parker, in "Their Grandmothers Never Did the Laundry," comments:

Their grandmothers never did the laundry.
My grandmother did it for them
for less than I make an hour
talking to them about paintings. (Page 83, lines 1-5)

Parker wants to refer to history to explain that African-American women have never been given equal opportunities and rights as white women; their oppressors found them only worth servitude. She charges white women equally responsible for all the adversaries that African-American women experienced. She argues that they have spent their energy and time on insignificant duties that white women did not bother doing for a very unfair payment. For example, doing the laundry was common among African-American women; though they worked very hard, they could hardly obtain satisfactory compensation because their tasks were not respected, and they were not given any credit. They could not be financially independent, which frustrated them because they were busy working most of the time, and payment was very little. Their needs and desires are considered secondary to those of white women. Shaziya Fathima confirms that African-American women have been used in prostitution as chattel since slavery; they "were represented in a limited number of roles, including those of housemaids, field workers, and breeders" (64).

Consequently, African-American women were left behind and could not reach white women's prosperity but were neglected. Parker highlights that white women disdained African-American women to the degree that they even covered their toil; she comments, "There is no black in the pictures. Where are all the slaves?" (lines 17-19). The speaker is perplexed; she says white people disparaged the labor of African-American women strongly; they felt it was not worthy of being remembered, even in a picture in their bathrooms. Margaret Walker explains that African-American women have been the backbone of the progress of the United States; they have served sincerely with all they could, but they are understated and neglected. According to Walker, an African-American woman "has been seen as the creature at the bottom of the social ladder; she has been seen as the beast of burden because in slavery that's what she was" (qtd. in Egejuru and Fox, 34).

Parker elucidates that white women removed the lowest social position of black women from history because they still thought such people did not deserve recognition and respect. They have always been underprivileged, leaving a feeling of never being good enough. The long history of oppression and discrimination remains fresh in many of them. This feeling of inequality has been passed down through generations of African-American women. African-American women think that white women have always had better treatment and protection. The idea that African-American women are more vulnerable to violence is based on historical evidence. Julian Wolfreys suggests that women are troubled by different structures of oppression, such as social deprivation, physical oppression, cultural oppression, and psychological oppression. Historically, they are devalued and denied masculine status; therefore, they are the most oppressed (50). The lack of protection from the criminal justice system has led African-American women to believe it has failed them. They think they have not been given a fair chance to succeed in leadership positions, and their opinions have been disregarded. Parker elaborates on the distinctions between African-American women and white women further and comments:

Did whoever
Came before me eat chitlins for breakfast?
Stuff her black lips with hollandaise
and home fries and if she cried
into her cotton palms did the sky go black? (Page 84, lines 20-25).

According to Parker, African-American women have been suffering from the lack of equality and privileges throughout the entire history of the United States; they hardly felt they were humans, and they have been used as tools for the service of white women. For example, they spent their lives in the kitchens to help white women enjoy their food, but they did not have the same type of food in their homes. She also shows society's reaction to the sadness of African-American and white women; she asks if African-American women ever felt the same sympathy as white women. Finally, Bell Hooks rejects the idea of universal sisterhood among all women and asserts that white women equally have oppressed African-American women; she contends that they are also responsible for black women's class oppression:

Today, despite predominant rule by white supremacist patriarchs, black women often work in situations where their immediate supervisor, boss, or authority figure is a white woman. Conscious of the privilege's white men, as well as white women, gain as a consequence of racial domination, black women were quick to react to the feminist call for sisterhood by pointing to the contradiction — that we should join with women who exploit us to help liberate them (50-51).

