



## Identity Formation: A Study of Conventional Marriages and Structure of African American Families in Their Eyes Were Watching God and Passing

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### ABSTRACT

In America, social, moral, and national unity issues have arisen because of the country's rapid population growth and the spread of many ethnicities. The Constitution then chose to make African Americans citizens of the United States by allowing them the freedom to marry. The constitution made it permissible for Afro-Americans to wed among themselves as well as in their locality. Many African Americans embraced this offer of citizenship by accepting the freedom to wed legally. Sadly, these rules gave them a new method of subjugation. This research aims at emphasizing on the difficulties and dilemmas that African American families, as portrayed in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. They had little privileges but numerous difficulties. Critical Race Theory provides information to understand the construction and deconstruction of law either in favor or against minorities. The nature of the study is qualitative because it deals with ideas and their social implications. Textual analysis of the texts proves that conventional and unstable marriages created barriers in their path. African American families are portrayed as being fragile, weak, pitiful, and loosely constructed under the sway of fast and traditional marriages. It further reveals that racism is deeply ingrained in American culture and has disastrous effects on African American family structures.

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## 1. Introduction

African Americans strove to reshape their social presence during the Harlem Renaissance. They made an effort to separate themselves from the terrible norms and images of their history. They placed a heavy emphasis on homemaking and strong family structures in order to retain their bourgeois status and self-esteem. They succeeded in some ways, and becoming middle class served to fuel their identity-related fight even more. However, the traditional marriage system, which was built on the tenets of a racist culture, gave them no opportunity whatsoever to become independent or find their place in American society. Due to intrinsic flaws, their families were troubled, and this trouble affected them in practically every career. They had ties to different social contexts via their familial connection. According to Anderson and Stewart (2007), the family was "an institution that interacts with other institutions to establish a social network" for African Americans. It demonstrates how their weakness in society as a result of instability in the family structure prevented them from rising to positions of authority in business, politics, culture, and religion. This research aims to illuminate the traditional marriage system that hinders African American identity development in the society depicted in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Nella Larsen's *Passing* in the context of critical race theory (Bloom, 2008). The goal of CRT is to draw attention to how discriminatory laws and practices have hurt minorities. They also believe that

racism exists in American culture and that laws are made and changed to assist the majority and institutionalized racism while also attempting to free minorities from these oppressive rules.

Since slavery became entrenched in their society, African American families have experienced several difficulties. Their lives and the family structure were wrecked by the slavery culture. A major barrier to maintaining a substantial family life was the selling and purchasing of an African as a slave. Male slave partners were put to death. They endured exile and were sent to distant, hostile nations to do laborious duties. Kids were used as pawns. Consequently, women led many African American households. Slave owners sexually harassed and exploited African women who were in slavery. African partners had no opportunity to reunite their families and provide for their relatives. Even when the anti-slavery association was founded in 1833, these issues had a significant negative impact on marriages. They hid their identities. Their lives were further complicated by this circumstance.

African Americans were the first group to legalize marriage. This statute was created so that a foreign lady may acquire American citizenship by marrying a citizen of the country. As a result, following the Civil War, African Americans had access to free marriages, owning both private and public property. Some socialists believed that due to their illiteracy and sloth, these scattered Africans were unqualified for legal marriages and citizenship. By denying them equal rights, the U.S. Constitution set the stage for legislation that discriminated against African Americans. Congress had a very damaging role in this respect. Congress amended the statute governing lawful marriage and citizenship in 1868, stating that only "White women may obtain citizenship status by marriage to a U.S. citizen" (Lopez, 2006). However, at that time, American culture had already developed the notion and desire to seem White.

African Americans in North America started a fight for self-recovery and self-discovery to restore their damaged reputation and rebuild their well-balanced West African family culture. Men performed physical labor in the West while women cared for the family and the kids. Popular occupations for Africans in West Africa included ploughing, keeping animals, gathering firewood, and working in fields. Women and families were given a respected status in their society because of their hard work and strength. In North America, the conditions were not favorable. Due to racism and other gender-related concerns, they were unable to maintain their customs in this area. In the North, things were quite different. Many African American women made efforts to forget their shameful past of slavery and revive the pre-Colombian culture. They were looking for a discipline that would enable them to forge their long-gone identity and leave a mark of strength and legacy on their surroundings. Their road towards recovery demonstrated their resilience, but they had difficulties in asserting themselves and overcoming various racial laws that were used against them in various facilities.

