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**COLOR-LINE DIVISION OF SOCIAL MILIEU DURING THE EMANCIPATION ERA
IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPRAISAL**

Manzoor Ahmad Khattak¹, Hoor Shamail Khattak² & Abdul Rahim³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, ISRA University, Islamabad Campus, Pakistan

²Assistant Professor of English, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar

³PhD Scholar, Area Study Center, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<p>W. E. B. Du Bois, Interdisciplinary Appraisal, Emancipation Proclamation, Racism, Ku Klux Klan</p>	<p>The present study is an attempt to explore the depiction of racism in the era of emancipation by reviewing two representative texts: <i>Of Our Spiritual Strivings</i> by W. E. B. Du Bois, and <i>The Jim Crow Laws and Racism in United States</i> written by David Fremon, and telefilm <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> directed by D. W. Griffith. After the official abolition of slavery by 13th Amendment of the Constitution, the problem of racism not only emerged but reached to its peak in that epoch in United States. It adversely affected both the black and white races for a period of almost one hundred years. Racism divided social milieu in US based on skin color. Dogmatically the darker in color would mean the cursed. The hatred against Blacks was institutionalized. Racially biased laws called Jim Crow Laws were enacted by many southern states. Private gangs such as Ku Klux Klan were formed who would find excuses for lynching and killing the blacks. The blacks were marginalized up to a limit which shook their souls and called 'double consciousness' by W.E.B. Du Bois. The essay tries to reconnoiter the traces of miseries of blacks from slavery towards racism through interdisciplinary critique of selected writings and a film.</p>  <p style="text-align: right;">2024 Journal of Social Sciences Development</p>
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<p>Corresponding Author</p>	<p>Manzoor Ahmad Khattak</p>
<p>Email:</p>	<p>khattakmanzoor@gmail.com</p>
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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the curse of racism in the aftermath of formal emancipation ([Lincoln, 1953](#)) in United States ([Guelzo, 2005](#)). December 19, 1865 was a day, dawning with a different Sun for nearly One Hundred Thousand Black Souls; as day earlier the constitution of United States was officially amended 13th time for them only. According to 13th Amendment ([Upham, 2017](#)): "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction". It was a ray of

hope, a new beginning for them. But formal emancipation was not available for free; it had a price, if not equal to slavery, almost the second biggest after slavery, as big as to be called “the problem of the twentieth century” (Du Bois, 1903, p.3) in forethought of his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. It was slightly exaggerated for being called the problem of the whole of twentieth century but it certainly was equal to a century starting from 1860s till the 1950s. It segregated the Blacks and marginalized them. It divided the social milieu of U.S. into various opposite binaries like Blacks versus Whites, White Southerners versus White Northerners, and Free Blacks versus Freed Blacks. It divided the whole nation based on the various shades in color of their skin, but the color line was not linear; it encircled the Blacks, squeezed inward by Whites, and pushed adhesively backward by Blacks. The division was complex, multifaceted, tumultuous and heinous. It created problem of race based on color of their skin, where different races collided and colluded with each other and everyone had to bleed and suffer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Du Bois (1903) begins his essay with Arthur Symons' *Song of Sorrow* which consists of two stanzas. In both the sestets the poet incants to seawater about his mournful cry. The words: 'cry', 'all nights', and 'all life' are used repeatedly several times signifying the everlasting pain of his segregated self (p.7). Fremon's (2014) book opens with a photograph that depicts the segregation due to color line division in theaters in 1930s which was a time of the Great Depression. Du Bois tells in beginning of his essay how it feels to be a 'problem' and to be a problem forever, as of colored skin. He shares his pain of alienation how he has been refused by his fellow school girl to exchange a gift card due to the differing color of his skin, and how he holds onto the notion, internalizes it, and lives by it to regress, to compete, to contend himself by winning over 'them' in studies and sports sometimes (p.8). But that has not been done by the South unanimously and simultaneously as proclaimed. On such mistreatment and othering even at a very young age, he seems to firmly draw a line of color, and racism begets racism. Similarly, the first picture-cum-scene shown in movie *The Birth of a Nation* produced by Griffith and Woods (1915) is Africans/Blacks chained amid the slave-traders-cum-masters and prologue commentary of film says “[the] bringing of African to America planted the first seed of disunion.”

On April 9, 1865, Union General Ulysses S. Grant and Southern General Robert E. Lee reached a mutual agreement to sign a treaty to settle the Civil War, which meant that the Confederate states would honor the Emancipation Proclamation 1863 by the Union President Abraham Lincoln, which set the South's slaves legally free (Lincoln & Dean, 2014). According to Fremon (2014), the Proclamation of Amnesty by President Andrew Johnson on May 29, 1865, pardoning almost all former Confederate soldiers, shattered the hope of the newly freed slaves who had been made to believe of receiving some land on plantation that they had already worked on under their former masters (Dillard, 1963). Rather Black Codes were passed by various Southern States to limit the activities of the newly unfettered Blacks and to segregate them at schools, theaters, hotels, and other public facilities. According to the South Carolina Black Code in contracts, the colored party shall be termed a servant, while other party is a master (Aptheker, 1946; Berman, 1993). Still, this is shown other way around in the movie (Griffith & Woods 1915), after assassination of Abraham