For Hooks, though white men are mainly blamed for African-American women's inferior position in American society, white women similarly have taken advantage of their social position to oppress African-American women. The persona points out that African-American women have always been an afterthought and have not been adequately empathized. They are at a disadvantage compared to whites and constantly fight for equality. Parker assumes that time has not changed a lot; African-American women are subject to oppression and discrimination similar to the past; she utters that many restrictions and obstacles hinder them from progressing. For example, she poses, "does anyone notice a shackle? I bet they don't" (lines 26-28). The shackle symbolizes the oppression African-American women have faced for generations; it is a reminder of the pain and suffering they have been through and a sign of their strength and resilience. Despite the difficulties they have experienced, they have always been leaders in the struggle for equality and justice. They have always been a force for change and have fought for their rights and justice for many years.

The lack of financial security and a sense of belonging can dramatically impact people, organizations, and the nation. It can lead to decreased consumer confidence and spending, higher unemployment rates, increased bankruptcies, and decreased credit availability. Moreover, financial instability can lead to increased market volatility, reduced investment in businesses, and a decrease in the value of assets. These effects can cause significant disruptions to the economy and can have a lasting impact on individuals and businesses. Parker reveals how African-American women experience disenfranchised and excluded from American society in "Nancy Meyers and My Dream of Whiteness" as follows:

I work two and three jobs.
I am honorable and brave.
The ensemble cast
whittles down.
Maybe I am a slave.
I make ends meet.
I don't get kissed. (Page 8, lines 15-22)

The speaker discusses her financial situation, noting that due to the economy's instability, she has had to take on two or three jobs to survive. Her words indicate a more prominent economic issue faced by many African-American women in the United States. She speaks of the massive tension this condition has on her mentally and physically, expressing her worry that she may be unable to maintain her various jobs for a long time. As a result, her situation has caused her to be overworked and underpaid, making it difficult to maintain economic stability and lead a comfortable and secure life. Booker Washington highlights the importance of achieving financial prosperity to free African Americans from oppression. He states that African Americans must have access to the same legal

rights as everyone else, but it is even more essential that they are equipped to use them. The chance to make a dollar working in a factory is worth much more than blowing a dollar at the theater (qtd. in Stobaugh, 252). Accordingly, without obtaining financial security, eradicating class oppression is impossible.

The persona mentions that she is qualified and fully eligible for the job but has had difficulty finding a position commensurate with her qualifications. Despite her qualifications and experience, she has been unable to secure a job that she feels deserves her talents and skills. While the progress made over the years is commendable, there is still a long way to go to ensure equal rights and opportunities for people of all backgrounds. African-American women face numerous obstacles in the workplace, from hiring discrimination to being overlooked for promotions and opportunities. As a result, their talents and skills are often disregarded and undervalued, leading to a lack of good job opportunities or jobs with limited income. Therefore, African-American women have a staggering unemployment rate. The lack of recognition and investment in their potential has had a deleterious effect on their career prospects and has perpetuated economic disproportions.

The persona likens life to a play, noting that the ensemble cast gradually decreases in size. She reflects on how life is filled with many characters, each contributing to the story and exciting, leaving an ever-shrinking cast behind. Her observation serves as a reminder that life is constantly changing, but some people, like African-American women, keep having the same repeated roles; such observation is an essential cue of striving for greater equality in all facets of life so that no one is relegated to a particular, limited role. Therefore, she declares that few women are honorable and brave and proudly proclaims she is one of them. She is proud to be part of a small but significant group of women with these admirable qualities. Her words contain a tone of confidence and self-respect, demonstrating her strong sense of character and integrity. She believes that her commitment to living by a moral code, and her strength of character, are qualities that she strives to embody and that she is proud to share with those around her.