Although many African Americans lived together as husband and wife, the Constitution did not recognize them as equal citizens, therefore they were not legally married. They were unable to voluntarily integrate into American culture. Due to the racist culture and these regulations, they were let into American society with the understanding that they would not be termed citizens. Frank provides a thorough understanding of African American families and aids in understanding the causes and effects of their failure in *Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages*. He claims that after the Civil War, they were only allowed the "freedom and rights of legal marriage among other races and to people of their race in order to enslave them to work and boost American wealth and riches" (Franke, 1999)(p. 262).

Black marriages were made lawful for two reasons. First of all, neither the Constitution nor the racist American culture saw them as respectable members of society. They intended to impart to them a Christian outlook on life and marriage. He adds that the "Constitution also said that they should emulate Whites and refrain from acting in an impolite manner" (281). Second, there was a significant need for manual laborers who could work without demanding exorbitant compensation following World War I. In order to gain African Americans' favor and employ them as convenient and available labor, white people who desired assistance offered them a minimal amount of rank and significance. Through the legalization of marriage, emancipation was once again "imprisoned by systematic prejudice, which was worse than

lynching and rape" (p. 283). Because men were held as slaves to maximize wealth, most African homes had a female head of household. It also prevented African Americans from getting married since it was impossible for them to have children and raise them without the assistance of their male spouses. For them, this circumstance was worse than slavery. African Americans made a concerted effort to practice marital culture, but there were various roadblocks that made them give up. The process of creating harsh laws did not end here. Marriage to a non-White person was seen a treacherous attack on the nation in 1931 for a US citizen. These organizations that framed the law were revealing the bigotry that existed between White Americans and African Americans. All these laws were developed for the formation of new identities of the African Americans in the society, but these steps could give them right to choose good partners. They were just made bound in the clutches of conventional marriages that only increased their problems. The paper analyzes these issues in the light of critical race theory.

The most famous and mysterious author of the Harlem Renaissance was Nella Larsen. She was a socialist and an excellent writer. There were many intriguing questions surrounding her life and writing career. She was well-known for revealing the life tales of women and for this accomplishment. She was given a fantastic standing in the literary world of New York. In addition to two outstanding novels, *Quicksand* in 1928 and her *Passing* in 1929, she also authored the short tale *Sanctuary* in 1930. She was unable to finish her third book. In her literary works, she embraced issues of gender, identity, passing, sexuality, class, and racial disparities. Katherine Herbold wrote in her book on Larsen that *Passing* was related to Nella Larsen's actual life. "She was also a light-skinned woman who eliminated the Black intellectual establishment" (Larsen, 2002)(p. 18). She said that Larsen pretended to be a White woman in order to get a new identity. She produced several short tales as well. She was charged with plagiarism in 1930, and as a result, she left the literary world.

From her father, Zora Neale Hurston realized that African Americans now had power and want to alter their viewpoint. She became aware of it in her environment and portrayed this energy in her works. In her books, she highlighted the courage, determination, and self-awareness of Black people. In her book, *Janie* served as a symbol of the ability of Black people to achieve their own goals. In her short tales and novels like *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, *Mules and Men*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, and *Seraph on the Suwannee*, she gave these people good representations. In her work, she reflected themes of gender, ethnicity, identity, and sexuality.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a work from the Harlem Renaissance, addresses the same problem of dysfunctional family structures. The story follows Janie, the main character, through significant times that coincide to her marriages to three very different men. Her mother experiences institutional prejudice throughout the book. She gives birth to Janie after being raped by a teacher at the school. Janie is raised by her grandma Nanny after the loss of her mother. She also envisions Janie growing up in a solid and secure family structure. Janie, on the other hand, want stability via marriage and a fully institutionalized love relationship. A fresh set of hardships enter her life as she longs for a family. She first marries Logan, a farm worker. He has no desire to remain married to Janie. Instead of a wife, he needs a domestic worker to operate the farm. Logan has acquired skills for using labor in a racist culture.