Lincoln, Southerner Whites are worried that they will be maltreated by the successors of Lincoln. However, common notion found in Fremont's text and Griffith's film is segregation and adding fuel to the fire of racism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is an interdisciplinary descriptive analysis of three main sources: First is an essay *Of Our Spiritual Strivings* from book of W. E. B. Du Bois titled *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903. Du Bois was the first African American who has done his Ph.D. at Harvard University, a Professor of Sociology, an authoritative voice on the 'Negro Problem', and the author of a book that can be called a work of history, political criticism, sociology, anthropology, biography, eulogy, fiction, and autobiography (Du Bois 1903). The second source that is used for analysis in the paper is a history book titled *The Jim Crow Laws and Racism in the United States* (2014) written by David K. Fremont. This is book of history. The third source is *The Birth of a Nation*, an American silent epic drama film directed by D. W. Griffith in 1915, based on novel *The Clansman* (1905) by Thomas Dixon. In 1992, *The Birth of a Nation* was chosen for preservation by the National Film Registry. It was considered to be a film particularly noteworthy culturally, and historically. All three works from different genres have had a huge impact on, and reflect on, color-line division in U.S. This paper highlights the traces of color-line division and racism in selected sources during, and the post-emancipation era (Engerman, 2007).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This tussle based on color lines get aggravated and resulted in the creation of Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Fremont in his book (2014, p.13) writes that in the year 1865 six youngsters from Pulaski in Tennessee created a group called the Ku Klux Klan. Claude Bowers who were a Southern supporter claimed (1929, p.309) in his writings that women and property of Whites were in danger hence formation of the KKK ensured their protection. He even adjudged that the civilization was under threat. The Klan Night Riders disguised themselves in hoods, appeared like ghosts, and spread terror among Blacks and poor Whites by burning schools and churches. The Klansmen threatened, attacked, whipped, murdered, and lynched African Americans for several excuses like registering votes or demanding civil rights (Fremont 2014, p.17). They were unstoppable. In the Film, the Ku Klux Klan is shown as inspired by White kids frightening Black kids just shooting them off for fun by Colonel Benjamin Cameron when he was pondering upon the agony of his soul. His youngest sister Flora Cameron was proposed and tried to be raped by Gus, the renegade. To escape the attempted rape, she jumped from the towering rocks and died. Gus was killed on this account by Benjamin Cameron and his friend. The idea of Ku Klux Klan in the movie (Griffith & Woods 1915) is shown to be a result of this episode. Thus, KKK rejuvenated, after the film was released. The film is heavily criticized for its racist pigmentation.

There were opponents of Klan too who fought back and aggravated racist riots. After Rutherford Hayes became the nineteenth President of the U.S., Reconstruction era ended, the Federal troops were withdrawn, and African Americans were exposed to the wrath of Southern Whites. In 1883, the Supreme Court added fuel to fire by declaring the 1875 Civil Rights Act (Watty-Brown, 1965)

unconstitutional, dismantling the 14th Amendment, which says; “All persons born or naturalized in United States, and subject to jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of United States and of state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction equal protection of the laws.” (U.S. Constitution). Although the amendment in constitution secures and forbids exploitation of racism had found framework that allows the same. And thus, paving way for Crow laws. The title Jim Crow, denoting to colored person mainly African Americans is lent from song, ‘Wheel about & turnabout and jump just so, every time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow’ by a Traveling entertainer named as Thomas Daddy Rice. Thomas Rice intended to mock crudely the blacks over his performance. In the late 1800’s Jim Crow Laws passed by State Legislatures, greatly bound and troubled the lives of the African Americans.

According to [Fremont \(2014, p.20\)](#), Jim Crow laws imposed such a separation of blacks and whites that they could not go to school/hospital together. They could not even share combined orphanage or public transportation. Even after death, they had to be buried in segregated cemeteries. Signs such as ‘Blacks Only’ and ‘Whites Only’ were used in restaurants and hotels, even in lavatories and public offices. They were segregated almost everywhere which would give priority to Whites and disdain to Blacks. [Ernest Whitehead \(1989\)](#) criticized that they could not drink water from the same fountain. The Blacks were not even allowed to pray in the churches of the Whites. In this connection, this is the kind of racism that compelled [Du Bois \(1903, p.8\)](#) to complain to God for making him a stranger and outcasted. Consequently, the underlying theme of the movie, *The Birth of a Nation* is white supremacy; the message it spreads is that Blacks are scholarly inferior and morally degraded hence they will always have to follow the rules decreed by the whites. They are born to be ruled as [Pauli Murray \(qtd. p.217\)](#) said no matter how honest and upright or law-abiding they are, would always be considered inferior. In this linking the whites would always be conscious to make sure that the Blacks remained in their respective low, downtrodden, rather than bottom of the place in all walks of life.