The speaker describes how those around her view her character, actions, and emotions. She knows how she is judged and accepted by those in her setting. This understanding of her self-image undeniably impacts her sense of self-worth and confidence. She acknowledges the reality of her situation and sighs, "Maybe I am a slave, just trying to make ends meet." She is conscious of the harshness of her circumstances and feels the weight of her struggles, but she refuses to surrender hope. Instead, she remains resilient and determined to find a way out of her current situation. The persona knows her place in the social hierarchy and reluctantly resigns as one of the lowest enslaved people in contemporary America. Social structure distinctions have been deeply rooted in the unfairness of class oppression and have been a burden to African-Americans throughout history. It is a source of frustration and disappointment. Likewise, sidelining African-American women has led to frustration and distress, and they have been denied the same opportunities and privileges afforded to those in more privileged positions. Finally, the speaker is deeply aware that she has been denied and does not receive the same love and affection as others. She vocalizes her sentiment in the statement, "I don't get kissed," as a sign of acknowledgment that hints at the systemic discrimination and erasure of her existence; and serves as a reminder of the lack of physical and emotional intimacy she has

experienced in American culture. She feels unappreciated and overlooked, which has caused her to feel isolated and disconnected from those around her.

Conclusion

Morgan Parker's poetic exploration delved deeply into the multifaceted layers of oppression endured by African-American women throughout history, unearthing a wealth of insights that shed profound light on their enduring struggles. Her meticulous examination of this complex tapestry of discrimination unearthed several noteworthy findings that enriched the understanding of the intersectionality of their experiences.

One of the critical revelations within Parker's work was the intricate interplay of African-American women's identities within her poems. They uncovered how the historical construction of these identities contributed significantly to African-American women's disempowerment. Parker artfully dissected how the overlapping forces of gender, race, and class injustices have systematically marginalized and silenced these women throughout history, emphasizing that their identities have been wielded as oppression tools, perpetuating inequality cycles.

Parker's poetic craftsmanship consistently directed readers' attention to the oppressive undercurrents inherent in the United States, unveiling the daily harsh realities that African-American women face. Her verses are a stark reminder that these oppressive forces are not mere relics of the past but continue reverberating through contemporary society, perpetuating systemic inequities. Parker illuminated how these women's struggles are deeply embedded in the nation's fabric through her poetry.

Moreover, Parker's artistry skillfully captured the intricacies of intersectionality, acknowledging that each African-American woman's journey through oppression is a unique narrative that defies easy categorization or amalgamation. Her work underscored the importance of recognizing the diversity of experiences within this group, rejecting any monolithic portrayal of African-American women. This recognition highlighted the significance of intersectional feminism as an indispensable lens through which to view the trials faced by these women. By embracing this perspective, readers were afforded a panoramic view of the daily multifaceted challenges that African-American women confront.

The enhanced awareness fostered by Parker's poetry catalyzed a collective recognition of the imperative to erect structures that ensure dignified existence and safeguard African-American women's rights. Her verses ignited a call to action, urging society to carve a path toward a future marked by equality and justice. In embracing these calls for change, readers embark on a journey toward dismantling the oppressive systems that have persisted for centuries, thereby working to rectify the historical injustices that have plagued African-American women and charting a course toward a more inclusive, equitable, and just society for all.