She then takes Jody with her and flees. She is seen as a commodity by him. Jody hinders her progress, which has a detrimental effect on it. She becomes a representation of his status in the community due to his bourgeois aspirations. Jody takes advantage of her by claiming that since she is a woman, her only place is at home. Jody owns a business and has Janie work there, but he bans her from interacting with the locals. He consistently degrades Janie by forcing his superiority onto her and can order others to bend down in his face. Even though she is totally oppressed by patriarchy, she still favors third marriage to Tea Cake. She has occasional friendly interactions with him, but she believes that Tea Cake is a barrier to her development and self-actualization. Janie observes the moral failings of individuals who have a limited perspective and priorities "Whiteness" above their Black compatriots. After killing him, she flees. She is seen as a servant in her household. Her husband values his land and his fortune more than she does. None of them give Janie and her family a second thought. They attempt to employ her as a work force while marginalizing her. Black communal life is plagued by racism. Her feeling of respect and an institutionalized love affair are never provided by

marriage, just a methodical kind of marginalization and tyranny. Hurston so brilliantly exposes these ideas in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. As a result, the researcher chose this work for the planned study since it offers crucial information on family racism and contributes to the achievement of the study's goals. African Americans have experienced both joy and pain in their marriages. African Americans had mental and social illnesses as a result of the legalization of inter-racial marriage.

*Passing* relates the story of two middle-class women who control the country and defame the race in court cases. Irene disagrees with Clare's decision to breach the racial barrier and sees it as a cunning assault on her neighborhood. Crossing racial barriers causes Clare's family a lot of issues. She marries White businessman Bellew, a typical representative of the bigoted White middle class. Thus, she does not feel secure because of the institution of marriage. Regarding the Black community, her spouse refers to her as 'Nig', and she suffers from intellectual racism. Clare seeks to reintegrate with the Black community, but Irene forbids it. Although Clare has a daughter, she doesn't feel any affection for her child. She disputes about the subject of internalized racism in the Black community with Irene Redfield. She is thrown out of a window by Irene, and she passes away right away. A Black racist spouse causes Irene, a light-skinned wife, and her family to have marital issues. He also experiences the negative consequences of his own prejudice. They each have their own bed. Irene does not adore her spouse, but they cohabit only for the sake of her social security. For her, marriage is just a connection of protection rather than a planned love affair. Their growth and individuality are severely hampered by society and traditional marriage. Whites alleged cultural supremacy looms over them. They are unable to think of themselves in this circumstance. They endure a great deal of hardship, must contend with society's rules and bigoted attitudes, and eventually become victims of prejudice in their own neighborhood.

Passing by Nella Larsen sheds enough information on these difficulties to validate the basic premise of this investigation. With this in mind, the researcher chose this piece of writing to fulfil the objectives of the study, which included analyzing the social trends based on the power and respect of the dominant culture. The study's objectives are best met by CRT, which also gives insight into the society's perception that racism is woven into the fabric of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005) (p. 31). Scholars created an academic field in the form of the most promising theory advocating for minorities' rights in 1970. With an emphasis on a critical analysis of society and culture, they created Critical Race Theory as a full academic field. They also criticized the Civil Rights movement's dedication to colorblindness and deliberate discrimination, as well as its strong framework. Through the characters who suffer in the books, this research seeks to shed light on American culture, the system of race, and racism in light of CRT. The researcher has examined the limits of traditional and social barriers within the African American community that keep them apart using the prism of CRT to examine the persistent institutional discrimination practiced in American racist culture. These concerns that have an impact on the Black family institution as it is portrayed in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* have been examined in the context of CRT. These factors make up the core components of this investigation.

### **1.1. Statement of Problems**

During Harlem renaissance American Constitution chose to make African Americans citizens of the United States by allowing them the freedom to marry. Regarding this, the constitution made it permissible for Afro-Americans to wed among themselves as well as in their locality. Many African Americans embraced this offer of citizenship by accepting the freedom to wed legally. They seized the chance, a fresh chance for social approval and winning identity. Unfortunately, this was another attempt to subjugate them in the name of illegal and conventional marriages. This study investigates the problems of conventional marriage for African American community and traces out various problem and difficulties this conventional marriage brought for them as portrayed in Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Bloom, 2008).

### **1.2. Research Questions**

1. What sorts of restraints and threats does conventional marriage pose in the way of Black Americans' identity formation as portrayed in the selected novels?

2. How does traditional marriage become a source trouble for African American families as portrayed in the selected novels?