Aware of the fact [Alben Hosley \(1929, p.424\)](#) states that him being black undermines his eligibility for candidature ship of any terminal position at State or Country levels. [Benjamin Mays \(1971, p.45\)](#) said, that at a young age, he got slapped by Whites for “trying to look too good.” Thus, looking at oneself over the lens of the ‘other’, reminded [Du Bois \(1903, p.8\)](#) of ‘double consciousness’, explained in his own words: “One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”. [Du Bois \(1903, p.9\)](#) elaborates the idea further that a Negro never wants his identity to be lost; he just wants acceptance as a Negro and an American. He wants to contribute as a co-worker; he wants to escape ‘death and isolation’; he wants equal share and opportunity and just share to exploit his latent genius. A Negro is being wasted because of the color of his skin; thus, he is confused and desolating in despair. As [Fremont \(2014, p.24\)](#) notes that African Americans were in double kind of trouble. By laws they had to work under Southern white masters or go to jail. On the other hand, a white man with no job would be sympathetically received as unemployed. Thus,

according to [Leon F. Litwack \(1979, p.531\)](#) the dream of freed Negroes to have “forty acres and mule”, remained an illusion.

Similarly, [Du Bois \(1903, p.10\)](#) believed that emancipation was a ray of hope to growth and progress. He considered slavery as mother of all evils and distresses. But little did he know that emancipation would bring its own follies, sometimes more grievous than slavery itself. The only way to deal with it perhaps was patience and inner power. African Americans had a mighty soul; they survived with inner power. Thus, as [Vernon Jarrett](#) in his interview on September 3, 1998, narrates that despite hardships, the servants did not lose their dignity. He gives the example of his parents for never losing hope and faith. They have maintained their integrity as well as have remained steadfast in their principles till their last breath. Jarret confesses that he has no spiritual admiration but his parent emitted pride in it. The segregation as well as racism stretched them so much and so hard that a newspaper from New Orleans published that if a colored perpetrator had to go to jail for ninety days, out of which ninety-seven days would only be for him being black ([Litwack 1998, p.253](#)). The cruelty of racism existed in all forms; it was supported by the church, government, and the law. For instance, Chief Justice Francis Nicholls was the signatory of segregation bill as a former governor ([Fremont 2014, p.30](#)).

According to [Stevens \(1976, p.59\)](#) Judge Henry Billings said that everyone should have the equal facilities. He calls racism a social phenomenon and considers it beyond the scope and obligation of the Constitution of the U.S. The Plessy v. Ferguson Case proved to be a myth like other American myths. It remained only an enchanted slogan, clearly short of practice and reality in the American history. As [Fremont \(2014, p.31\)](#) criticized the principle of “separate but equal” emerged as a result of the Plessy v. Ferguson Case. The Southern States would emphasize separation and would ignore the part equally. Thus, on the occasion of the International Exposition arranged in Atlanta on 18th September 1895, [Booker T. Washington \(1901, p.234\)](#) requested in a speech that the whites and the colored “[c]ast down your bucket”, and to build working relationship. He ([Washington 1901, p.236](#)) wanted to reconcile both races by proposing that they could be different in terms of structure but similar in function for mutual growth. In this connection, [Du Boise \(1903, p.10\)](#) realized that even after half the century had passed the freedman was wondering and struggling for his promised land. Thus, Du Boise emphasizes that even after several decades of the abolition of slavery, freedom is not ensured. Therefore, the promised land remains equally a myth in pre- and post-emancipation era in the United States.

CONCLUSION

According to [Du Bois \(1903, p.12\)](#) to be a poor individual is tough but to be a poor race is a curse. Racism was so deep in lives of Blacks and Whites that one critic from Mississippi said that a White man’s dog is considered better than a Black man ([quoted in Grossman 1919, p. 3](#)). The racism and curse of racism was present in all spheres of life. The movie *The Birth of a Nation* filled the gap in this regard as according to [Donald Bogle](#) the movie is, “a racist masterpiece.” He ([Bogle 1988, p. 19](#)) claimed it was most controversial movie ever released in America. In the movie, *The Birth of Nation* Blacks were disgraced and Whites were glorified. The blacks, through characters in movie, were shown as conspiratorial politicians. Who were drunkards, imprudent, physical brutes, and constant

threat to a white woman? According to Fremon (2014), the Ku Klux Klan was considered a hope and rescue by Whites.

The telefilm *Birth of a Nation* was equally appreciated by White audiences both in the South and North. They applauded the hooded raiders. The Klan was revived due to the movie in 1920s. The membership of the Klan substantially increased and this time the Klan was even more horrible than original. The two selected writings and film expose division of American society based on racism. Finally, some sense was restored with the verdict of Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. On 17th May 1954 Supreme Court gave a decision against seclusion of Blacks and Whites at schools. Post, the Civil Rights movement, issue of discrimination was openly debated. Although the intensity of racism is lowered it still haunts the souls of people with colored skin. It will certainly take an equal number of years for the unanimous amalgamation of the skin with one color and its different beautiful shades to restore American confidence. Or it would need an aggressive skin care treatment for pigmentation by the government to root out the curse of division based on skin color in American society.

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