References

1. Butler, Judith. *Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex*. Yale University Press, 1986.
2. Busby, Margaret. *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the Present*. Ballantine Books, 1994.
3. Catalyst. *Advancing African-American Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know*. Catalyst, 2004.
4. Coles, Robert. *Children of Crisis*. Little Brown and Company, 1964.
5. Collins, Patricia Hills. and Bilge, Sirma. *Intersectionality*. Polity Press, 2020.
6. Cudd, Ann. *Analyzing Oppression*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
7. Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. "Black Women Historians from the Late 19th Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement." *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 89, no. 3, 2004, pp. 241–261
8. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The second sex" Classic and Contemporary Readings in Sociology*. Routledge, 2014.
9. Egejuru, Phanuel and Robert Fox. "An Interview with Margret Walker." *Callaloo*, vol. 6 1979, pp. 29-35.
10. Eisenstein, Hester. *Contemporary Feminist Thought*. Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1988.
11. Fathima, Shaziya. "Feminism and Social Disparity in the Poems of Maya Angelou and Meena Kandasamy." *Language in India* vol. 19, no.1, 2019, pp. 62-70.
12. Fernandes, Lily and Nora Alsaeed. "African Americans And Workplace Discrimination." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* vol. 2, no. 2, 2014, pp. 56-76.
13. Ford, Lacy. *Deliver Us from Evil The Slavery Question in the Old South*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
14. Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*. New York Holt Press, 1955.
15. Gimenez, Martha. "Marxism and Class, Gender and Race: Rethinking the Trilogy." *Race, Gender & Class* vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, pp. 23-33.
16. Greene, J. Lee. Blacks in Eden: *The African American Novel's First Century*. University of Virginia Press, 1996.
17. Greene, Maxine. *The dialectics of Freedom*. Teachers College Press, 2018.
18. Guy-Sheftall, Beverly. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. The New Press, 1995.
19. Hemphill, Katie. *Bawdy City Commercial Sex and Regulation in Baltimore, 1790-1915*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
20. Hernton, Calvin. *Sex and Racism in America*. Doubleday, 1965.
21. Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Routledge, 2014.
22. Hull, Gloria, et al. editors. *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave*. The Feminist Press, 1982.
23. Kovel, Joel. *White Racism: A Psychohistory*. Columbia University Press, 1984.
24. Lerner, Gerda. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. Vintage, 1992.
25. Matthews, Madison and Valerie Wilson. "Separate is still unequal: How patterns of occupational segregation impact pay for black women." *Economic Policy Institute*, 6 Aug. 2018,

<https://www.epi.org/blog/separate-is-still-unequal-how-patterns-of-occupational-segregation-impact-pay-for-black-women/>.

26. McDonald, Kathlene. *Feminism, the Left, and Postwar Literary Culture*. University Press of Mississippi, 2012.
27. McFarland et al. "The Condition of Education 2019." National Center for Education Statistics. 2019, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019144>.
28. Painter, Nell. "Hill, Thomas, and the use of racial stereotype." Race-ing justice, en-gendering power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the construction of Social Reality. 1992, pp. 200-214.
29. Piersen, William. *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
30. Sanders, Fran. "Dear Black Man," *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Bambara Toni Cade. Washington Square Press, 2005.
31. Sengupta, Jayita. *Refractions of Desire: Feminist Perspectives in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Michèle Roberts and Anita Desai*. Atlantic, 2006.
32. Stephens, Jennie. *Diversifying Power Why We Need Antiracist, Feminist Leadership on Climate and Energy*. Island Press, 2020.
33. Stobaugh, James. *American History-Teacher: Observations & Assessments from Early Settlement to Today*. New Leaf Publishing Group, 2012.
34. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 2012.
35. Sunday, Nathaniel and Ene Ekpo. "Black Identity Formation in Repression: A Study of Selected Poems of Maya Angelou." *Anglisticum Journal* vol. 7, no. 8, 2018, pp. 41-53.
36. "Table 2. Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Union Affiliation and Selected Characteristics." Bls.gov, 2017, www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm. Accessed 18 Nov. 2022.
37. Ritchie, Joy and Kate Ronald. *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s) (Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture)*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001.
38. Roth, Benita. *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. Cambridge University Press 2004.
39. "The State of Economic Progress for Black Americans: Martin Luther King Day 2020." Joint Economic Committee. (2020, January 20), https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9a226c5c-88ad-4fd1-a3d4-7a3ac94cd1cc/state-of-economic-progress-for-black-americans-mlk-2020-final.pdf. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023.
40. Wolfreys, Julian. *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*. New York University Press, 1999.
41. "We're Not Ready for This: An Interview with Morgan Parker." *Apogee Journal*, 11 Aug. 2014, <https://apogeejournal.org/2014/08/11/were-not-ready-for-this-an-interview-with-morgan-parker/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2023.
42. Wun, Connie. "Unaccounted Foundations: Black Girls, Anti-Black Racism, and Punishment in Schools." *Critical Sociology* 42.4 (2014).