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

1. To determine various restraints and threats that conventional marriage pose in the way of Black Americans' identity formation as portrayed in the selected novels.
2. To find the way in which traditional marriage becomes a source trouble for African American families as portrayed in the selected novels.

### **1.4. Significance of the Research**

The research is essential because it aims to draw attention to the structural injustices in American culture that led to the institution of the Afro-American family being unstable. In order to comprehend the primary causes of marital breakdown in the African American society, the researcher concentrates on American racism. This study sheds light on the sad lives and families of Black people in America by evaluating the issue of passing for White society. It also helps readers comprehend the obstacles posed by traditional marriage and society to the development of Afro-American identity and self-realization. The background of discriminatory legislation created in various American organizations has been researched in relation to American culture. As a result, this research study also opens the path for contemporary scholars to investigate problems relating to minorities' and women's rights. The research helps readers comprehend the hostility, aggressiveness, and attitudes brought on by laws that discriminate against minority groups like Blacks and others who are oppressed.

## **2. Literature Review**

During the Harlem Renaissance, African Americans worked to change the way they appeared in society. They made an attempt to distance themselves from the appalling standards and representations of their past. In order to maintain their bourgeois position and sense of self-worth, they put a significant premium on household management and robust family structures. So, in order to end marginalization and achieve liberation by putting an end to both internal and external racism, CRT concentrates on these laws and seeks to deconstruct and rebuild legislation. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2005), CRT "exceeds civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal policies" (p. 78). He thinks that the Civil Rights movement's emphasis on colorblindness and other trivial issues prevented it from accomplishing anything. He gives the idea of interest convergence and wants to achieve something different. Delgado says that CRT is a "commitment to radical emancipation from the law" (p. 79). He seeks total freedom from these discriminatory laws via this position. He continues by saying that they need to combat the structures that undermine our people. They are victimized by white supremacists who set themselves as power group against subordinates (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). Delgado concurs with the claim that racism still exists in American culture. He continues by saying that commonplace stories, hate speech, and racist experiences encourage bad thinking in the community. These problems have harmed their lives on a mental, emotional, moral, and physical level especially, families and "African American parents report more prepared for the biases than do other parents"(Ruthland, 2017) ( p. 258).

Additionally, it has a bad impact on their mentality and ideologies. These are humiliating circumstances, and minority groups must be protected against them by the law. Lawrence favors this concept and says that the "structure of subordination existing in society"(Lawrence III, 1992) (p. 92). According to him, there are always going to be those who have biases and detest minorities. They must be condemned as a result. The following CRT principles have been taken into account as we examine how the legal system and other institutions are harming African American families.

Examining the roles of various institutions in the context of interest convergence and material determinism, we may say that these institutions are being run in accordance with Whites' agenda. CRT comes to the conclusion that the legislation has been harsh by assessing its function. If the Constitution has favored the and racist sheriff... The interest of White and Black for a moment converged" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) (p. 23). minorities, it is either for its interest or to show the world because "it would ill serve U.S. interest if the world press counted to carry the stories of lynching, Klan violence, Numerous instances of characters being exploited specifically to further the interests of the dominant side can be drawn from books in this respect. Additionally, they are robbing their neighbors of their power. Many proponents

look for racial components in the hiring process for jobs, education, income, the property system, and the whole society. They discover the unfairness of these arrangements. The chosen books also demonstrate the use of this tactic. The books feature black people torturing their people with brutality.

CRT looks at racism as a common issue that affects daily life. Everywhere—in daily life, music, tales, employment, educational institutions, and public spaces—whites are given precedence. The issue has gotten very complicated to counter the prevailing social norm that White people are given advantages (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The judiciary, which is dominated by Whites, is unable to resolve their issues or pursue their cases, which is another issue with litigants. African Americans' lives are no longer guaranteed by the state or the law in the books. The way that the police and other institutions handle their cases is unfair. Therefore, by creating CRT, its founders want to provide a system of safety and protection for minorities. The theory offers principles for analyzing these problems from the chosen texts.

CRT detractors also look to the legal framework governing hate speech. They examine the legislation considering offensive language, slurs, and biases. Laws that jeopardize certain unalterable principles inevitably hurt minority groups' psychological makeup and practices, which has a detrimental effect on their personalities. Additionally, they concentrate on outlawing public spaces that conjure up images of slavery and other forms of prejudice. In this sense, several steps were taken by the activist to end the oppression against African American community. CRT best provides tenants to understand the trap of law and formation of new identity of the community, therefore, used to analyze the collected data. The theory paves way of freedom of those who ignored and rejected even in the most recent time too.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The identity formation and conventional marriages increasing discrimination against Black families in the context of CRT is the topic of this study; as a result, the researchers refer to book reviews, author biographies, interviews, critical debates, and other editions to comprehend the novels. With the aid of the sources described above, a critical study of the books aims to gather information to understand the concept, inspiration, and effect on the authors. The secondary sources provide an objective and persuasive argument in favor of this work's originality and aid the researcher in avoiding personal preferences while doing a content analysis. These sources also help to highlight the unique worth of the material that a reader is likely to attach to it. In order to choose the textual data from the chosen books for the analysis, the research technique, agenda, and frame of CRT have all been taken into account. By offering specifics and gathering data from the texts in the context of Critical Race Theory, I investigate factors like advantage/disadvantage, Black/White, subjugation/dominance, and discrimination/facilitation. The researcher uses the technique of textual analysis to evaluate both of the chosen books using the Critical Race Theory theoretical framework in order to meet the study's aims. This approach is definite, trustworthy, and typical given the study's literary, cultural, and qualitative character. By placing the text in a different environment, it examines the text's rhetorical point of view while concentrating on its qualities. The humanities or literature are the foundation of the present study. This research is qualitative since it is a literary and cultural examination of two books. The interpretation of the subject's human experience, behavior, emotion, connection, and social environment is the main goal of qualitative research. It is an inductive and individualized strategy. Due to its inductive, subjective, analytical, and explanatory techniques, it is often appropriate for cultural and literary studies. Qualitative approaches are related with interpretative and critical perspectives. In the fields of social sciences and humanities, it aims to obtain knowledge of human experiences. Three questions are evenly split across three chapters in this study. One single question is intended to be addressed in each chapter. Based on the suitability of the theoretical framework to gather data to answer the goal questions, data is gathered for each chapter from both chosen novels.

### **4. Data Analysis**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the issues with traditional marriage that affect how African Americans create their identities. Identity is a concept that has both psychological and social connotations. Psychological identity denotes one's perception of oneself, including self-worth and self-image. In psychological words, identity denotes "how one

perceives oneself as one desires to be in the future" as well as "how one was in the past" (Weinreich, 1986)(p. 17). It further defines identity in terms of how a person sees themselves as a person and as a member of a group. In its social context, identity relates to the concepts of selfhood and individuality. It also addresses the uniqueness that sets a person or group apart from others. It represents an individual's idea of self-expression and self-establishment (Erickson, 2013). Identity in this research study refers to the individual, social, economic, and political recognition and acceptance of a person or a group. The African American protagonists in the books are marginalized and unable to establish their presence in the social, economic, and political spheres of the society. In this chapter, the researcher examines how marriage and family life contribute to their failure and rejection. Data analysis draws on Critical Race Theory as a source. African American households are shown as being weak and haphazardly constructed in the chosen works. They have issues with their families. African Americans are forced into the matrimonial system. They sometimes want to be married, but sadly, society and the government do not provide any protection. Marriage provides them with nothing more than a little feeling of comfort and sanctuary in that racial environment. They anticipate that the marriage would result in an institutionalized love affair, but it consistently fails to stop the tears of shame from welling up in their eyes. In order to provide appropriate responses to the target questions, the researcher investigates these issues in this chapter in the context of the CRT tenets.

It has been exemplified in Janie and Nanny's attitudes to marriage in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. For Janie, being married is a legitimate way to find love and pleasure. However, in Nanny's perspective, marriage is nothing more than safety and security. In this situation, Logan Killicks is seen by Nanny as a deity who is protecting her Honey. She says that he can ensure Janie's safety, enough food, and a suitable place to live. She reassures Janie that he can provide her the marital status and everything else she needs. She elaborates further that now "May daily prayer now is to let dese golden moments roll on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life" (Hurston, 1990)(p. 20). It demonstrates that marriage is just a guarantee of a stable life for Nanny. In the sake of protection and security, she works against her granddaughter's preferences and forces her into the marriage process against her will. Nanny has been humiliated and degraded in the racist society, and this has caused her to become enchanted by her memories of slavery. She yearns for a robust family structure for Janie because of this. Racism, according to proponents of critical race theory, is a commonplace phenomenon that permeates everyday life. They investigate society to find this bad guy. They think that racism is a pervasive problem that is still present today. The routines, customs, and institutions that we "depend on to carry out the tasks of the world ---will maintain the minority in inferior positions ---are taken by them as a typical system operating in daily life" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) (p. 27). In this sense, racism is characterized as a pervasive, hidden phenomena that constantly discriminates against minority groups in all institutions, whether consciously or unconsciously. Although African Americans had considerable influence during the Harlem Renaissance era, racism's complexities and challenges prevented them from overcoming them. Although racism had been outlawed in the majority of institutions, its effects were still felt today in society. African Americans' family lives suffered because of racism. In society, they had difficulties.

Janie makes an effort to build a loving relationship with him, but she is unable to persuade him to love and be loved. She remarks "some folk never was meant to be love and he's one of' em" (Hurston, 1990). It shows that there is an absence of love between them. She is not hopeful of finding loveable relations with Logan. She complains Nanny but she again consoles her that "wait a while, baby. Yo' mind will change" (p. 32). It is also a great tragedy that African Americans lack solid support systems that might give them the self-assurance they need to meet life's obstacles. They must overcome the obstacles set by the government and society. Janie seeks refuge with Nanny since she is her only person who can comfort her. Janie also understands that society and her marriage are working against her. She gives up on expecting Logan and marriage to work out. Her marriage turns into a source of strife and suffering for her. African American women have an extremely pitiful social position.

They are constantly treated like slaves and robbed of their hard labor by men. Logan asks Janie to help him cut wood. He compares her to his first wife at this point when she flatly rejects him. He scoffs Janie and says "mah Fust wife never bothered me' bout Chopin' no wood no how. She'd grab dat ax and sling chips lak uh man" (p. 35). This demonstrates how they

treat their spouses like domestic animals and steal their labor. Logan, a businessman, uses Janie for labor-intensive tasks. More than a loving life companion, he needs a helper. He severely treated his previous wife and now he wants to use the same methods on Janie. On the other side, Janie wants to escape Logan's cruel worldview and find real love and friendly relationships. Janie tells him that she is unable to carry out demanding tasks. She clarifies that she is his wife and that she desires a happy life. Now, Logan often exhibits sarcasm and bigotry. He always complains about physical labor and has Janie work long hours on his farm. Her life became more difficult and terrible as a result for the rest of her days. Janie now wants to end this unhappy relationship, so she flees with Jody.

Joe Stark comes in her life and she considers him the blessing of God. Jody asks about her life and she tells him that "My husband is gone tuh buy a mule fuh me tuh plow. He left me cuttin' up seed p'taters" (p. 39). Logan has her do this manual labor. She must do the duties of a man for him, and he treats her like a mule. Logan is placing too much pressure on her, and she cannot handle it. She is approached by Jody, who informs her that since she is young and attractive, physical labor is inappropriate for her. He shows her the way to the appropriate road for identifying herself. She gains awareness of herself and her limits thanks to Jody. Jody is like heavenly support for Janie in these circumstances and gives her hope to challenge the brutality of Logan as "he spoke for change and chance" (p. 39). Delgado states that narrative analysis helps us "not only understand our social situation but to change it" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Legal testimony attests that White people have praised African Americans for achieving greater success and doing physical labor. In this situation, Jody has been working for and being influenced by White people. His mentality has been seriously impacted by their culture. He attempts to impose his dominance onto his wife and other members of his community and draws inspiration from middle-class White individuals. He flaunts his money and constantly seeks to exert some kind of control over them.

His neighborhood members also laud him for his riches and attractive wife. He and his wife leave an impression on them. They like chatting with Janie when they are in his shop. She is said to be an exceptional communicator. Hurston writes that Jody warns them saying "thank yuhfuhyo' compliment, but mah wife doesn't know nothin' 'bout no speech-Makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place are in de home" (Hurston, 1990). Once again, this demonstrates how he attempts to keep her alone at home and prevents her from communicating with others. This further demonstrates that Joe has total control over his wife and is unwilling to make concessions. He finds White folks to be impressive. He attempts to display his dominance over her, just as Whites do with Black people, and he flaunts his riches and power in front of her and other residents of the community. With the conservative Jody in her life, things are gradually becoming more complicated for Janie. She is once again devastated as her second marriage seems to be failing. She flees Logan's brutality with Jody, but she now has to deal with Jody's archaic ways once again. Jody desires complete control over her in the same way that White people held him under their thumb.

Janie shares her experience and makes comments on her two marriages. She says that marriage is "uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine" (p. 152). She has the same issues that her grandma had for a long time. African Americans are unable to escape the painful memories of their history. Another major factor in marriages falling apart is their prior experiences. They lack the knowledge and abilities to govern their family connection and foster affectionate relationships. Janie appreciates Tea Cake's acceptance of her, but he can't really distinguish Janie's woes and aspirations from those of Jody and Logan. She cannot get a supportive role from him despite his love for Janie and desire for dominion over her. Without a question, Tea Cake loves her, and she is content to be with him, but he never lets her develop a sense of self. She continues to be Tea Cake's happy object, but she is never treated like a person with the freedom to appreciate the finer things in life. He always sets himself as a boss in front of her "being able to whip her reassured him in possession, not brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss" (p. 196). Sometimes, he feels disgusted against her, but he never speaks blindly ignoring her presence like Logan and Jody, he just "threw the glass upon the floor. Janie was frantic with alarm" (p. 233). Tea Cake's disposition causes her problems constantly, and sometimes "he was accusing her of negligence" (p. 234). These little sufferings prevent her from realizing her



wish and bringing the pear tree's picture to life. Additionally, he charges her of having unlawful relationships with Mrs. Turner's brother. She never stops describing to him how pure her ideas are. But he never believes what she says. Tea Cake never gives her a cruel treatment, but with him, she is unable to fully express herself since he also wants to dominate her by silencing her voice. At last, her life becomes a complete agony, and she gets rid of "her troubled love and then she had shot Tea Cake and had been in jail and had been tried for her life and now she was free" (p. 252). Hurston depicts the real image of African American households in a very lovely way. She aims to demonstrate that in the context of American racial society, their families cannot be controlled and kept together. No nigger lady "ain't never been treated any better," she claims (p. 249). She believes that despite several laborious attempts to bring the African American family structure together, White supremacy, Black rigidity, and male control continue to create a distance that can never be closed.

#### **4.1. Black Family Institutions in Passing**

Many African Americans attempted to pass for Whites when the court made its ruling on the marriage of foreign women to gain an identity and access to a fulfilling life. The court ruled that the undersigned's marriage to an American citizen serves as proof of citizenship. (This study's chapter 2 has further information.) Later, the court limited the application of its ruling to White American women alone.

In 1917, an exclusionary act was passed by the senate in which "all the members of the African or Black race" were excluded from society (Lopez, 2006). In her novel *Passing*, Nella Larsen also highlights the idea of transitioning from one civilization to another. Irene and Clare, her main characters, are light-skinned women who pose as Whites in order to join their social structure and adopt their way of life in order to elevate their own lives. Their actions cause them a lot of problems. Clare marries a White guy who doesn't appreciate her or think of her as his wife. He never stops working in his line of work or running his company. Irene, on the other hand, also poses as a White, although she is unaware of her impersonation. She has a deep affinity for the Black community. Therefore, both ladies endure significant suffering, despise their families, and want to end their lives. They are unwilling to accept their obligations because they despise the people in their families. They want for happiness, yet it is completely absent from their existence. Larsen introduces the Mulatto family early on and discusses Clare's family's difficulties. She was raised by her aunts when her father passed away since he was a poor man's daughter. They correct her and put too much pressure on her, preventing her from having time to play with a friend. Clare meets Irene she remembers her mother sayings "I'm worried about Clare, she seems so unhappy" (Larsen, 2002) (p. 21). This represents the difficulties Mulatto families faced due to the denial of their fundamental rights. Their families have difficulties as a result. She goes through a lot of challenges as a youngster. This illustrates the awful pictures of black people being dragged into the fen of problems. Family members of Clare often discuss her struggles and her parents' sadness. Irene uses her imagination to enlighten us about her family life. She recalled her family mentioning her throughout supper. They talk about Clare that "poor girl, I suppose it's true enough, but what can you expect. Look at her father. And her mother, they say, would have run away if she hadn't died" (p. 22). This demonstrates how mulatto families' lives are already pitiful and wretched due to social and legal discrimination, poverty, and other factors. Clare had never experienced joy in her life. Her parents have had to deal with the state's and the law's discriminatory attitude. She has had a horrible and miserable life. She want to have a fulfilling life filled with pleasure. Her sole option for fulfilment is to put her past troubles behind her and pursue happiness in the future by posing as a White person. On the top of the Drayton Hotel, both ladies discuss their issues.

Finally, Jack arrives and sternly reprimands Clare. He gets fixated with her and her town, speaking extremely harshly to her while oblivious to the fact that she is his wife and the mother of his daughter. It displays the common mindset and animosity of Whites against Blacks. Clare worries that he may have learned who she is. She tries to defend herself by moving a few steps away from him, but she tumbles. He completely disregards her saying that "so you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!" (p. 175). He ridicules her and disgraces her in anger. At that time, he looks much disturbed and fierce. This shows his disgust and annoyance for the Black community and his wife "his voice was a snarl and a moan, an expression of rage and pain" (p. 175). He criticizes her about her neighborhood and displays his disdain and disgust for her. His statements serve as a reminder of White people's pervasive bigotry against

the Black population. The CRT proponent Pyke refers to it as external racism. She claims that society, not any clear rule or government decision, is to blame for it. Brian aspires to be well-regarded in society. White racism and power have an impact on him. He is a materialist who wants to make money and improve his level of life. He makes fun of his wife and his neighborhood to express his discontent with life. He treats his wife unfairly and has internal prejudice towards her. His family is left with numerous gaps as a result. He is influenced by white people because of the way they consistently see African Americans as inferior. They began to marginalize their Black people and practice internal racism towards them as a result of this damaging impact on Black psyche. On the other side, Irene's unrest is a result of racial divides brought about by mistrust and disbelief in a Black neighborhood. She stops caring about her family. Clare's family life continues to be unremarkable and unstable until her death ends all of her suffering. Irene also has some serious family issues that damage her family's bond and make her depressed and melancholy for the rest of her life. This is connected to the terrible history of African American families, who have a reputation for being frail, sickly, and easily shattered. They are weak and find it difficult to maintain enduring relationships in American racial situations. Their families therefore endure awful circumstances as a consequence of the state's laws, which not only discriminate against them but also trap them in never-ending problems.

## 5. Conclusion

It is summed up that African Americans have found it difficult to maintain a solid family unit and to gain identity because of traditional marriage and society. Black families are seen as catalysts for preserving their traditions and raising their social standards. Their families are unable to retain their traditions and the long-standing civilization, identity, and durability of their ancestors as a result of the prejudice of the law. These ill-timed African Americans were marginalized in new ways by this rule and had great suffering because of its evolving tactics. It diminished the sources and modes of existence as well as the family unit. The chosen works highlight these constraints on African American households. The marriage of various characters in the novels prove that marriage does not provide them sources pleasure rather just bound them in the name of security and survival. Logan's marriage to Janie is coerced by her. Logan is a harsh and bigoted individual who marries her customarily. He mistreats her. He values a friend more than a life partner. Similarly, once again, Jody also creates problem for Janie and keeps her bound at his store. His conformist attitude obstructs her and prevents her from moving forward. He bans her from entering his sick room and displays her poorly to the residents of his village. They also doubt her sincerity and honesty. She is dissatisfied with her marriage.

In *Passing*, Clare attempts to overcome the racial divide to get these rights. She also endures the calamities associated with a typical marriage. She marries Bellew, a bigoted White guy, but after crossing the racial divide, her life spirals out of control. She discovers that White culture does not value or show affection for her feelings. She attempts to shed her African identity and forge a new one for herself in White culture, but it makes her cry. It comes to the conclusion that traditional marriage and society are unable to comfort them and aid in the formation of strong family bonds, but rather, they pose several obstacles to African Americans' sense of identity. African Americans and their families are made unstable by the marriage laws in the United States. It trains the culture to support racism with them. In addition, Brian despises his life and wishes his family were not there. It is obvious that because of these traditional, hurried, and insecure marriages, their families are weak and loosely constructed, which is always harmful to the spouses' integrity and sense of self-worth.

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